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Connecting Theory and Research with Public Relations Practice

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Zifei Fay Chen, Ph.D.
University of San Francisco
iprrc.org@gmail.com

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Linjuan Rita Men, University of Florida, **Marlene Neill**, Baylor University, **Cen April Yuen**, University of Florida, and **Aniisu K. Verghese**, Sabre Corporation, India
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David Michaelson, **Jennifer Clark**, **Stephan Merkens**, and **Kevin Cleary**, Teneo
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Paulo Nassar and **Emiliana Pomarico**, Aberje and University of São Paulo, Brazil**,**
Luiz Alberto de Farias, and **Vânia Penafieri de Farias**, University of São Paulo, Brazil
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Michael J. Palenchar and **Anna Kochigina**, University of Tennessee
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Tim Penning, Grand Valley State University, and **Mark Bain**, upper90 Consulting
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Katie R. Place, Quinnipiac University
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Stacey Smith, Jackson Jackson & Wagner**, Sean Williams**, Bowling Green State University, Jackson Jackson & Wagner
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An Examination of Environmental CSR on Skin Care and Cosmetics Brands' Websites ***454***
Brigham Young University Top Ethics Paper
Ruoyu Sun, **Michelle I. Seelig, Huixin Deng**, and **Sanchary Pal**, University of Miami
Personal hygiene and toiletries brands often claim that they engage in production practices to reduce their environmental impact. Drawing from stakeholder theory and the MECCAS model, a content analysis was conducted to examine how CSR is presented on skin care and cosmetics brands' websites and to what extent these environmental practices are truly green.

Japanese PR Practice Through the Eyes of Expatriate Practitioners ***469***
Koichi Yamamura, TS Communication, Japan, and **Xue (Yuki) Dou**, Ritsumeikan University, Japan
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The Impact of Internet Advertisements on the Purchasing Behavior of King Saud University Employees

Ali Alanazi
King Saud University

Abstract

Saudi Arabia E-commerce in the Arab world has grown rapidly in the last few years. According to PayFort's e-payments status report for 2018, Saudi Arabia and the UAE occupied advanced positions among Arab countries in e-commerce. This study focuses on the role of Internet advertising in Saudi Arabia. It examines on the impact of e-advertising on the purchasing behaviors of KSU employees.

Introduction

Today's electronic world, with all the dazzling technological advances and the increasing wonders of the information revolution, has made life more comfortable and more fun. In the domain of shopping, the Internet has made itself available to millions of individuals, institutions and companies to use it as a medium for selling and purchasing merchandise without stepping out of the comfort of one's sitting room. According to the Arab Knowledge Economy Report 2017-2018, prepared by "Orient Planet Research," the Arab world has witnessed an increasing growth in the number of Internet users, which is expected to reach 258 million users by the end of 2020. The estimates mentioned in the report indicate that the rates of Internet use in the Arab world will increase significantly to reach 65% by 2020, compared to the 37.5% in 2014, outperforming almost 7% over the expected global growth rate of 3.6 billion users; (Saudi Telecom and Information Technology Ministry Report issued in 2018). This is supported by another report by Bayfort Corporation on the status of electronic payments for 2019, which tracks the e-commerce and payments sector in the Arab world. The same report has demonstrated that the number of Internet users in Saudi Arabia has increased from 19.6 to 23.8 million users between 2014 and 2019. According to the report, Saudi Arabia and the UAE occupy the forefront of Arab countries in the field of e-commerce, and experts estimate the size of the e-commerce market in the Arab world in 2020 to reach $13.4 billion. In the same context, the study of Al-Faqih in 2019 showed that the number of Arab stores in the Middle East and the Maghreb registered officially in the range of (1076) Arab electronic stores, out of which (246) are in Saudi Arabia. (Beaufort Annual Report on the Status of Payments, 2019). Because of this technical development and tremendous electronic progress in Internet services, the use of electronic sales sites has increased significantly, as intermediary sites for sale and brokerage and electronic stores have emerged, offering sales, purchase, delivery, installation and after-sales services. These sites are divided into two categories:

1. Advertising sites belonging to the original stores of commercial establishments and companies selling their products, owning the goods that sell them, and providing customers with delivery and after-sale services

2. Intermediary advertising sites, which act and sell as brokers or intermediaries. They simply provide a purchase service for the seller to display his products in their virtual electronic stores and provide a purchase service for the customer to view the product, buy and receive it. That is all done through the site only, without having to visit the store or company, which owns the product. These sites are growing and gaining increasing global reputation. Examples include the Alibaba store and the Amazon store, where all the goods are available for purchase anywhere in the world. The buyers can request the items through their personal computers or mobile phones via the internet and can learn about the best price for the product that they want to buy, about the best service available, and the best quality of the required product.
3. On the regional level, Souq.com website has managed to gain great popularity during the past few years, which led Amazon to purchase it due to its excellence in the field of electronic sales advertisements. Chief Executive officer of Souq.com Mashhour estimated that online shopping in the Middle East exceeded $20 billion in 2017.

(https://arabic.cnn.com/business/2017/03/28/souq-amazon)

Tariq Fadel, Deputy Executive Director of the digital platform for e-commerce, "Nun.com", emphasized that the Arab Gulf region together with Egypt represent about 80 percent of the volume of e-commerce in the Middle East. He added that the size of the e-commerce sector in

the Middle East and North Africa region is expected to grow to $28.5 billion by 2022. (https://akhbarelyom.com/news/newdetails).

E-commerce sites have facilitated the consumer's shopping process by overcoming many difficulties related to distance, time differences, laws, regulations, and other obstacles. The E-consumer can shop 24/7 without leaving the house. The commercial electronic advertising sites on the Internet have become an important and effective tool in helping the public and users to accomplish many activities and businesses. They provide detailed information about their products and services, which makes the decision-making of the purchase for the customer more rational and more efficient. The electronic search engines have also helped in connecting the users and in facilitating their access to the products and obtaining them in high quality and at competitive prices. All that makes the shopper the number-one beneficiary in the electronic market through the multiplicity of opportunities, the availability of products in various parts of the world, and the intensity of competition between producers and sellers.

Study Problem

E-commerce advertisement sites have appeared on the Internet as a modern and easy way of direct and fast online shopping. Some consumers today do not have sufficient time to go to the markets, so they have the opportunity to browse the Internet stores and purchase goods of their choice around the clock, seven days in the week. The wide and parallel spread of fast and instant delivery services provided by local parallel service companies has led to a qualitative shift in the field of enabling and activating direct and rapid purchase, as these companies receive and deliver messages, parcels and goods at record times that exceed the clients' expectations.

Despite these features, which are available to online shoppers worldwide, there is still a large percentage of consumers in the Arab world in general, and in Saudi Arabia in particular, who are still afraid of making the decision to make online purchases. They feel afraid of giving out their personal and private credit card data to those online advertising sites, lest they should expose themselves to fraud, or have their personal information stolen and sold to other websites and companies. In addition, the lack of confidence in the e-store, in the e-company, and in the product itself, among as other factors make some customers reluctant to make a decision to purchase through the web. (Yunus, Haytham 2018, p. 102).

Those reasons have contributed to making some shoppers prefer to go to traditional markets to check and see the product before completing the purchase. Despite all such fears and risks, many studies confirm that shopping through online advertisement websites is increasing rapidly (https://arabic.cnn.com/business/2018/03/28/souq-amazon)

Therefore, this study seeks to identify the most important factors affecting the attitudes of King Saud University employees as users of the Internet towards shopping through electronic store websites. They are factors related to the features of those sites, such as ease of use, the expected benefit from them, safety and privacy. There are also factors related to the features of the products or services they offer, such as quality and price, in addition to factors related to user characteristics such as user confidence, experience, and attitudes towards well-known brand products, as well as their attitudes towards shopping. The study also seeks to identify the relationship between these factors affecting the attitudes of users and their attitudes towards shopping, and the relationship between the attitudes of users as King Saud University employees (that is, students, staff and faculty members) towards electronic shopping and their purchasing behaviors. The study examines the factors affecting the university's youth orientation, represented by electronic shopping through intermediate electronic stores available on the web throughout the day.

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study arises from the need to study the advertising aspect of the Internet due to the effective features of the Internet as a virtual network. Such features are the vast human presence and the modern communication capabilities like interactivity, the possibility of immediate purchase, feedback, and after-sale services. This study is also a test of the hypothesis of the uses, the motives, and the realized gratifications, by applying them to university students in Riyadh, the Saudi capital, in a quest to find out the relationship between their trends, their purchasing behaviors and the electronic advertisements to which they are exposed. The study sample also adds great importance to the study since King Saud University community is an important segment for advertisers and owners of productive companies and for those in the field of electronic advertising sites. Therefore, the study will examine in detail the relationship between the university employees and electronic advertising and the latter's relationship with the purchasing behaviors of the former, which benefits advertisers in identifying the trends of this important segment of Saudi society within the city of Riyadh and its purchasing behaviors towards the advertisements of these institutions. The lack of serious and academic Arab studies that deal with electronic advertising and its effects on the purchasing behavior of the public gives greater importance to this study.

Objectives of the study

The underlying objective of the study is to determine the relationship of the purchasing behaviors of King Saud University employees with the electronic advertisements spread across the Internet. In other words, the study aims at identifying the role of Internet advertisements (electronic sale advertisement sites) in providing King Saud University employees with advertising information, gratifications, and purchasing behaviors that determine their use of these sites and the reasons for the comparison between them. This main goal emanates from several sub-goals as follows:

1) Identifying the types of Arabic electronic sale advertisement sites most used by King Saud University employees

2) Defining the types and forms of products and services that King Saud University employees are interested in while browsing the Internet or searching for specific products through electronic stores

3) Identifying the factors related to the features and characteristics of electronic sale advertisement websites (in terms of expected benefit - website performance and ease of use - safety and privacy) and the extent of the impact of these factors on the attitudes of King Saud University employees towards electronic advertisements and the relationship of this to their purchasing behaviors

4) Identifying the factors related to the features and characteristics of products and services offered in e-stores in terms of (product, service or price quality), and the extent of their impact on the attitudes of King Saud University employees towards their purchasing behaviors

5) Identifying the purchasing behaviors of Internet users of King Saud University employees (in terms of the user's self-efficacy and attitude towards electronic advertisements and towards brands and expected risks, user confidence in the site and experience in dealing with similar sites)

6) Recognizing the most important demographic variables (gender - educational excellence - monthly expense - nationality - residential geographic location) and the extent of their impact on the KSU employees' attitudes towards shopping through electronic advertising sites.
7) Monitoring the information derived from electronic advertisements in forming opinions and attitudes of King Saud University employees

Study Questions

The following study questions discuss the role which advertising plays through (intermediate electronic sale sites):

1) What is the effect of the respondents' demographic characteristics on the purchasing decision?
2) What is the extent of the respondents' exposure to Internet advertisements?
3) What are the motives for the respondents' exposure to Internet advertisements?
4) What are the nature, methods, and forms of Internet advertisements to which respondents are exposed?
5) To what kind of products and services in electronic advertisements are the respondents exposed?
6) What is the effect of this on the purchasing decisions of the respondents?
7) How do respondents evaluate Internet advertisements in terms of description and reliability?

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The uses, motivations, and gratifications approach represents the appropriate theoretical framework for this study. Such an approach can give researchers accurate results that can be generalized and can provide researchers with the best results related to the sample of this study.

The best model for studying the effect of advertising on the target consumer is the AIDA model for studying the impact of advertising developed by Strong in 1925. This model includes FOUR stages of influence: (attention, interest, desire, and action). (Tayeh 2007)

This can be illustrated through the following:

First: the theory of uses and gratifications:

This study relies on the theory of uses and gratifications to explain the motivations of university youths' exposure, their uses of Internet advertisements, and the verifications obtained from them. The theory of uses and gratifications is one of the theories of the transitional influence of communication methods that appeared in the late 1940s for the first time in an integrated manner through Elihu Katz and Blumer, 1974. The study focuses on studying the motives for individuals' use of communication means and exposure to them on the part of the functions carried out by the means of communication and their content, on the other hand (Ismail 2003, p. 252) to link this use to the gratification achieved with this use and the resultant impact. It also focuses on what the public do with the means of communication, not what the means of communication do with the public. (Abdel-Sadiq 2013, p. 121). Katz and others see the theory of uses and gratification as dependent on five assumptions: (McCawy 2009, p. 157).

Content of the Theory

Content includes the assumptions, needs, and motivations of the audience for exposure, use, types of gratification, and impact model.

Theory hypotheses

1) The term (Use of Means of Communication) represents the needs that the users understand; individual differences, social interaction, and the diversity of the needs of the members of this audience all control such needs.
2) The public's use of the means of communication helps to define the cultural norms that prevail in that community, not through content only.
3) The public are the ones who choose the content that satisfies their needs, and the audience members use the means of communication, not the other way around. (Ismail 2003, p. 254).
4) The public are active participants in the communication process and use its means to achieve intended goals that meet their expectations and satisfy their needs that develop the social environment. (TAN 1985 P233).
5) The public have their needs and motives, and they respond to the means of communication and to the content that satisfy those needs and motives. (Abdel Hamid 1993, p. 61).

Audience Needs

Katz and Gurevitch classified "the needs of the public" according to the theory of uses and gratifications in five categories: (TAN, 1985, p. 235):
1- Knowledge needs related to information, knowledge and understanding of the surrounding environment
2- Influential needs related to strengthening the aesthetic aspect, the feeling of pleasure and the nurturing of emotional experiences
3- Personal integration needs related to credibility and a sense of trust and stability
4- Social integration needs related to interactions with family, friends and the outside world
5- Defeated needs related to escapism and stress relief and the desire for fun and entertainment

Audience Motives for Exposure and Use

Motives are the individual's reasons for action. Motives are either internal or external, acquired or innate, and are accompanied by certain emotions related to that willingness; the individual tries to follow a special path towards it. (Al-Abdali 2011, p. 246). Most studies of uses and gratifications divide the motives of exposure to communication into the following:

1) Utilitarian motives: to search for information, knowledge, personal interest, experience and learning.

2) Ritual motives: to search for entertainment, pastime, rest and familiarity with the means. (Abdel-Sadiq 2013, p. 123).

Various motivations among members of the public lead to differences among them in exposure and use of means of communication; motives also change in accordance with time, roles, sites and social cultures. (Abdel Hamid 1993, p. 63).

Types of gratifications

Gratifications can be defined as the feelings by individuals when they have had their needs and goals satisfied or fulfilled. (MORALE, 2007, p. 431) Lawrence Wiener, according to McCawy, differentiates between two types of gratification:

1) Content gratifications, which result from exposure to the content of the means of communication. They are directional gratifications represented in monitoring the

environment to obtain information and social gratifications represented in linking the content to the individual's social relations. (McCawy 2009, p. 165).

2) The gratifications of the used communication medium, which result from the use of a specific communication medium. They are (a) quasi-directional gratifications represented by entertainment, recreation, rest, and (b) quasi-social gratifications represented by interaction with the parties and components of the communication medium.

The following model summarizes the content of the theory of uses and gratifications:
It can be said that, according to this model, the basic needs such as the individual's physiological, social and personal needs are the gratifications that individuals seek to achieve or hope for, and their motivation is adequate to the nature of these needs in all their types. These motives appear in people's lives in general and are translated through their behavior, which includes exposure to the means of communication. If the individual gets the gratification he/she wants, the exposure turns to the use of these communication means in order to obtain more gratification and use. This case represents the effect of the communication means on the users. (Abdel Hamid 1993, p. 61).

Researchers and specialists have unanimously agreed that the theory of uses and gratifications is appropriate for studies that relate to the Internet as a means of communication and advertising in general, for the following factors (Shaheen, 2010, p. 22).

1- Audience activity and internet interactivity: This interactive communication description, compared to traditional means of communication, needs users that are more active.

2- Transformational: It means the increasing development of the characteristics of the Internet and the diversity of the content therein, and this led advertisements to an increase in the available uses and the accompanying fulfilled gratifications.

3- Global consumption in the Internet: This means that each user has goals from using and visiting websites to satisfy certain needs.

4- Internet capabilities: The Internet is able to meet the diverse needs of users more than the ability of traditional means of communication to meet the needs of its audiences.

The Relationship between Advertising and the Theory of Uses and Gratifications

Advertising is of great importance to achieve consumer gratification because the differences between minor goods and services and advertising can be the element that supplies the consumer with a certain gratification and gives the item or service a competitive advantage in the Internet and markets. (Al-Sahan 2000, p. 78).

Motivation research is considered one of the most important methods used in advertising research and aims to discover the motives of individuals that produce their behavioral patterns. Knowledge of the consumer's motives for purchase is one of the most important things to understand in the marketing activities in the modern era. (Al Abdali 2011, pp. 203-243).

Second: The AIDA model and the advertising communication models explaining the purchasing behavior of the consumer:

Advertising aims at creating a set of sequential effects to reach the desired response from the advertisement. This cumulative science passes through several stages:

- Perception, Emotion, and Behavior, which result in cognitive, monotonous, or behavioral responses. 'Impact' has been defined as the result of communication, and falls on both the sender and the recipient, and may be social, psychological or behavioral. It is achieved

through the means of communication by providing news, information, entertainment, persuasion and improving the mental image. (McCawy 2009, p. 34).

Specialists have agreed on many models that link the advertisement and its effects to the consumer's purchasing decision, the most important of which are the IDA model, the progressive impact model, the Dagmar model, the product adoption model, the communication model in the advertisement, and the Hue model. The following is a table that explains them all:

Contact Impact Template Table

	Aida Model	Gradual Impact Model	Dagmar Model	Adoption Model the product	Communication Model in Advertising	Hoe Model
	ADIA	Hierarchy of Effects	Dagmar	Product Adoption		Hoe
Cognitive Stage (Perception)	A Attention	Awareness Knowledge	Awareness Compre-hension	Awareness	Exposure Reception perception Response	Awareness Knowledge
Passion Stage (Influence - Emotions)	ID Interest Desire	Liking Preference Conviction	Conviction	Interest Evaluation	Attention Interest	Liking Preference Conviction
Behavior Stage	A Action	Purchase	Action	Experience Adoption	Behavior	Purchase

The researcher believes that the forms that link advertising to consumer behavior end in behavior, purchase or action, which is the last stage of influence, response and characteristics of communicative behavior, the use of communication methods, the way of exposure, the intensity of exposure, participation and interaction in the communication process, and then the gratification of motives and needs, then the preference to use specific means of communication and trust in them. This explains the compatibility between the bottom line of advertisement influence models in the communicative process (behavior, purchase, or "response"), the assumptions of uses and gratification theory.

The STRONG model (AIDA) developed in 1925, is a major model for studying the impact of advertising on the target consumer. (Tayeh 2007) This model includes four stages: (attention, interest, desire, action). Here is how this template affects and links to electronic advertisements:

Attention:

The e-website design is the most important element, which draws attention to any advertisement, in addition to the uses of text and colors in the design as they draw attention. The size of the advertisement on the page also forces us to pay attention to it. Another important element is the use of the name of the company or commodity or service and the reasons for its purchase, as well as the advertisement site. The employment of celebrities in advertising,

graphics, and pictures, and putting the website address in search engines and traditional means of communication -- all of these contribute towards attracting the internet user's attention. (Omar 2008, p. 104)

Interest:

Looking at the advertisement does not necessarily mean reading it. Therefore, an advertisement should increase interest and excitement in the user from the first moment he/she enters the site. Manipulating emotional gestures and sound effects, an advertisement should also create reasons for the user to remain on the website. An advertisement must also be closely associated with real life, and explain the results of buying the commodity or the service and its impact on the life of the consumer (the user). The user will be looking for more information about goods and services at this stage, so the advertisement should be keen to provide it in interesting ways. (Karlsson 2007, p.13).

Desire:

The main task of the advertisement is to create the desire towards the commodity or service that is advertised. At this stage, the advertisement focuses on highlighting the offers and discounts that are used to motivate users towards buying, in addition to arousing the motives of the purchase and showing the needs, and this is what drives consumers to purchase. This is done in the Internet through payment strategies that are made by sending electronic messages to consumers and through sudden advertisements that appear to the user on the site he/she is surfing. The advertisements must give evidence, facts, numbers and information about the importance, necessity, benefits and gains of buying. In a manner commensurate with the tastes and needs of the consumer and a comparison between the situation before using the goods and services and after using them and activating sales by all means at this stage, consumers become eligible to make the purchase. (BELCH, 2003, P147).

Action:

This is the last stage of this form. It is making a decision to buy, not to buy, planning to buy at another time, or to purchase online through the Internet. This stage is related to the behavioral aspect of the motives for buying, where advertisements at this stage remind people of goods and services, and encourage buying through messages that include how to implement a decision to purchase. (Omar 2008, p. 106)

In the light of the foregoing, the researcher proposes the following model for this study, which seeks to identify the extent of the use of Internet advertisements and their impact on the decision of purchasing among university youths and the implications for them. He will indicate the effect of intermediate variables, which are the demographic variables of the respondents. He will rely on the Aida model, which clarifies the effect of advertisements on consumer purchasing behavior, and this can be illustrated as follows:

Independent Variable	Intermediate Variables	Dependent Variable
Internet advertisements Duration of Internet Use How often advertisements	Demographic characteristics Gender (Male / Female)	The purchasing decision of the university employees Influence on the Purchasing Decision

are seen Motives for advertising uses Advertising Gratifications Advertisement Formats Advertising Methods Goods and Services Exposure Sites Advertisement Evaluation (Description, Credibility, Preference)	Academic Specialization (humanities, Natural, Medical, etc.) Economic Level (High, medium, low) Academic Excellence Factor (Academic Degree)	Degree of Influence on Purchase decision Online Purchase Traditional Purchase Nature of the Purchase After-Sale Service
AIDA Model Impact: Attention = Interest = Desire = Action		

Theoretical Framework

First: electronic advertising: (definition, types and characteristics):

Electronic advertising is an easy and low-cost method, compared to other advertising means in providing information about various goods and services to a wide audience of consumers around the world. The importance of electronic advertising has increased due to the burgeoning use of the Internet worldwide. These advertisements contain the corporate file of the advertising company, which contains information about the company and the types of goods or services that it produces, which are of interest to the dealing audiences with it, like current or prospective consumers. Hence, electronic advertising has become an important advertising medium through which advertisers can present their different activities to different types of audiences dealing with them. These advertisements differ - to a large extent - in the type of information that they provide to the audience with whom they are dealing. However, these advertisements share a lot of information they provide about the activities or products produced by the advertisers. But some advertising sites may add some information about the history of the company and its experience in the field that it works in, in addition to introducing workers and their various experiences and qualifications, as evidence of the strength of these companies in attracting the best elements to work with, in order to create a good mental image of the company. Electronic advertising has now become an integral part of any advertising campaign carried out by advertisers.

Definition of electronic advertisement:

'Electronic advertising' can be defined as the process by which the advertiser puts his/her products and services to be visible to users across the Internet, through the Banner Advert, which allows users to click on by using the mouse to be directed to the advertisers' pages.

The stages and forms of development in electronic advertising are as follows:

1) Email advertising:

The e-mail service is used by advertisers to reach potential or existing consumers, as messages are sent directly to Internet users who have a current or future interest in the advertised item or service. This is one of the most effective methods of marketing communications, if messages are sent to the consumer who is interested in the subject of advertising.

2) Banner advertisements:

These are small advertisements, rectangular, fixed or animated. They often appear at the top of the page and rely mainly on the use of multimedia (text, video, audio). Clicking on these advertisements will take the visitor to the advertiser's site to get more information about the declared organization or company. There are various types of banners, including: fixed, mobile and interactive.

3) In-site Advertisement:

It is one of the effective forms of electronic advertising, and it includes several types that include:

A- Official Sponsorship Advertisements on the Internet: This form is one of the most-used advertisements; it is divided into:

- *Regular Sponsorship advertisements:* according to which the advertiser entrusts an organization that owns a website as an official sponsor, to advertise its products on the pages of its website, with a fee for the space occupied by the advertisement on the website.

- *Sponsorship of content advertisements:* according to which the official sponsor announces the company's products on the Internet, and interferes with the formulation of the content of the promotional message.

B - Surprise Internet advertisements: they take two main forms:

- Surprise start advertisements: It is an advertisement that shows surprise when browsing the various websites, or while trying to enter a specific site, and usually takes the form of a square larger than the advertisement tape, and by clicking on the advertisement shot, the site is moved to the advertiser or the declared institution.

- Surprise end advertisements: An advertisement that appears surprisingly when exiting a website, or after completing copies of a particular program.

4) Classified Advertisements:

It is a group of fixed strip advertisements assembled together and are very similar to classified advertisements in newspapers and magazines. They are small and depend mainly on the advertising texts and sometimes on pictures of the product. These advertisements deal with some commodities such as cars, real estate, communications, jobs, and travel and excursion offices.

5) Rich Announcement:

It is an advertisement that takes advantage of the many possibilities on the Internet, such as Multimedia software. It is designed using certain programs such as Java, and has the additional ability to do some form of interaction with the Internet user, increase the impact of the advertising content, and affect the response of consumers to the advertisement.

6) Purchase spaces on other sites or on search engines:

Like Google, one of the most popular search engines, these sites provide an opportunity for consumers to pick out certain goods.

7) Hyperlinks: These advertisements take advantage of the possibilities offered by a network Internet and these advertisements are a hyperlink containing text or image, which the consumer clicks on to open a new page containing the advertiser's site.

8) Electronic advertising sites: electronic sale sites or electronic stores: These advertisements are the last stages of advertising development in the web, where you find one-site products by many companies. This site can provide you with an integrated service from A - Z by viewing

the product and seeing its full specifications, and making sure of the producing company, the date of production, the guarantee, and even the payment of the amount via the Internet (bank account sites) to receive it via a huge transportation network. These sites also provide replacement service after sale or retrieval within specific days unless the product matches the specifications and desires of the buyer. The most famous of these sites is the globally known Amazon website, the 'Souq.com' website in the Arab market, the coupon site, the Noon site, and many other sites. It is worth noting here that these advertising sites do not have any products, but they provide an advertising platform for the seller and the buyer and a link between them. It gets a percentage for the services and facilities that it provides to both parties.

Features and characteristics of electronic advertising:

Many organizations and companies compete to win more consumers for the commodities that they advertise in various parts of the world through their website on the Internet, in light of the many advantages provided by electronic advertising, which are as follows:

1) Global:

Electronic advertising is considered one of the means of advertising of an national or international nature, but its advertising content is mostly characterized by the local character of the origin related to the advertising companies. For example, most American advertising sites use English and are directed primarily to the American public or English speakers around the world. Likewise, most Chinese websites use Chinese to address the Chinese public, and so on. These local contents are valid for goods and services of a local character. As for international or multinational companies, content is used with an international character, and in line with the public in various countries around the world.

2) Interactive capabilities:

Interactivity is one of the most important characteristics of electronic advertising, as it represents the real and promising benefit of the Internet - as a modern means of communication - and represented by interactivity, through knowing the opinions of consumers and customers in the goods and services that are promoted.

3) Facilitating the purchase process:

Entering websites can lead to ordering the product from the company, especially if the company places a link to contact it.

4) Very limited cost:

Compared to other advertising methods, radio and television time is expensive, measured in seconds. Moreover, since the company has a large site, there is a lot of space to advertise, with the possibility of using more space.

5) Flexibility to change, delete, add and schedule:

Especially with the availability of multiple raw materials, which gives the opportunity to advertise and publish in more than one version and in more than one way. This allows the possibility of updating the information at any time the advertiser wants when there is information or essential things related to the advertised good or service.

6) The possibility of using the multi-media elements:

Text, image, video, this process makes the offering of goods and services take a more exciting and attractive nature to the consumer, if companies do well to exploit the possibilities available in multimedia programs.

7) Possibility of picking the required information about goods and services produced by advertisers, which suit consumer preferences and interests.

1) The impact of the Internet on the consumer

First: the communicative model of the Internet as an advertising medium

Communication via the Internet depends on interactivity and is the most important feature of the communicative internet that enables the consumer to communicate with the company of the good or service, and with users of goods and services, to seek their views through personal interaction (Al-Alaq, 2010, p. 122). The customer can interact with the medium through research on the Internet pages to search for various information, the company can communicate to the customer the content of the message that you want to deliver. (Tayeh, 2007, p. 50) as follows:

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="2"></td><td>The company</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Content</td></tr>
<tr><td>The company</td><td>Content</td><td>(Internet)</td><td>Content</td><td>The consumer</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="2"></td><td>Content</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>The consumer</td></tr>
</table>

Second: Types of Internet Users:

Studies have shown that the Internet is used in a variety of ways by different groups of users and that there are behavioral characteristics of Internet users. Lewis & Lewis in 1997 defined it in five types: (Chaffey et al. 2000 p44)

1) Users searching for specific information:

These users search for specific goods, services and information, and this type of user is experienced in using the Internet and search engines, which makes them more focused during use.

2) Users who do not search for specific information:

They are usually called browsers and tend to browse pages online and move from one site to another. They have little experience and are more inclined to click on advertisements.

3) Guided Buyers:

They are the ones who use the internet to buy a specific good or service, so they visit the websites via the Internet in order to compare the characteristics of goods and services to know their prices.

4) Bargain hunters:

They use the Internet to identify offers of goods and services advertised on the Internet, such as providing free samples and the like.

5) Seekers of entertainment:

They use the Internet to find fun by entering quizzes, using online games and interacting with them.

As stated in a study (Laudon & Traver, 2001) that divided Internet users according to their behavior in one session into seven types (Tayeh, 2007, p. 94).

1- Fast: Like those who read e-mail.

2- Finders of facts: who find and evaluate information.

3- Carry out specific tasks: visit the famous specialized sites to obtain the required information.
4- Visitors to favorite sites: such as, chat sites and exchange of opinions.
5- He visited entertainment sites: like games and competitions sites.
6- Information seekers: who search for information related to a specific topic
7- Browsers: who care about interesting sites

Third: The behavior of Internet users as consumers:

1) Online Consumer Behavior Model:

The general consumer behavior differs from the consumer behavior used for the Internet by two factors: the characteristics and design of websites, the consumer behavior on the Internet, and his skills and capabilities.

The website features include content and technologies such as audio, image, video, graphics, and design that must be attractive and appropriate to the tastes of the site's visitors, provides the possibility of purchasing from the site, and contains a variety of marketing methods. The consumer behavior used for the Internet includes the activities that it performs on the Internet and the way it deals with Internet advertisements. If online advertising does not achieve the desired impact on the purchasing decision, it increases consumer awareness of the goods and services. As follows:

	Website features		
The Cultural Environment The Social Environment Psychological Factors	Brand Marketing activities Possibilities to buy	Advertisement click behavior	Purchase decision

Consumer behavior on the website:

The Aida model, which explains the purchasing consumer behavior, consists of four stages. When this model is applied to the behavior of Internet users as consumers, while they are exposed to Internet advertisements inside websites, each stage of the Aida model is related to a form of Internet user's behavior within the websites, and verification of *Attention* is achieved through the user's view of the advertisement. *Interest* is achieved if the user enters the website of the advertisement. The *interest* turns into *Desire* if the Internet user *communicates* with the advertisers or the producers of the good or service. Ultimately, the action is achieved and it is the final stage of the Aida form if the user *purchases* in its regular or electronic form through the Internet, this is evident through the following table:

Table

Online advertisements	A	I	D	A	Gratification verified
	Attention (Viewing)	interest (Access)	Desire (Communication)	Action (Purchase decision)	Loyalty
	The first visit to the website				Next visit
Exposure to the website	Behavior within the website				

Fourth: The effect of advertising and psychological factors on purchase decision-making:

Advertising is a marketing communication activity aimed at persuasion and creating the necessary effect (the purchase). The purchasing decision of the consumer is affected by many factors. However, psychological factors that represent the consumer directly and reflect his needs and desires and constitute his motivations determine the purchasing behavior of the consumer, as follows:

This strategy refers to the role of the individual internal factors such as cognitive and psychological influences that influence the formation of behavior more than the role of biological factors, and link emotional arousal to specific behaviors (McCawy, 2009, p. 107). The following address these factors:

First: The effect of psychological factors on advertising:

According to Abdel-Hamid, McQueel believes that the satisfaction and gratification of the needs of individuals to use the means of communication is more related to psychological factors. (Abdel Hamid, 1993, p. 63).

Kotler explained (1997) that the influence of psychological factors on the consumer's purchasing decision is stronger than that of other factors, because these factors represent the buyer in particular, (Al-Bakry, 2006, p. 80) as follows:

Cultural Factors	Social Factors	Personal Factors	Psychological Factors	The Buyer

Motives are divided into two categories:

First: *Innate motives*, which an individual is born with. They are divided into types, *special motives*, accompanied by a specific emotion of its own, and *general motives*, which are not accompanied by emotion of its own. (Al-Abdali, 2011, p. 246).

Second*: Acquired motives*, which a person learns during his life. (Saeed, 1993, p. 125) Behavioral motives are divided into *mental motives* when the purchase is made after thinking and *emotional motives* when the purchase is made without prior thinking. Motives are divided according to the stages of disposal into: (a) *preliminary motives*, which are related to the reasons for purchase, the purchase of a particular commodity regardless of the different brands, and (b) *selective motives*, which are related to a specific brand, and (c) the *dealing motives* associated with any store the purchase is made for reasons related to the location, price and desire to deal with that store. (Al-Sahan, 2000, p. 127).

1- The effect of motivation on advertising:

The advertiser benefits from knowing the mental and emotional motivations of purchasing in determining the effects used in the advertisement. Examples of the effects of mental motivation are quality and emotional effects gravity. When we talk about the motives according to the stages of the act, there are *primary* motives (the reasons for buying certain goods and services) *selective* motives (the reasons for buying a specific

brand) *dealing* motives (the reasons for buying from a specific place). (Saeed, 1993, p. 125).

2- The effect of learning on advertising:

a. Repetition: The more exposure to an advertisement, the more consumers will know what the advertisement contains and the more it will be remembered.

b. Meaning: The more meaningful goods and services are learned, then advertising must give specific meaning to goods and services. (Saeed, 1993, p. 127).

3- The effect of trends on advertising:

Trends include three elements, a *cognitive* component: how to perceive things, an *emotional* component; how we feel towards things, and a *behavioral* component: how to behave towards things. These three trends are important factors in determining the opinions of consumers towards a specific topic. These trends are reflected in their behavior, so the advertisement works to support Positive direction towards goods and services, or change a negative direction towards goods and services and create a positive direction, and the advertising message differs according to the type of trend element (Abu Tuaima, 2008, p. 180).

4- The effect of perception on advertising:

Perception goes through three processes: first: exposure to advertising (disclosure of advertising) second: interest in advertising (attention), and third: preference for advertising (interpretation), (Suwaidan and Haddad, 2006, p. 154).

Perception is characterized as a personal process that differs from one person to another, and as a selective process, as the consumer chooses influences and leaves others, which is the meaning the individual gives to the stimulus that he was exposed to. Therefore, it is necessary that the advertisement be concerned with influencing the consumer's senses by drawing attention and attracting interest, using the form and content of the advertisement, changing the advertisement occasionally, and choosing the appropriate time and means for advertising, (Saeed, 1993, p. 130).

Second: The effect of psychological factors on the stages of making a purchasing decision:

Each of the consumer's psychological factors is related to a stage of purchasing decision-making. These psychological factors determine how the consumer behaves at this stage, as follows:

Realizing the need	→	**Searching for Information**	→	**Evaluating Alternatives**	→	**Purchase Decision**	→	**Post-Purchase Feeling**
Motivations	→	**Perception**	→	**Directions**	→	**Integration**	→	**Learning**

Psychological factors are among the most effective internal factors that affect consumer decisions, and they are one of the factors that represent the consumer more than other external factors. The researcher believes that, according to the form, the consumer's awareness of his needs is related to his motivations that drive him to satisfy these needs, just as the consumer's

awareness of his reality and his environment is nothing but his awareness of what he wants to realize. This is what drives the consumer to search for something they want. A consumer's choice of a specific brand, good or service is due to his/her convictions and directions that he/she formed. When the consumer exceeds these stages related to his psychological formation, he/she has an integrated perception about the thing they want to buy, but learning it helps the consumer if they felt that they benefited from the goods and services or gained gratification, and learning has contributed to repetition of purchase.

Third: Purchase decision-making process model:

This model explains how the consumer makes the traditional purchase decision or purchase through the Internet. The differences are simple and refer to the activities provided by the advertising medium and the consumer environment. The model includes three stages:

Inputs	Marketing efforts: commodity, price, promotion, distribution.		Social and cultural environment: family, culture, reference groups, social class.
Processes	Feeling of need Search for information		Consumer psychological field: Motives, perception, learning, personality, attitudes
Outputs	Making a purchase decision	Post-purchase feeling	

1. Inputs stage: It includes the marketing activities carried out by companies and advertisers for goods and services, which are the product, price, location and advertising, and the social and cultural factors that surround the consumer.

2. Operation stage: This encompasses the consumer's psychological factors, which are the internal influences that most affect the consumer's purchasing decision and influence how he/she is affected by external inputs. This stage mixes with three stages of the decision to purchase, which are, feeling the need, searching for information, identifying and evaluating alternatives, in addition to previous experience that affects the re-purchase state.

3. The output stage: It is the actual purchasing behavior and includes the purchase decision and evaluation of the purchase process.

Literature Review

The researcher chose the most important previous studies that relate to his topic directly and classified them into three axes, according to the topic as follows:

1) Studies related to the impact of Internet advertisements on purchasing behavior:

- Aljundi's study (2017), the effect of internet advertising on the steps of the electronic purchasing decision, an applied study on students of the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies in Al-Ahsa Governorate

- Al-Zuyoud Study (2014): Uses of Internet Advertising and its Impact on the University Youth Purchase Decision: A Field Study on a Sample of Yarmouk University Students in Jordan.

Gaurav (2013) Internet advertising and its impact on consumer purchasing behavior: This study was conducted on a sample of the audience of Internet users in India and relied on quantitative and qualitative analyses. The study aimed to test a set of hypotheses that included the impact of Internet advertisements and factors that contribute to the effectiveness of Internet advertisements on the purchasing behavior of users of the Internet and the types of advertisements most influential. The most prominent results were the noticeable increase in Online advertising activities due to the interactive services they provided with the preference for classified advertisements, then websites, then in search engines, in addition to the ability to target consumers, develop a strategy for them, and consider the sample members. The Internet advertisements are annoying and widespread on the websites in the first place and evil in the last place, and the sample members relied on the following sources:

- Where the contact came with others first, then the advertising content, then the brand's website, and video advertisements and windows on the Internet came from the last windows that consumers rely on during e-shopping.

- A Study by Mathew et al. (2013) The impact of online advertising on consumer behavior:

This study was conducted on a sample of the population of the city of Maiduguri Metropolis, the capital of Nigeria, and it consisted of 150 individuals and adopted the survey methodology. The study aimed to identify the impact of Internet advertising on consumers and the most prominent results were that 71,94% of respondents had a positive trend towards advertising on the Internet. 28,06% of the respondents had a negative trend towards advertising on the Internet. 73.38% of the respondents said that they went to advertise on the Internet in search for information. 30.22% of the respondents said that Internet advertising affects the use of some products and services. 23.02% of the respondents said that Internet advertising affects them only to plan for future purchases. 15,83% of the respondents said that Internet advertising affects them in purchasing some products and services and the challenges that consumers encountered during exposure to advertisements on the Internet were the irregular supply of electricity and lack of access to the Internet and services not provided as advertised and fraud and delivery of products will be in Bad conditions. The study concluded that the impact of Internet advertising on consumers was more than other forms of advertising due to the interactive and global nature and opportunities available to consumers to purchase goods and services through the Internet.

- Mubarak’s study (2012), King Saud University employees’ use of news websites Priyanka’s Study (2012) The Impact of Internet Advertising on Consumer Behavior (with special reference to advertising emails). This study used as its sample a population of Lacknow that consisted of 100 individuals, applied quantitative and qualitative analyses. It aimed at identifying the characteristics and features of the most attractive Internet advertisements (Interactive, Credibility, Entertainment, Irritability, Buying, Providing Information), and the effect of age and online advertising site on the response. The most prominent results were that Internet users of all age groups had the same perception towards advertising sites, but 22% of the respondents agreed that Internet advertisements

were rich in information said that they made purchases online and 16% saw it as being interactive and 14% of the sample saw that Internet advertisements were credible and 12% of respondents believed that advertisements were online for entertainment.

- A study by Bany Mohammed and Alkubise (2012) How Internet advertisements affect the purchasing intent of the consumer: experimental evidence from a developing country. This study was conducted on a sample of Jordanian and private university students. It consisted of 339 individuals and relied on the survey method. It aimed at identifying the impact of Internet advertisements, the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of Internet advertisements on the purchasing intent of consumers and the types of advertisements and their most influential display sites through a set of assumptions. The most prominent results showed that income, Internet use skills, duration of use, content of advertisements and their display sites were statistically significant to the effectiveness and impact of Internet advertisements had a strong impact on consumers' purchasing intent. Other factors such as the opinions of others and the language had less influence on the effectiveness of Internet advertisements and their impact on consumers' purchasing intentions.
- Darban and Ali (2012) study, the impact of Internet social media on the decision to purchase for consumers and food merchants. This study was carried out on a sample of food shop owners who had pages on Facebook and of consumers who visited those pages on the Internet. The study was not limited to a specific country and depended on the interview and telephone contact. The study aimed to identify the impact of social networks on the Internet (Facebook) on the decision-making process for consumers buying from food stores through a set of assumptions. The most prominent results were that social networks on the Internet affected every step during the purchasing decision-making process for consumers in varying degrees with regard to foods stores. The reasons are the Facebook features that provide people with comfort and convenience. It was found out that consumers spend more time on the net and that Facebook features allow consumers to interact with food stores other than the consumers who deal with them. Another result was the influence of consumer comments on Facebook pages that talk about food stores has had an effect on consumer purchasing decision-making.
- Duncan (2011) Internet Advertising Study: Determining the different types of advertising sites and their impact on consumer purchasing behavior. The study sample was taken from Internet users at the University of Elon and Taconet of 200 individuals. The study aimed at analyzing various types of advertisements on the Internet and studying how these advertisements affected the purchasing behavior of the consumer. It also aimed at identifying the types of mature and effective Internet advertisements and at studying the users' awareness of Internet advertisements. The most prominent results were the description of Internet advertisements as meaningless, opaque, ineffective, forgettable and intrusive. 46.7% of the sample said that they did not like Internet advertisements, 55.4% of the sample found Internet advertisements troublesome, and 83.7% said they watched Internet advertisements often. 65,2% said that the most preferred types of internet advertisements were on corporate websites, followed by 40,2% of window advertisements, and 30,4% said that Internet advertisements affected the purchase decision sometimes, and 29,3% said they did not affect at all. Internet

advertisements were the most used e-mail, and the inefficiency of Internet advertisements was due to the lack of clarity in the advertising message used in it.

- Tayeh Study (2007) Effect of Internet Advertising on the Purchasing Decision Stages for Palestinian University Youth. This study was conducted on a sample of Palestinian university youth in the Gaza Strip. It consisted of 382 individuals and adopted the descriptive analytical approach. The study aimed at identifying the effect of Internet advertisements on the decision-making stages of purchase among Palestinian university youth, the rates of university youth use of the Internet, and the impact of the Internet as a commercial advertising channel on the decision-making process. The most prominent results were that Internet advertisements positively affected the purchasing decision. A small number of them carried out the electronic buying process, although 71,7% of university students used the Internet daily and the amount of time that university youth spent on the Internet positively affected the purchase decision. There were statistically significant differences regarding the effect of Internet advertisements on the purchasing decision due to age, level of education, and income variables, while gender and type of university changes did not affect Purchasing decision.

-The Alaq and Alsayyed Study (2006) Measuring the effectiveness of online advertising in Jordan. This study was carried out on a sample of Jordanian university students and consisted of 1231 individuals from 4 Jordanian universities and adopted the survey methodology. The study aimed to test a set of assumptions that included determining whether consumers' interaction with Internet sites affected their attitudes towards the types of commercial goods advertised through these sites later. It also evaluated the extent of the impact of these sites on the trends of these consumers towards Internet advertisements and measured the extent of the impact of Internet advertisements through the interaction between consumers and these sites. The most prominent of results showed that there was a positive effect of Internet advertisements on the items of the goods advertised on these sites, and that these advertisements improved the perception of these items. The study also revealed that those who felt that Internet advertisements had improved their awareness of the advertised items saw that there was a benefit from Internet advertisements in addition to having some negatives sides. It revealed that many consumers preferred traditional, non-interactive means of communication, such as TV and magazines.

2) Studies related to the influence of advertisements in general on purchasing behavior:

- Al-Kubaisi Study (2012). The effect of visual advertising on the behavior of Riyadh children from the point of view of their parents. This study was conducted on a sample of parents of Riyadh children and consisted of 140 individuals. The study relied on the descriptive analytical approach and aimed at shedding light on the extent of the impact of advertisements on the behavior of Riyadh children from the point of view of their parents. The most prominent results were that most parents had a negative attitude towards advertisements in that they changed the behavior of their children to the worse, and that their children accepted more the negative aspects of advertising than the positive aspects. The parents also said that the advertisements did not provide useful information to their children as advertisements used methods of deception and fraud that the percentage of advertisements beneficial to children was almost very small, especially in harmful food advertisements.

- Study of Shabbier et al. (2011) Effectiveness of advertising and its impact on consumer purchasing behavior. This study was conducted on a sample of the population of Pakistani cities consisting of 200 items and used quantitative and qualitative analyses. It aimed at testing hypotheses relating to the relationship between environmental response and emotional response that represented the independent variables with the purchasing consumer behavior, which is the dependent variable. The most prominent results were the moderate relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variableو and that there was a positive relationship between emotional reactions and the purchasing behavior of the consumer and the absence of a relationship between the environmental response and the purchasing behavior, and that the consumers had bought brands that they were attached to emotionally.

Al-Rabbaa Study (2009) The Impact of TV Advertising on Consumer Purchasing Behavior. This study was conducted on a sample of adolescents in the city of Irbid and consisted of 400 male and female singles. It relied on the survey method and aimed at identifying the relationship between TV advertising and the behavior of the consumer's purchase. The most prominent results were that 48 4% of the sample were always exposed to advertisements and that 45.5% were exposed to them after eight o'clock in the evening and the most viewed lyric advertisements were 41.8%, then followed by drama advertisements with 31.2%. 68.3% saw that they were somewhat honest and that there was a statistically significant relationship between advertisement delivery time, its reliability, and the newness of its information and the purchasing behavior of teenage girls.

3) Studies related to the theory of uses, gratifications, and the effects of Internet advertising:

- Study Jones et al. (2003). Exploring consumer motivations for using the Internet and its effects on e-commerce. This study examined the effect of demographic variables and the dimensions of motivating factors on two types of consumer use of the Internet: the weekly internet surfing ratio and the time spent by the consumer to search for products and information related to services, online shopping and data collection from two sources. The sample consisted of a self-survey of 59 undergraduate students in an introductory communication course at Cornell University and an online survey of 59 New Yorkers via e-mail and reached. The results were the following:

- There are different patterns of relationships that distinguish the demographics and the catalysts for these two types of dependent variables. A negative correlation had been reached between the proportion of time devoted to researching the product and shopping online, while the economic motives had a positive impact. In addition, it was found that shopping through the Internet it was linked more to informational and interactive motives and that social motives had an impact on commerce and advertising on the Internet.

- LUE Study (2002). Electronic Consumer Behavior: Theory of Uses and Gratification: A study of the structural equation model. This study was conducted on a sample of business school students in two major universities from the southern and northern states in the United States of America and consisted of 238 individuals. This study aimed at identifying the effects of information and entertainment motivations in various consumer behaviors on the Internet, such as the attitude towards the Internet, the use of the Internet and gratification, in particular, and the relationship between the use of

the Internet and gratification, the attitude towards the Internet, the relationship between information and entertainment, and motivation and Attitude towards the websites. The study was conducted in accordance with the theory of uses and gratifications. The results indicated that the consumers' attitude was good towards the websites, and Internet users who saw the sites amusing and useful in general had shown a positive attitude towards them. In return, the respondents who viewed those sites as disturbing had a negative attitude towards those websites. Finally, the study found that Internet users had a positive attitude towards the Internet and that browsing the Internet often led advertisements to a feeling of relief.

Commentary on literature review:

After reviewing the previous studies, the researcher found the following:

a- The lack of local and Arabic studies that deal with the impact of Internet advertisements on the consumer's purchasing decision compared with foreign and international studies

b - Previous studies dealt with the impact of Internet advertisements on the consumer's purchasing behavior and attitudes toward those advertisements and the factors that increased the effectiveness of Internet advertisements on consumer purchasing behavior.

c - Previous studies dealt with variables such as the extent of exposure, characteristics, types, content, and sites for displaying Internet advertisements, advertised goods and services, Internet use skills for purchasing, consumers' position on advertisements, reasons for exposure and non-exposure to a lesser degree, language, income and age.

d- Previous studies dealt with consumer behavior in general and the purchasing decision in particular, and they were varied in relying on the survey method and models of advertising impact on communication, the theory of uses and gratifications, and the theory of accreditation.

e- Previous studies relating to advertising generally addressed its effect on the purchasing behavior, using types of advertisements, show times, and reliability

Method of the study

This study is follows the descriptive methodology, which is one of the most-used study methodologies adopted by communication researchers. The stud is also a report on the characteristics of a specific phenomenon or situation that has been overwhelming. The survey methodology is a comprehensive study of a relatively large number of cases in a particular situation. The survey will be applied to the sample where the researcher collects his data and then interprets it to extract generalizations and conclusions, so that we can extract from this data what will be collected from part of the community that will give results validating the whole society. (Ismail 2011, pp. 96-95) The phenomenon discussed here is in (the uses of Internet advertisements and their impact on purchasing behaviors among university youth - employees of King Saud University - and the verifications obtained from them).

Study Community

The study community consists of undergraduate-program students at King Saud University who use the Internet with all its applications and programs. They will be chosen within the quota system, which represents different classes in the study community according to

the characteristics that have been adopted, as the researcher tends to choose individuals who are ready to undergo study. (Zogheib 2009, p. 243).

The researcher believes that this type of samples serves this study and achieves its goal. Given the large study population, (as the number of King Saud University employees reached by the end of the academic year 2017 (61704) male and female students), the researcher chose a sample consisting of (400 individuals) employees of King Saud University, who were divided into scientific and human colleges, males and females, to serve the aims of this study. (Al-Khazim, Muhammad, Al-Jazirah newspaper, Issue No. 15859). The total of the study population is as follows:

The number of male and female students: 57676
Number of employees: 11613
Number of faculty members [doctors, lecturers, teaching assistants]: 7249
Total: 76,538 levels

The Study Sample

With reference to the segments of the study community [students, employees, and faculty members] and according to what is approved in survey studies, the study deals with (400) items as a sample for large research societies numerically, and conducted a proportional equation according to the sample by dividing the part by the whole and multiplying it to become as follows:

Male and female sample: 57676 ÷ 76538 X 100 ~ 75%
Staff sample: 11613 ÷ 76538 X 100 ~ 15%
Sample of faculty members and the like: 7249 ÷ 76538 X 100 ~ 10%

Study Variables

The study seeks to test the relationship between a number of variables that are included in the study's hypotheses:

1) Independent variable: electronic online advertisements. Internet usage time, exposure to advertisements, motives for advertising, ad saturation, ad formats, advertising methods, goods and services, exposure sites, evaluation of advertisements (description, credibility, preference)
2) Intermediate variables:
    1- Gender: (male - female).
    2- City of residence: the city of Riyadh (the geographical area therein).
    3- Economic level: (high - medium - low)
    4- Academic specialization: (scientific, literary, natural)
    5- The degree of educational achievement: (superior, acceptable, weak).
3) A dependent variable: the uses and motivations of male and female students and purchasing behaviors, the purchasing decision of university employees, to influence the decision-making of the purchase, the degree of influence on the decision to purchase, electronic purchase, traditional purchase, the nature of the purchase process, after-sales services (guarantee).

Third: Justifications for choosing the study community and its sample:

1- The university youth category has made great use of Internet advertisements. (Exploratory study).

2- The lack of local and Arabic studies that targeted the uses of Internet advertisements and their impact on the purchasing decision of university youth within the limits of the researcher's knowledge.

3- The sample consisted of quotas representing literary and scientific colleges, as well as social gender, males and females. King Saud University includes literary and scientific colleges of both sexes, represents the demographic characteristics approved in the study, and serves its goals, and accordingly all of the vocabulary of these quotas were listed by referring to the Deanship of Admission and Registration at the University King Saud.

4- A sample of 400 individuals was chosen and is representative of the study community because it is a quota ample, based on the information available in published research, which constitutes an important starting point regarding the sample size. (Zogheib 2009, p. 253).

Fourth: The Study Tool

This study relied on the questionnaire, one of the most-used methods and tools of data collection in the survey method. The latter is a method of data collection that aims at exciting the respondents in a systematic and codified way by presenting certain facts, opinions or ideas within the framework of data related to the subject of the study without the researcher's intervention in these data. (Abdel Hamid 1993, p. 183). The questionnaire includes several axes intended to measure the variables adopted in this study, to achieve goals and answer questions, and to test assumptions according to the theory of uses and gratifications and the IDA model.

Sixth: Procedures of honesty and consistency

The researcher has presented the questionnaire to three referees and specialists. The researcher will test his questionnaire on a small group of 20 members of the study population to determine its stability.

Seventh: Statistical metrics used in this study

The researcher analyzed the questionnaire data using the following statistical methods through the SPSS program, namely:

1- Frequencies, percentages, arithmetic averages and standard deviations for presenting metadata.

2- Pearson correlation coefficient to study the relationships between variables.

3- One-way a nova variance analysis to study the relationships between variables.

Results

Validation and reliability verification stage of the tool

The researcher tested the validity of the tool (validation of the content) by referees. Accordingly, some amendments were made to the wording of some expressions, according to the consistency of the referees' comments.

The researcher used the questionnaire tool in the application of the study. The questionnaire was designed based on the questions and hypothesis presented in the theoretical framework taking into consideration the nature of the study sample.

Likert Scale

The researcher used the statistical packages for social sciences program, known as the acronym (SPSS). The following table shows the degree of response according to the five- point Likert scale used by the researcher when designing the study tool. The answer to the question is as follows:

Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
5	4	3	2	1

The range was calculated as (5-1 = 4). The result was divided by the cells of the scale in order to get the correct cell length (Likert pentatonic scale), i.e. the category length = (4/5 = 0.8); then this value is added to the lowest value on the scale, as shown in Table (3) below:

Table No. (3) Approximate scale of the Likert pentatonic scale

Value	Wight case	Mean	Level
Always	5	4.2-5.0	High
Usually	4	3.4-4.2	
Sometimes	3	2.6-3.4	Medium
Rarely	2	1.8-2.6	Low
Never	1	1-1.8	

Internal Consistency of the Study Tool

The researcher has applied the study tool to a random exploratory sample consisting of (40) individuals from the study sample. Those responses have been entered into the statistical program. A synthetic variable has been created for each of the phrases of the study axes, and the relationship between each of the phrases of that axis with the variable has been measured. The aggregate of the same axis, using the Person Correlation coefficient. The content of the questionnaire was tested, and the internal consistency coefficient of the paragraphs expressing each of the variables, using the correlation matrix that showed the presence of a large number of correlations with statistical significance at the level of significance (0.01). The correlation coefficient method between the axes of the questionnaire for independent and dependent variables was used. All correlations were reassuring, confirming the stability of the scale and its suitability for application.

Reliability of the Study Tools

To verify the Validity of the tools, the researcher used the Cronbach Alpha value for each tool to verify its reliability. The overall stability value for the study axes was high as it reached (0.954), which is a high-value reliability factor. This is an indication of the validity of the study tool to achieve its goals by answering its questions, which led advertisements to the potential for consistency in the results that can be produced when applied.

Statistical processing methods:

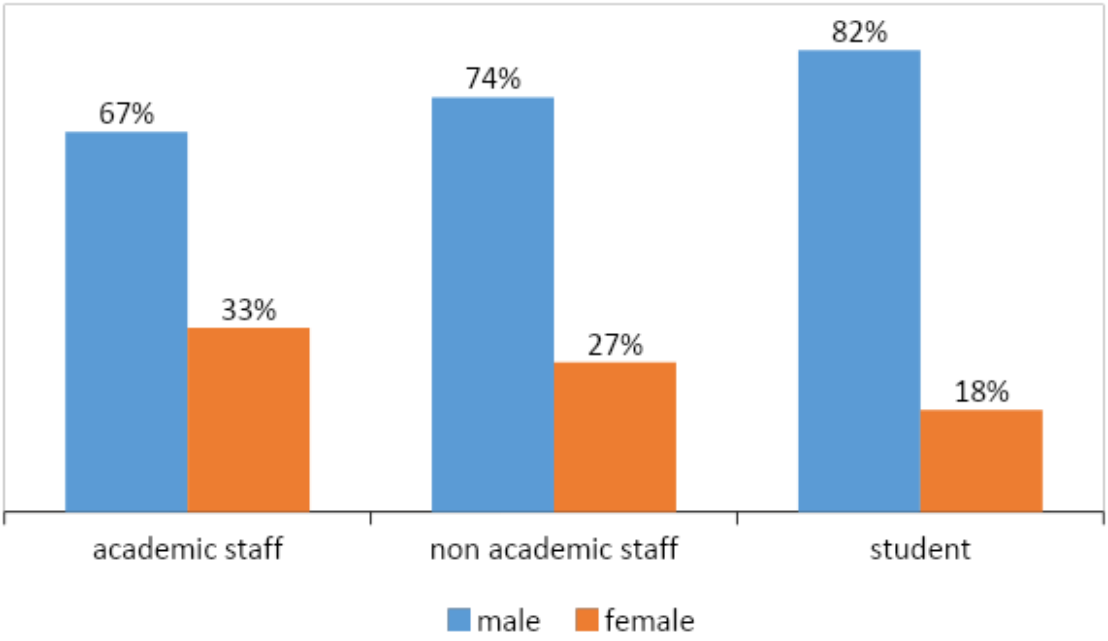
1. Pearson Correlation to measure internal consistency
2. Cronbach's Alpha to measure reliability

3. Frequency & Percent to measure the characteristics of the study sample according to their academic and personal variables, and to identify their responses towards the phrases of the main axes included in the study tool
4. Weighted Mean to measure of average of the respondents' responses to each of the phrases of the study axes. It is also beneficial in arranging the axes in accordance with the highest arithmetic average. (mean)
5. Mean (arithmetic average): in order t measure the low or high response of the respondents' responses to the main study axes. This is beneficial to arranging the axes in accordance with the highest arithmetic average.
6. "Standard Deviation" to identify the extent of deviation of responses of study individuals to each of the phrases of the study axes, and to each of the main axes of their mean. It is noted that the standard deviation clarifies the dispersion in the responses of the study members for each of the phrases of the study variables, in addition to the main axes. The closer its value approaches zero, the responses focus, and the dispersion decreases between the scales.
7. Independent Sample t-test to verify the differences between the study sample trends according to their variables, which are divided into two categories.
8. One-Way Anova variance. To verify the differences between the directions of the study sample according to their different variables, which are divided into more than two categories.

First: demographic characteristics

Type		
	F	%
male	194	78.2
female	54	21.8
Occupation		
academic staff	43	17.3
nonacademic staff	34	13.7
Student	171	69.0
Salary		
less 6000 SR	94	51.6
From 6000-12000 SR	46	25.3
From 12000-18000 SR	28	15.4
Over 18000 SR	14	7.7

The above table data indicate that the majority of the study sample was 78.2% male and the rest was female. 69% of the study sample was students, compared with 17.3% of the faculty members, and finally 13.6% of the administrative staff, and half of the study sample had a low economic level. The majority of them were students, 51.6%



The majority of the study sample was 78.2% male, the female faculty member rate was 25.9%, the male ratio was 14.9%, and the percentage of female administrative staff was 16.7% compared to 12.9% for males

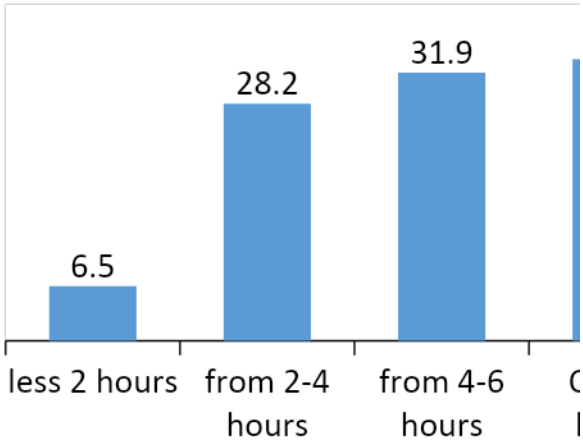
Second: Order of Use of Commercial Advertisements of all Kinds

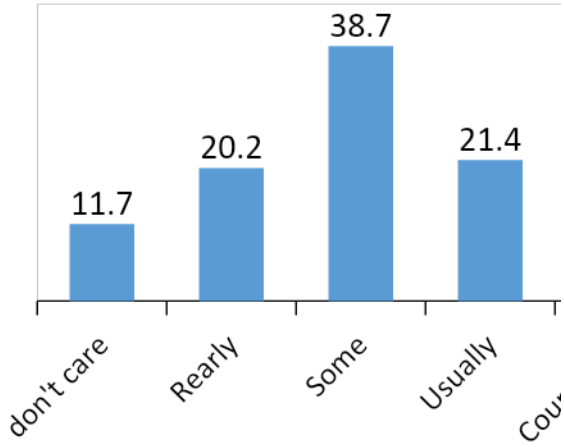
	Mean
Internet	2.25
TV	3.63
Signboards	3.88
Personal Phone	3.94
Publications	5.15
Radio	5.41
Newspaper	5.54
Post	5.70
Magazine	5.85

The most used means to analyze commercials are the Internet, then television, and banners on the road advertisements, the least of which are paper newspapers and regular mail.

Third: The size of exposure to Internet advertisements among university employees:

The time you spend daily on the Internet Interest in advertising on the Internet





The high volume of exposure to Internet advertisements among university employees, as the amount of time spent daily on the Internet for the majority of the study sample, increased by 33.5%. The study sample was sometimes interested in advertising on the Internet with a percentage of 38.7%, followed by those who often care about advertisements by 21.4%. Among the most important reasons for not paying attention to online advertisements was that the study sample always preferred to see goods and services on the ground

Reasons for not paying attention to advertisements on the Internet

	Mean	Std. Deviation
I Preferred seeing goods and services on the ground	4.28	0.86
It imposes itself on websites in a crude and annoying way	4.26	0.91
It is difficult to ascertain the advertised goods and services	4.00	0.98
I could not find interest in it	3.71	0.99
I don't trust online purchase	3.54	1.02
The difficulties of online payment during the online purchase process	3.54	1.15
I'm afraid these advertisements will contain viruses that can harm my device	3.28	1.48
Not having enough time to be Connected	3.27	1.12
I am not used to online advertisements	3.21	1.19
The best advertisements shown in traditional media	3.14	1.32

The most important reasons for not caring about advertisements on the Internet is that the study sample always prefers to see goods and services on the ground, and they impose themselves on websites in a crude and annoying way. One of the least important reasons was that the study sample was not used to an adequate follow up of online advertisements, as they prefer sometimes advertisements to be shown on traditional media, as television came second after the Internet among the means of using commercials.

Fourth: Motives and gratifications of exposure to Internet advertisements among university employees

Motives, gratifications	Mean	Std-deviation
Motives for exposure to Internet advertisements	3.69	0.71
The gratifications you get from exposure to internet advertisements	3.81	0.78
General Mean	3.75	0.70

We note from the above table that the motivations and gratifications of exposure to Internet advertisements among university employees were high, where the general average of motivations and gratifications was 3.75 with a standard deviation of 0.70. The study sample from university employees were often exposed to Internet advertisements with an average of 3.69 because it is available at any time, the possibility to request the item or service directly from its source, as they sometimes interact with users of goods and services, and finally they sometimes interact with advertisers. The university employees often achieve their satisfaction from exposure to Internet advertisements with an average of 3.81 and a standard deviation of 0.78. The study sample agreed that they often know the latest offers and discounts on goods and services, as shopping has often been easy, and sometimes they can interact with advertisers.

The differences between males and females according to the exposure and satisfaction of exposure to Internet advertisements

	Sex	Mean	Std-deviation	T	Sig
Motives	Male	3.67	0.71	1.27	0.205
	Female	3.81	0.72		
gratifications	Male	3.74	0.77	2.4*	0.01
	Female	4.03	0.77		

The above data table indicates that there are statistically significant differences between males and females in favor of females in relation to their satisfaction with exposure to Internet advertisements, where the value of T = 2.4 is a function at a level of significance less than 0.05

Differences between adverbs and saturation exposure to Internet advertisements depending on the profession variable

	Occupation	Mean	Std-deviation	F	Sig
Motives	academic staff	3.43	0.79	3.79*	0.024
	nonacademic staff	3.77	0.75		
	student	3.75	0.67		
gratifications	academic staff	3.57	0.85	2.823	0.06
	nonacademic staff	3.74	0.68		
	student	3.88	0.77		

The above table data indicate that there are statistically significant differences between faculty members, administrative staff, and students for the benefit of administrative staff in relation to the motives for exposure to Internet advertisements. The value of P = 3.79, which is a function at a level of significance less than 0.05 where there were differences between staff and faculty members in favor of Employees, as there were differences between faculty and students for the benefit of students.

Table No. () shows the differences between the realities and the satisfaction of exposure to Internet advertisements according to the monthly salary variable

	Salary	Mean	Std-deviation	F	Sig
Motives	less 6000 SR	3.72	0.66	8.14**	0.00
	From 6000-12000 SR	3.8	0.69		
	From 12000-18000 SR	3.72	0.66		
	Over 18000 SR	2.82	0.83		
gratifications	less 6000 SR	3.85	0.75	7.526**	0.00
	From 6000-12000 SR	3.89	0.68		
	From 12000-18000 SR	3.76	0.74		
	Over 18000 SR	2.88	0.78		

The data of the above table indicates that there are statistically significant differences between low, medium and high salaries in favor of average salaries that range from 6000-12000 riyals in relation to the motives for exposure to Internet advertisements, where the value of P = 8.114 is a function at a level of significance less than 0.05. There are also significant differences in Statistics between low, medium, and high salaries in favor of average salaries that range from 6000-12000 riyals in relation to their gratifications obtained from exposure to Internet advertisements

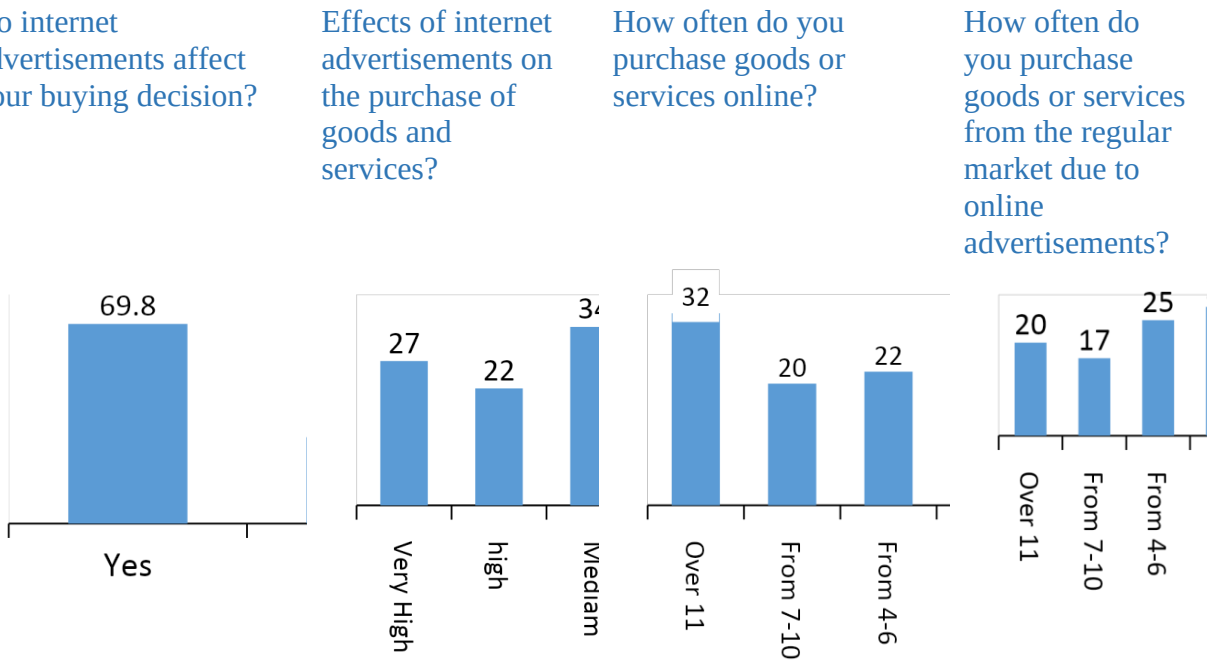
Fifth: The nature of exposure to Internet advertisements for university employees

The nature of exposure to Internet advertisements	Mean	Std-deviation
The forms of Internet advertisements that you are exposed to on websites	3.51	0.79
Exposure to Internet advertisements through the following electronic means	3.85	0.72
The methods that attract you in your internet advertisements	3.48	0.88
Products (goods) and services that are exposed to online advertisements	3.42	0.78
General Mean	3.57	0.64

The above table data also indicate that the study sample from King Saud University employees were often exposed to Internet advertisements with an average of (3.57) and a standard deviation (0.64). KSU employees were also often exposed to forms of Internet advertisements on websites with an average of (3.51) and a standard deviation (0.79). The advertisements they were most frequently exposed to were mobile advertisements (video or flash) on the page and fixed advertisements on the page. One of the advertisements the least that were exposed to was the infiltrating advertisement on the page, and the advertisement is at the bottom of the page. They were often exposed to Internet advertisements via electronic means with an average of (3.85) and a standard deviation (0.72), and the most important of these methods that they are often exposed to are social media accounts, then advertising messages, and finally messages that come via e-mail, and advertisements on the official websites of the institution . The study sample was often attracted to the methods that are exposed to through Internet advertisements, with an average of

3.48 and a standard deviation of 0.88. Among the most important of these methods are the use of colors in an exciting way in the advertisement and the use of photographs accompanying the advertisement. Finally, the study sample was sometimes attracted by Internet advertisements, the appearance of the advertisement in more than one place within the page, the frequent appearance of the advertisement on the page. Finally, the study sample was often exposed to Internet advertising products and services with an average of 3.42– and a standard deviation of 0.78.

Sixth: The impact of Internet advertisements on the purchasing decision of university employees



The current study data indicated that 69.8% of the study sample is affected by Internet advertisements on the purchasing decision of university employees, and they are affected by Internet advertisements on their purchasing readers with a moderate degree. The number of times online purchases was high (11 times or more), and the number of times purchases of goods or services from normal markets due to exposure to their online advertisements were average 1-6 times, and the study sample was highly influenced on Internet advertisements on the purchasing decision of the study sample .

The extent to which Internet advertisements affect your purchasing decision

The impact of Internet advertisements on your decision to purchase goods	Mean	Standard Deviation
Buy goods and services I need [Necessary Needs]	3.7	1.21
I am looking for discounts and lower prices	3.53	1.14
to find the location of the commodity	3.43	1.2
I make the online purchase convincingly and without hesitation	3.31	1.19
My purchases increased due to Internet advertisements	3.13	1.29
General Mean	3.56	0.64

The above table data indicates that the effect of Internet advertisements on the decision to purchase goods (products) and services came high for the study sample with an average of 3.56, a standard deviation of 0.64, and the impact of Internet advertisements on the high purchasing decision in favor of buying necessary goods, then knowing discounts and lower prices, and knowing the location of the commodity.

Seventh: Evaluating internet advertisements for university employees

	Mean	Std. Deviation
went viral	4.02	0.88
Exaggerate the benefits of goods and services	3.95	0.94
Disturbing	3.95	1.07
Innovated	3.76	0.87
Interesting	3.69	0.89
it enables to interact with the advertiser	3.59	1.10
Dispersed	3.59	0.97
Liar	3.58	0.93
Boring	3.57	1.00
General Mean	3.36	0.97

The above data table indicates the approval of the study sample with respect to its evaluation of Internet advertisements with an average of (3.36) and a standard deviation (0.97). It agreed that they are spread in every site, exaggerating the presentation of the benefits of goods and services, and disturbing, innovative, eye-catching, and managed to Interact with the advertiser, dispersed, false, and boring.

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Perceived Transparency and your DNA: Examining Direct-to-Consumer Genetic Testing Communication on Consumer Trust, Attitude and Behavioral Intentions

Alan Abitol
University of Dayton

Nicole M. Lee
North Carolina State University

Matthew S. VanDyke
University of Alabama

Abstract

As at-home genetic testing products gain popularity, unique challenges are presented. Through a survey of direct-to-consumer genetic testing consumers, this study examines organizational transparency and measures its impact on consumer trust, attitude and word-of-mouth. Findings hold implications for research and practice at the intersection of science and public relations.

Keywords: Transparency, trust, DTC genetic testing, corporate communication

Direct-to-consumer (DTC) genetic testing kits that offer ancestral or health-related information have become increasingly popular in recent years. In fact, as of July 2019, 15% of U.S. adults reported that they have taken at least one DTC genetic test (Graf, 2019). Although perceptions of genetic research are fairly positive (Critchley et al., 2015), consumer mistrust and overall skepticism has increased recently due to public controversies surrounding DTC genetic testing companies selling consumer information to third parties (Hendricks-Sturrp & Lu, 2019) and general apprehension regarding genetic science due to new technologies like CRISPR (Kolata & Murphy, 2018).

To combat these negative attitudes, public relations practitioners for DTC genetic testing companies must develop strategies to build trust, which can be a complicated and complex matter. Trust requires vulnerability and openness (Rawlins, 2008), which can be hard for some companies to project. But, without trust, consumers are less likely to demonstrate positive attitudes and behavioral intentions such as recommending these testing kits to friends and family.

One framework that can provide guidance in how DTC genetic testing companies can elicit trust among consumers is organizational transparency. Transparency is deliberately making available any pertinent information—positive or negative—to the public (Rawlins, 2008). Transparency holds organizations accountable for their actions and policies and provides individuals the information they need to build trust and support organizations.

The purpose of this study is to examine organizational transparency within the context of DTC genetic testing and measure its impact on consumer trust, attitude, and the desire to recommend the tests to others.

Literature Review

For-profit Science and Direct-to-Consumer Genetic Testing

Since the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980, U.S. scientists receiving federal funding have had the right to patent and sell the findings of their funded research. This economic incentive given to scientists and their institutions to pursue commercialization opportunities resulted in a dramatic increase in university patents, public-private partnerships, and science and technology startups (Ezell, 2019). Genetic science and genetic testing in particular have long had a great deal of private industry involvement leading to the rapid growth of the industry (Caulfield, 1998). Initially, commercial genetic testing was facilitated by physicians but since entering the market in 2007, DTC offerings have greatly increased (Graf, 2019).

Despite public concerns about the ability to interpret genetic health information provided by tests (Almeling & Gadarian, 2014) and concerns about privacy (Kolata & Murphy, 2018), 15% of the U.S. adult population has adopted these technologies (Graf, 2019). 23andMe and Ancestry are the two leading DTC genetic testing companies, and as of October 2019, both offer both health and ancestral information to consumers (Baig, 2019). In terms of the current consumer profile, people who have taken a DTC test are more likely to be white, report higher income levels, and say the reason for taking the test is to discover ancestral information (Graf, 2019).

Corporate Science Communication

Corporate communication is a management function in which all internal and external communication is effectively and efficiently harmonized to create favorable relationships with groups as to which the company is dependent (Van Riel & Formbrun, 2007). To manage all communication under one function, companies make attempts to project one unifying image of their products or services (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011). This can be done by a company

integrating, coordinating, and orchestrating communication so that efforts appear consistent and coherent across audiences and media (Cornelissen, 2004).

In general, corporate communication ranges from describing messages companies disseminate to a broad communication ideal shared by many different stakeholders that can potentially have implications for organizational life (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011). From a research standpoint, corporate communication research often focuses on how companies communicate about their products (e.g., Wang, 2017) or about company activities such as corporate social responsibility (e.g., Abitbol & Lee, 2017).

However, science-based companies, like those that sell DTC genetic tests, must balance the need to sell their products while simultaneously considering the need for educating their consumers about the science and potential risks and uncertainties associated with their products. This is mostly due to the fact that these products, like DTC genetic tests, likely are unfamiliar or new to consumers and are complex in scope. Unlike the early days of communication about science that involved strategies of "amazing" and "delighting" the public with scientific information (Gregory et al., 2008, p. 204), today, science companies try to engage consumers by explaining complex information through demonstrations as to how products work through forums and cooperative meetings (Gregory et al., 2008). These inclusive strategies have led to more positive attitudes and behavioral intentions regarding science-based corporate communication.

Impact on attitudes and behavioral intentions. Attitude is typically defined as "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 6). In a public relations context, publics' attitudes can help measure the overall impact or effectiveness of a particular communication program or campaign. For organizations, understanding publics' attitudes can help practitioners understand how the public feels about something and how they may act toward it (Lindenmann, 2002).

Positive attitudes can, in turn, lead to positive behavioral intentions including recommending ideas or actions to others. Behavioral intentions are "the intention to perform a particular behavior, a plan to put behavior into effect" (Perloff, 2003, p. 92). Behavioral intentions are typically treated as an actual behavior predictor because people's behavioral intention tends to be identical to behavior (Perfloff, 2003). According to the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), behavioral intention is an intermediate variable between attitude and behavior.

General public attitudes toward genomic research have been fairly positive (Critchley et al., 2015), however the nuance of this general positivity is complex and is often contingent on the area of genetics under consideration, the purpose of genetics research, and how genetic technologies are applied (Condit, 2010). For genetic tests specifically, the public is likely to assume that tests are analyzed and administered by health professionals and that the tests comply with medical, health, and scientific regulations (Critchley et al., 2015). When examining overall attitude toward DTC genetic tests across areas, Critchley and colleagues (2015) discovered that the U.S. consumers are generally supportive and willing to purchase a commercial genetic test compared to Australian consumers. This is mostly due to their curiosity about their health status and ancestry. Therefore, the first hypothesis examines the relationship between consumers' attitude toward DTC testing and the likelihood as to whether or not they will recommend the genetic testing to others.

H1: The more positive consumers' attitude toward DTC testing is, the more likely they are to recommend the genetic testing kits to others.

Building Trust for the Consumer

A key factor in developing positive attitudes in consumers is building trust. Trust is "one party's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is competent and dependable, has integrity, and acts with goodwill" (Rawlins, 2008, p. 4). Two key dimensions for building trust is for acting parties to have an expectancy to rely upon others (Rotter, 1967) and to have a degree of vulnerability (Zand, 1971). Ultimately, trust is one's belief in another to act in complete faith and to not exploit one's vulnerabilities (Morrow et al., 2004).

For DTC genetic testing companies, building trust can be a complicated and complex matter. Consumers share intimate and private information when completing genetic tests. They not only expect the results to be accurate, but they desire the information to not be shared outside the context of the test without permission. When comparing trust levels in genetic tests in general, Critchley and colleagues (2015) discovered that consumers trust the accuracy of the tests overall and believe their information is kept private when genetic tests are conducted by their personal physicians. This trust is not consistent with how consumers feel about DTC genetic testing companies. Consumers had the highest levels of mistrust of DTC companies toward after-care; that is, what happens to the results after the test is returned to the testing company (Critchley et al., 2015). This mistrust is partly due to an increase in public controversies centered on privacy of consumer information, including genetic health risk data and genealogical data being exchanged with third parties (Hendricks-Sturrp & Lu, 2019).

However, these companies are taking several steps in their attempts to build trust with consumers. This includes highlighting institutional attributes, such as company expertise, and promoting information about the product itself, including quality and accuracy (Einsiedel & Geransar, 2009). Based on previous research that posits that more trust leads to positive attitudes (e.g., Crtichley et al., 2015; Morrow et al., 2004), this study predicts that the more trust consumers have in DTC testing, the more positive their attitudes will be:

H2: The more consumers trust the DTC genetic testing process, the more positive their attitudes will be toward DTC testing.

Importance of transparency. For companies to increase trust, literature suggests that they must be open and transparent in their communication (e.g., Rawlins, 2008; 2009). According to Heise (1985), as referenced in Rawlins (2008, p. 7):

> Transparency is the deliberate attempt to make available all legally releasable information—whether positive or negative in nature—in a manner that is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal, for the purpose of enhancing the reasoning ability of publics and holding organizations accountable for their actions, policies, and practices.

Transparency, in other words, is the opposite of secrecy, which is the deliberate attempt to hide actions (Florini, 1998). Transparency is made up of three dimensions: informational transparency, participatory transparency, and accountability transparency (Balkin, 1999; Rawlins, 2008). Organizations must have all three of these qualities in order to "build, maintain, and restore trust with stakeholders" (Rawlins, 2008, p. 6). The information organizations share must provide stakeholders the opportunity to make informed decisions regarding their interactions and relationships with the organization. Organizations, however, do not need to share all information, just what is substantial and useful to the stakeholders (Rawlins, 2008). This information though must be accurate and provide clarity (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2014). For information to be considered substantial, organizations must know what stakeholders need and want to know (Rawlins, 2008). Increasing stakeholder participation will lead to more

disclosure. According to Rawlins (2008), "stakeholders must be invited to participate in identifying the information they need to make accurate decisions" (p. 7).

Accountable transparency requires organizations to be accountable for what they say, do, and decide. This will open them to be seen and evaluated by publics (Rawlins, 2008). Accountability requires an organization to disclose both positive and negative results of their actions and to not attempt to influence how stakeholders interpret the results (Global Reporting Initiative, 2006).

Overall, transparency holds organizations responsible for their actions and policies and provides individuals who deserve to have access to information with respect and reasoning opportunity (Rawlins, 2009). Transparency requires trust. According to Koehn (1996), an organization opening itself up to its publics should register a kind of faith in the public's ability to understand and ultimately trust that their decisions are just.

Transparent communication also has been found to impact consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. Through the results of an experiment, Holland and colleagues (2018) discovered that when publics perceive companies to be more transparent in their messaging, the more positive their attitude and behavioral intentions are toward the company. Based on this literature, the following hypothesis is posed:

> **H3:** The more transparent consumers perceive a DTC genetic testing company's communication to be, the more a) they trust the DTC genetic testing process, b) positive attitudes they have toward DTC testing, and c) likely they are to recommend the genetic testing kits to others.

Based on H2 and H3, we also posit that the more transparent DTC genetic testing companies are perceived to be in their communication, the more consumers will trust the genetic testing process and will have positive attitudes toward testing, which will then lead to a higher likelihood that they will recommend the tests to others. Based on this logic, we propose the following hypothesis:

> **H4**: Consumer a) trust of the DTC genetic testing process and b) attitude toward DTC testing will mediate the relationship between organizational transparency and their likelihood to recommend genetic testing kits to others.

Method

Participants

Via Qualtrics Panels, an online survey was conducted. For the current study, the sample consisted of 271 consumers. As part of a larger survey, which included 571 total participants, this study only included participants who have taken a DTC genetic test in the past. This was because only existing consumers could provide insight into what communication efforts led them to purchase DTC genetic tests. Of the 271 participants, 67% (n = 182) identified as female and 33% (n = 88) identified as male. The median age was 49.49. Most participants were Caucasian (83%, n = 226), followed by Black (11%, n = 31), Hispanic (10%, n = 27), and Asian (4%, n = 11).

Measures

Behavioral intentions. Behavioral intentions for this study include a consumer's likelihood to recommend the genetic testing kits to others. Adapting Kang (2014), behavioral intentions were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Four items were used to measure behavioral intentions: "I will encourage friends to buy at-home DNA tests from [company]", "I will encourage family members to buy at-home DNA tests from

[company], "I would recommend [company] to someone who asks for my advice about at-home DNA tests", and "I will stay positive things about [company] and its services to other people" (α = .93, *M* = 3.86, *SD* = 1.02).

Attitude. Attitude toward DTC testing was adapted by Dillard and Shen's (2005) 5-point semantic differential scale. For this study, participants were asked to rate their feelings toward at-home DNA tests based on the following options: positive/negative, desirable/undesirable, necessary/unnecessary, beneficial/unbeneficial, bad/good (reverse coded), foolish/wise (reverse coded), and unfavorable/favorable (reverse coded). The items were combined to indicate a composite "attitude toward DTC testing" measure (α = .89, *M* = 4.01, *SD* = .75).

Perceived organizational transparency. Organizational transparency is "the deliberate attempt to make available all legally releasable information –whether positive or negative in nature—in a manner that is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal, for the purposes of enhancing the reasoning ability of publics and holding organizations accountable for their actions, policies, and practices" (Rawlins, 2009, p. 75). This study measures how participants perceive the level of transparency of at-home DNA testing kit companies in terms of their communication efforts. Rawlins (2008) described transparent communication by four dimensions. The first dimension, *participative,* includes "statements about involvement, feedback, detailed information, and the ease in finding the information" (Rawlins, 2008, p. 7). It is measured by six items. A sample question reads, "[Company] asks for feedback from people like me about the quality of its information" (α = .90, *M* = 3.73, *SD* = .86). The second dimension, *substantial information,* involves statements regarding completeness, accuracy, clarity, relevance, and verifiability of information shared (Rawlins, 2008). It is measured by 7 items. A sample item reads, "[Company] provides information that is relevant to people like me" (α = .91, *M* = 4.01, *SD* = .75). The third dimension, *accountability*, describes "the organization sharing information that covers more than one side of controversial issues, that might be damaging to the organization, including admitting mistakes, and that can be compared to industry standards" (Rawlins, 2008, p.7). It is measured by 5 items, such as "[Company] is open to criticism by people like me" (α = .84, *M* = 3.49, *SD* = .75). The fourth dimension is *secretive,* which is reversed coded, reflects "a lack of openness, or attempts at secrecy" (Rawlins, 2008, p. 8). The secretive dimension is a counter measure to test if the communication is the opposite of transparent. It is measured by 5 items with a sample item reading, "[Company] provides information that is intentionally written in a way to make it difficult to understand" (α = .88, *M* = 3.14, *SD* = 1.02). All items were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Trust. For this study, trust refers to the level in which participants trust the DTC genetic testing process (Critchley et al., 2015). On a 5-point scale (1 = 'don't trust at all'; 5= 'trust a very great deal'), trust in the DTC genetic testing process was measured by 10 items. Three items assessed how participants trusted the expertise of the test. An example question reads, "on a scale between 1 and 5, rate how much you trust the genetic analysis" (α = .89, *M* = 3.68, *SD* = .86). Two items assessed how participants trusted the regulations surrounding the tests (i.e., "That the report conformed to ethical guidelines") (*r* = .74, *M* = 3.73, *SD* = .86). Two items assessed participant trust in after-care (i.e., "That the testing company would provide you with expert genetic or advice if needed") (*r* = .65, *M* = 3.1, *SD* = 1.07). Because only two items made up these trust dimensions, correlation was used instead of alpha. Three items assessed participant trust in confidentiality or privacy. A sample question reads, "on a scale from 1 to 5, rate how much you trust that the testing company would keep your genetic information private" (α = .83,

M = 3.42, *SD* = 1.07). To ensure that these four trust types could be collapsed to one composite measure of trust, we used principal axis factoring with a direct oblimin rotation test the variables. The four trust types loaded on one factor, which explained about 75% of the variance. These four types of trust were then combined to create one trust measure (α = .92, *M* = 3.50, *SD* = .84).

Results

To test the first three hypotheses, linear regression was used through SPSS 24. However, before the hypotheses were explored, a series of bivariate correlations were run among the independent and dependent variables. Correlations between variables are shown in Table 1. H1 posited that the more positive consumers' attitude toward DTC testing was, the more likely they were to recommend the genetic testing kits to others. Results supported H1 (*B* = .32, *SE* = .07, *p* < .001).

	Attitude	Recommend	Trust	Particip	SI	Account	Secretive
Attitude	-						
Recommend	.60**	-					
Trust	.47**	.55**	-				
Particip	.50**	.59**	.56**	-			
SI	.63**	.73**	.60**	.77**	-		
Account	.47**	.47**	.45**	.65**	.63**	-	
Secretive	-.04	-.06	-.03	.01	.01	.34**	-

** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

H2 postulated that the more consumers trust the DTC genetic testing process, the more positive their attitude will be toward the DTC testing. Results supported H2 (*B* = .14, *SE* = .06, *p* = .02).

H3 posited that the more transparent consumers perceive a DTC genetic testing company's communication to be, the more a) they trust the DTC genetic testing process, b) positive attitudes they have toward DTC testing, and c) likely they are to recommend the genetic testing kits to others. Results confirmed that the transparent dimensions of sharing substantial information (SI) and accountability (A), significantly influenced all three dependent variables: H3a (SI: *B* = .36, *SE* = .14, *p* = .01; A: *B* = .28, *SE* = .13, *p* = .03), H3b (SI: *B* = .42, *SE* = .11, *p* = .001; A: *B* = .23, *SE* = .11, *p* = .03), and H3c (SI: *B* = .85, *SE* = .15 *p* < .001; A: *B* = .30, *SE* = .14, *p* = .03). No results examining participative and secretive transparency were significant.

H4 examined the mediating effects of consumer a) trust in the DTC genetic testing process and b) attitude toward DTC testing on the relationship between perceived organizational transparency and consumers' likelihood they would recommend genetic testing to others. To test these relationships, SPSS Macro Process (model 6) was conducted using bootstrap methods with resampling set to 1,000 (Hayes, 2013). Results revealed that for all the transparency dimensions, only attitude toward DTC testing (*B* = .14, *SE* = .01, 95% CI [.01, .40]) mediated the relationship between the substantial information dimension of transparency and the likelihood consumers would recommend the genetic testing kits to others.

Discussion

This study aimed to understand how perceptions of organizational transparency among DTC genetic testing impacts consumer trust, attitude, and the desire to recommend the testing kits to others. The results suggest that the more DTC genetic testing kit consumers perceive DTC genetic testing companies to be accountable and share substantial information, the more they trusted the DTC genetic testing process, the more positive their attitudes were toward DTC testing, and the more likely they were to recommend the kits to others. The study also revealed that a positive attitude toward DTC testing was a mediator between the effects of communicating substantial information and the likelihood consumers would recommend the test.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

None of these findings alone are surprising, but taken together they clarify how transparent communication can be an effective strategy for PR practitioners in the DTC genetic testing industry and how examination of this context fits within the current transparency and corporate science communication literature.

First, DTC genetic testing is a unique corporate industry in which, not only is it a product being sold, but the product requires consumers to provide very private and personal information (i.e., genetic data) in order to use the product. Because there is a history of concerns about genetic data being used by insurance companies or law enforcement (Hendricks-Sturrp & Lu, 2019), for the industry to prosper, it must build trust with consumers to achieve positive outcomes. This study provides support that the key to building trust among consumers looking to be stakeholders in this uniquely-private industry may very well be transparent communication. Specifically, according to the results of this study, consumers expected DTC genetic testing companies to be accountable in their actions and to communicate substantial information. These findings, which mirror previous research (e.g., Rawlins, 2009; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2014) that examined the connection between transparency and trust, make sense for this unique industry. Consumers are divulging very sensitive information so they expect companies in this industry to be transparent in the information they provide and to take responsibility for what they do with this information.

For PR practitioners within this industry, this study gives empirical support that consumers not only crave, but also expect companies in this industry to be transparent when discussing every aspect of a DTC genetic testing process and the use of their genetic information. This expectation matches what the industry's governing body envisioned when genetic tests became available for at-home use. In 2007, in an effort to help regulate DTC genetic testing, The American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG) developed a list of recommendations (Hudson et al., 2007). Transparency was put at the top of this list in hopes it would facilitate openness and consent between consumers and health professionals (Wasson, 2009). However, some companies failed to live up to these guidelines. For instance, after most large DTC companies publicly

agreed and committed to preventing law enforcement from accessing their databases without a subpoena, FamilyTreeDNA opened its database to the FBI without informing consumers (Haag, 2019). This was a misstep in an industry that should strive to be as transparent as possible because, at least based on the results of this study, the more transparent the communication is surrounding the product, the more likely consumers will have positive attitudes toward the industry, which should ultimately lead to positive outcomes for the industry as a whole.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The limitations of this study point to directions for future research. First, the survey method was based on self-reports of perceived transparency, etc. Other methods, such as experiments, where different messages showcasing varying degrees of transparency could be controlled for and tested among consumers would add to our understanding of this phenomenon. Second, only consumers who have already taken a DTC genetic test were included in the study. Because they already purchased the product in the past, they conceivably already trust the companies they bought the tests from enough to have positive attitudes toward the company. They may already believe that the company practice transparent communication to some degree, which is what led them to purchase the product in the first place. Future studies should include other consumer types, including those who have never purchased an at-home genetic test or those who are wary to purchase such a product. The demographic makeup of the sample also skewed female and Caucasian, which is consistent with the consumer demographics (Graf, 2019). As there are more efforts by DTC genetic test companies to include minorities in their consumer base, future studies should include a more diverse sampling pool. Finally, future work should examine specific concerns or risk perceptions consumers have regarding DTC genetic testing and how transparency surrounding testing methods or security practices may mitigate these concerns.

Conclusion

Companies in the DTC genetic testing industry face a unique challenge compared to most companies in other industries. Challenges like privacy concerns, mistrust, and handling of personal information may deter consumers from supporting the industry or purchasing at-home genetic testing kits. PR practitioners in this industry must assuage these concerns but must also communicate about sensitive topics related to health and ethnicity that can have substantial implications at the individual and societal levels. This study provides insight into the importance of organizational transparency to build trust and elicit positive attitudes within consumers that can ultimately lead to positive organizational outcomes. DTC genetic testing offers an opportunity for researchers to investigate the communication efforts of for-profit companies in a unique industry. And, this study provides a basis for future research on DTC genetic-testing companies, public perceptions of their communication, and the effects of that communication.

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Perceptions of Social Responsibility: Traditional CSR or A Portion-of-Profits Scheme?

Branden Birmingham
Shannon A. Bowen
University of South Carolina

Abstract

CSR is common but we know little on the most effective types and those that instill trust among stakeholders and publics. We explore what form of CSR works best between two types: portion of profit donations versus traditional CSR tactics. Kotler & Lee (2005) concluded that CSR was a discretionary act by a corporation to give back to communities. This definition is traditional in nature, but a shift to so-called strategic CSR has occurred. Strategic CSR may be completed based on reaction to social issues, aspirations of higher profits, or positive brand imaging (Carroll, 1999; Porter & Kramer, 2006, Page & Parnell, 2017). But are these efforts genuine, authentic, and trustworthy? Do they raise skepticism? Portion of profit donations have become popular. This strategy encourages corporations to sell products that will provide large profit margins, while making – in many cases -- minimal social impact. Consumers gain knowledge of portion of profit CSR campaigns through public relations, used to build relationships and trust with stakeholders and publics, especially after a corporate social responsibility campaign has been executed (Kim, 2017; Pomering & Dolnicar, 2008).

We used an experiment to compare perception of a portion of profit campaign simulation versus a traditional CSR tactic. Respondents viewed a news clip, read a copy of the news script, and completed pre-and-post-test instruments; our analyses compared their understanding of CSR and perception of the dummy organization, as well as that of a control group. We asked: which type of CSR is more effective and produces behavioral intention? We used prior-published scales Maignan (2001); Olsen, Pracejus & Brown (2003); Liecht-enstein, Drumwright, & Braig (2004); Ford, Smith & Swasy (1990) to test the perceptions of respondents on CSR in each group. We also collected qualitative comments for thematic analysis. After thorough analyses, we discuss strategic CSR and make recommendations for more efficacious use of CSR in public relations efforts.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, Cause-related marketing, Skepticism, Trust, Public relations

Introduction

Most corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities implemented by organizations are executed to build trust and relationships with stakeholders, but consumers are skeptical of implementation leading to ulterior motives (Bowen & Gallicano, 2013; Friestad & Wright 1994; Kim, 2017; Pomering & Dolnicar, 2008; Porter & Kramer, 2006). As H. Bowen (1953), suggested CSR is a tactic or campaign that is implemented by a corporation to raise benefit, and awareness to in society and increase trust among consumers. The fact that the term CSR is widely used and there is no exclusive definition is perhaps the main reason for its lack of consistent operational implementation. In articles from Pomering & Dolnicar (2008); Friestad & Wright (1994), the concept of CSR lacks a theoretical basis and their conclusions of CSR as a profit raising scheme still hold today. CSR has been used to study donation strategy, skepticism, trust, and consumer attitudes (Olsen, Pracejus & Brown, 2003 Liecht-enstein, Drumright & Braig, 2004; Morsing, Schultz & Nielsen, 2008; Grau & Folse, 2007; Kim & Lee, 2009; Olsen et al, 2003; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998).

Despite these conceptual differences and viewpoints, most authors seem to agree that various stakeholders (millennials) pay attention to CSR communications and base their purchasing decisions on societal impact, and organizational reputation (Nielsen, 2015; Deloitte, 2019; Pomering & Dolnicar, 2008; Manignan, 2001). Today, when talking about CSR, one of the most important goals for corporations is to implement CSR strategy that is effective and will help to build trust. One of the most important aspects of CSR to study skepticism surrounding implementation of portion of the profit donations (POP). CSR is often viewed as a strategic business decision to respond to the wants and needs of stakeholders (H. Bowen, 1953; Carroll, 1999; Porter & Kramer, 2006; Page & Parnell, 2017). Today, over 80% of the millennial population purchase goods from organizations based on their current knowledge of CSR practices (Nielsen, 2015; Deloitte, 2019; Pomering & Dolnicar, 2008; Manignan, 2015). Thus, consumers are learning about CSR and tactics such as traditional and portion of profit donations from CSR communications and public relations professionals.

Implementing a proper CSR plan and curating unique messaging is needed to build trust and lower skepticism among consumers. As scholars such as Grunig (1992) suggested, public relations (PR) is a management function implemented into corporate operations allowing for interaction, and the curation of relationships between stakeholders.

Literature concerned with CSR, POP, messaging and skepticism & trustworthiness shows overlap on the conceptual, methodological and empirical levels (Olsen et al., 2003; Kotler & Lee, 2005; Porter & Kramer, 2006; Kim & Lee, 2009; Kim & Ferguson, 2016; Pecorino, 2016). The aim of this research is to further explore which CSR strategy is superior: POP or traditional donation campaigns. Literature on all four included concepts is reviewed followed by the method and results of this pilot study.

Literature Review

The concept of traditional CSR

Traditional CSR practices are subjective as it is based on consumer understanding and perceptions. It is basically a tactic such as the implementation of green initiatives or donation activities which are philanthropic in nature and not connected to management operations (Afrin, 2009). Most traditional CSR tactics are viewed as an activism approach in different disciplines due to implementation based on reaction to social issues, and positive brand imaging (Carroll, 1999; Porter & Kramer, 2006). The problem with the concept of traditional CSR is that it is often

misused by organizations, which causes disorganization, disconnection, and low levels of CSR impact (Porter & Kramer, 2006). The main reasons for the above issues regarding traditional CSR is the fact that CSR is a term used in many disciplines including management, advertising, and public relations. Thus, future research conducted must address how traditional CSR is a factor in public relations strategy and a strategic management approach based on findings from scholars such as Kotler & Lee (2005).

As suggested by Kotler & Lee (2005), suggested traditional CSR tactics are implemented as a discretionary act by a corporation to give back to communities in which they operate. Although the goal of traditional CSR activities is to give back to communities and enhance relationships, CSR tactics may be implemented to corporations with large benefits that may not be well known to the average consumer (Carroll, 1999; Kotler & Lee, 2005; Porter & Kramer, 2006; Page & Parnell, 2017).

Due to the evolution and purpose of traditional CSR, consumers may not fully understand the motives regarding traditional CSR implementation and tactics such as traditional donations or POP donations. In, this research we selected millennial consumers as our target stakeholder group in which the combined effects of donation strategy, skepticism, and trust were investigated. Millennials were selected for this study based on their purchasing habits, and familiarity with CSR activities implemented by corporations (Deloite, 2019; Nielsen, 2015).

Portion of Profit Donations (POP)

Traditional CSR is one among many indicators of trust and relationship building considered by stakeholders. Millennial consumers can be attracted to purchase a product from an organization if they are knowledgeable about a corporation's previous donation or POP activities, which serve as a source of information on the perception of corporate motives (Kim, 2017; Pomering & Dolnicar, 2008; Maigan, 2001; Ford, Smith & Swasy, 1990; Rim & Kim, 2016). Since consumers may not have enough information to fully understand the nature of a POP donation, they can use information from sources such as CSR reports, or CSR communications to make informed decisions (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2009; Dawkins, 2004 as cited in Kim and Ferguson, 2016). This triggers the investigation of the links between POP donations as a form of CSR strategy. Thus, a portion of the profit donation (POP) is the purchase of an item in which a set percentage or dollar amount is donated to a charitable cause or organization (Olsen et al., 2003).

Research in the area of POP donations has largely been conducted in the fields of advertising and management (Kim & Lee, 2009; Grau & Folse, 2007; Kim & Olsen Pracejus & Brown, 2003). However, exploring POP at a micro-level has become popular in the field of communications (Kim, 2017; Pomering & Dolnicar, 2008; Rim & Kim, 2016). Few studies have utilized advertisements, and very few studies have used news clips or public relations campaigns (Grau & Folse, 2007; Kim & Lee, 2009). The use of POP donations can be linked to uncertain corporate intentions, ethical decision making. The need to increase profit margins has been linked to increased skepticism (Porter & Kramer, 2006). Many corporations attempt to implement POP as a traditional CSR tactic, which suggests that consumer knowledge may be skewed, and skepticism will rise due to improper communication procedures.

POP, management intentions, and public relations strategy has influenced changes in consumer purchasing habits across many consumer groups, including millennials (Best, 2019). Deloite (2019) & Nielsen (2015), suggested that millennials make most of their purchasing decisions based on how corporations engage with them regarding portion of profit CSR.

Another ethical issue to address is the communication method about CSR activities. In a 2017 study by Cone Communications, approximately 85% of consumers believed that corporations should use ethical public relations strategies to highlight implemented CSR activities (Cone, 2017). Communication surrounding CSR is important as consumers want to build trust and relationships with corporations if they provide evidence of ethical CSR strategy and managerial activities (Bowen & Gallicano, 2013; Bowen & Hung-Baesecke, 2016; Friestad & Wright 1994; Kim, 2017; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998).

Messaging Tactics

Another aspect of CSR and POP donations is the use of messaging tactics to promote campaigns directly to consumers. Proper messaging strategy is crucial for building relationships and raising consumer knowledge regarding CSR and POP activities (Kim, 2017; Pomering & Dolnicar, 2008). Strategy must be implemented properly, which would allow high levels of trust with consumers and lower levels of skepticism regarding motives (Morsing, Schultz & Nielsen 2008). This is the best-case scenario, but some CSR communication strategies are implemented poorly, causing high levels of skepticism and lower levels of trust. This aspect of messaging tactics is extremely important to this pilot study as most POP and CSR research has not yet effectively addressed effective messaging strategy and skepticism (Grau & Folse, 2007; Kim & Lee, 2009; Olsen et al, 2003; Pecorino, 2016).

Deloite (2019) & Nielsen (2015) suggested that consumers expect proper communication regarding CSR, and that CSR implementation is done without ulterior motivations. This argument is especially important to this study as our target population (millennials) are at the forefront of purchasing items from corporations that implement CSR or donation campaigns (Nielsen, 2015; Deloitte, 2019). The best ways of reaching out to consumers regarding CSR is through the use of social responsibility (SR) websites, annual reports, social media platforms, and passive in store campaigns. (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2009; Dawkins, 2004 as cited in Kim and Ferguson, 2016).

Although CSR reporting is growing, and consumers want to know about CSR initiatives many questions regarding the amount of messaging still exist. Pomering & Dolnicar (2008) & the Governance & Accountability (2018) Institute suggested that few companies initially reported CSR activities, but this number has grown to over 85% for companies in the S&P 500. As the number of companies reporting on CSR has grown, consumers may still be skeptical of CSR reporting as superficial, required, or pro forma. This could invite skepticism about how campaigns are messaged among the various platforms above (Kim & Ferguson, 2016).

Due to these issues that arise from CSR messaging, scholars suggested that there is a catch 22 for communications that could ultimately raise skepticism among consumers (Kim, 2017; Morsing, Schultz & Nielsen, 2008). Morsing, Schultz & Nielsen (2008) suggested that a catch 22 arises from giving too much or too little information to your stakeholders (Morsing, Schultz & Nielsen, 2008). Thus, this pilot study will be beneficial to analyze skepticism surrounding messaging about POP and donation campaigns.

Skepticism and Trustworthiness

Skepticism and trustworthiness are two of the most important issues surrounding POP and CSR strategies. One of the most widely cited definitions of skepticism is from Obermiller & Spangenberg (1998). Obermiller et al (1998) suggested that skepticism is a "tendency toward disbelief of advertising claims" (p. 160). Although, this definition is advertising based, it can be used to make arguments as to why there is skepticism in CSR and POP when public relations campaigns are used. Porter & Kramer (2006), Forehand & Grier (2003), Friestad & Wright

(1994), suggested that skepticism of CSR tactics increased due to uncertain corporate intentions, decision making, and the need to increase profit margins.

One of the most important aspects to study regarding skepticism is persuasion. Bernays & Cutler (1969) suggested that persuasion was an integral aspect of public relations, used to change attitudes/opinions to obtain support for a societal issue. Persuasion can raise skepticism as it can be used to promote ulterior motives in a way that helps society (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Friestad & Wright, 1994).

As skepticism is a major factor in ethics research it is important to understand how decision making and CSR implementation will affect the level of trust between consumers and corporations (Bowen & Hung-Baesecke, 2016). One of the most important theories that ties together skepticism, relationship management, and ethics is the *Excellence Theory*. This theory emphases how ethical decision making will have an effect on public relations strategy (Grunig, 1992). Based on this theory, a corporation should implement an ethical CSR strategy that focuses on societal issues that will not affect operations. This will in turn build trust and relationships with consumers, if a corporation effectively communicates and implements ethical managerial decisions (Bowen & Gallicano, 2013).

Based on the above literature review, we created four hypotheses to analyze regarding skepticism surrounding POP and donation campaigns.

H1: *Participant attitudes and knowledge will be greater for those who support socially responsible corporations compared with those who do not support them.*

H2: Participant attitudes will be greater for those who have a positive view of portion of the profit donations as CSR, compared with those who do not.

H3: Portion of the Profits messages or initiatives raises consumer skepticism

H4: Consumers are more likely to trust a corporation that communicates effectively about CSR initiatives, versus portion of the profits.

Method

Procedure and Sample

In our research, skepticism of POP campaigns as a traditional CSR tactic was assessed by measuring student views of traditional CSR or POP donations and its effect on a consumer's ability to trust an organization. We measured the above concepts among 95 university students. As the purpose of this pilot study was to explore relationships between the above variables, we used a 2 x 3 experimental design with a control group and two different stimuli groups. We started by having students complete a pretest questionnaire, watch one of three different video clips, then complete a posttest questionnaire.

Students were used in this pilot experiment as they are representative of our population of interest. They are a convivence sample due to the ability to access them and provide credit toward their courses. This experiment was completed in person and online prospective subjects received an in-person and email invitation, which included a link to register via SONA. The experiment was open to all students enrolled in at premier communications programs at multiple R1 institutions, as well as an invitation extended to a convenience sample of non-students. Students who completed the experiment were awarded extra credit in a class, with professor approval and per IRB requirements had another alternative to earned credit.

Instrument

The survey instrument was comprised of five scales, which were adopted from existing literature. The scales implemented were from Maignan (2001); Olsen, Pracejus & Brown (2003),

Liecht-enstein, Drumwright & Braig (2004); Ford, Smith & Swasy (1990); Rim & Kim (2006). All of the items are presented in Table 1 below.

To measure the below independent and dependent variables, previously published scales will be implemented using response options of a 7-point Likert scale. Many arguments exist that a 7-point scale is best when asking questions as there can be a mid-point option and the use of 7-points can increase the optimal level of reliability (Symonds, 1924; Nunnally, 1976). A 7-point Likert scale will be used, as suggested in psychometric literature for optimal levels of reliability (Nunnally, 1976). Table 1, below, features the constructs and items used in this experiment.

Table 1
Scales

Construct	Item
Purchase Intention - Maignan (2001)	I would pay more to buy products from a socially responsible company. I consider the ethical reputation of businesses when I shop. I avoid buying products from corporations that have engaged in an immoral action. I would pay more to buy a product from a company that shows caring for wellbeing of others. If two corporations offered the same price and quality, I would buy a product from the corporation with a socially responsible reputation.
Donation - Olsen, Pracejus & Brown (2003); Liecht-enstein, Drumwright & Braig (2004)	Overall, I had a positive attitude toward the Carolina Wireless news clip when presented with a donation amount. Overall, I have a positive attitude toward Carolina Wireless regarding their CSR activities. If Carolina Wireless comes to my city, I will buy from them if a donation is made. Carolina Wireless is committed to using a portion of the profits to help the local community. Carolina Wireless gives back to communities in which it does business. Communities are benefitting from Carolina Wireless' financial contributions. Carolina Wireless integrates charitable contributions into its business activities. Carolina Wireless is involved in corporate giving campaigns
Skepticism – Ford, Smith & Swasy (1990); Rim & Kim (2016)	How likely is it that the claims made in the news article are legitimate? How skeptical are you about the truth of this claim as a CSR tactic? The motive for CSR activities are different from those presented publicly. Carolina Wireless has been honest in conveying the reasoning behind their CSR initiatives. Carolina Wireless has a "hidden agenda" in promoting CSR initiatives. Corporations disguise their true motives by implementing CSR. Corporations complete CSR activities because they truly care about their publics.
Trust/Messaging – Rim & Kim (2016)	CSR messaging provides consumers with knowledge to make accurate purchasing decisions. I believe the messaging presented by Carolina Wireless is informative, and I can trust what is being said. Carolina Wireless' CSR messaging was truthful. I am skeptical about CSR messaging from corporations. Most messaging from corporations are intended to mislead versus inform.

Before the video clips were presented in the experiment session, participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire regarding their current knowledge and beliefs regarding CSR tactics. Next, the subjects were told to fill out basic demographic questions and submit the questionnaires. After completing the initial questionnaire students watched a 60 second news clip (traditional CSR, POP, Control) that would manipulate their understanding of CSR, and then were instructed to complete a series of questions regarding the following topics CSR, portion of profits, skepticism, purchasing, and communication of CSR strategy.

Participant Profile

All respondents used for analysis in this experiment were college students at a R1 university in the Southeast United States. A total number of 124 students participated in this study. Of the 95 participants, 65 (68.4%) were females, and 30 (31.5%) were males. All 95 participants provided their ethnicity, 69 (72.6%) were Caucasian, 8 (8.4%) were African American, 7 (7.4%) were Latino or Hispanic, 7 (7.4%) were Asian, and 4 (5.3%) reported other

or unknown. Of the 95 participants, 10 (10.5%) were Freshmen, 19 (20%) were Sophomores, 22 (23.2%) were Juniors, 39 (41.1%) were seniors, and 5 (5.3%) reported that they were a non-undergraduate student.

Among in person sessions 44 participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups. 11 participants were assigned to the control group, with the remaining 33 participants assigned to the CSR or Portion of the profits group. 21participants were assigned to the CSR group and 12 participants were assigned to the portion of the profits group (Table 2). 51 participants were randomly assigned to each group through the Qualtrics randomization feature.

Table 2. The number of participants in each physical group.

Group	Participants
Control	11 (25%)
CSR	21 (48%)
Portion of the Profits (POP)	12 (27%)

Results

Reliability Checks

To determine the reliability of the measures used in this study, a reliability analysis was conducted for each construct used in this study per questionnaire. The constructs used in this study included purchase intentions, donation, skepticism, messaging, and trust. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to determine if the items in each construct had a high reliability. Based on Cortina (1993), a reliability of at least .80 is considered sufficient. Table 3 below shows the reliability of each construct based on the test given. When testing the control group, the purchasing intention was not reliable based on Cortina's (1993), practice of .80 for optimal reliability. In the CSR group trust level and purchasing intentions were not reliable based on Cortina's (1993), practice of .80 for optimal reliability. When testing the POP group, the donation items and trust items were not reliable based on Cortina's (1993), practice of .80 for reliability.

Table 3: Reliabilities for items in each group

	Control	CSR	POP
Purchasing Intention	.783	.769	.877
Donation	.803	.849	.758
Skepticism	.921	.800	.953
Trust	.914	.695	.674
Messaging		.880	.962

Hypothesis Testing

H1: *Participant attitudes and knowledge will be greater for those who support socially responsible corporations compared with those who do not support them.*

When analyzing intercorrelations of the in-person POP group, the correlations of purchasing habits were satisfactory based off of a Cronbach's alpha of .877. To determine the validity of this measure we can look at the inter-correlation between the items. When running a two-tailed Pearson correlation test, we get the following data below.

Correlations

		I would pay more to buy products from a socially responsible company.	I consider the ethical reputation of businesses when I shop.	I avoid buying products from corporations that have engaged in an immoral action	I would pay more to buy a product from a company that shows caring for the well-being of others.	If two corporations offered the same price and quality, I would buy a product from the corporation with a socially responsible reputation.	Overall, I have a positive attitude toward organizations who publicize their CSR activities.	If a new corporation comes to my city, I will buy from them if a donation is made
I would pay more to buy products from a socially responsible company.	Pearson Correlation	1	.730**	.639*	.772**	.543	.494	.525
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.007	.025	.003	.068	.102	.080
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
I consider the ethical reputation of businesses when I shop.	Pearson Correlation	.730**	1	.590*	.779**	.649*	.450	.612*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007		.043	.003	.022	.142	.035
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
I avoid buying products from corporations that have engaged in an immoral action	Pearson Correlation	.639*	.590*	1	.573	.557	.818**	.515
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	.043		.052	.060	.001	.087
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
I would pay more to buy a product from a company that shows caring for the well-being of others.	Pearson Correlation	.772**	.779**	.573	1	.686*	.336	.464
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.003	.052		.014	.286	.129
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
If two corporations offered the same price and quality, I would buy a product from the corporation with a socially responsible reputation.	Pearson Correlation	.543	.649*	.557	.686*	1	.490	.783**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.068	.022	.060	.014		.106	.003
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Overall, I have a positive attitude toward organizations who publicize their CSR activities.	Pearson Correlation	.494	.450	.818**	.336	.490	1	.645*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.102	.142	.001	.286	.106		.024
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
If a new corporation comes to my city, I will buy from them if a donation is made	Pearson Correlation	.525	.612*	.515	.464	.783**	.645*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.080	.035	.087	.129	.003	.024	
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As there is significance between the level of knowledge (ethics, well-being, and knowledge about immoral action) and level of support for an organization that is socially responsible we can determine that **H1** is valid.

H2: *Participant attitudes will be greater for those who have a positive view of portion of the profit donations as CSR, compared with those who do not.*

In analyzing the intercorrelations of the in-person POP group, the correlations of positive views of POP donations and positive attitudes were satisfactory based off of a Cronbach's alpha of .962 (POP), and .877 (Purch. Intention). To determine the validity of this measure we can look at the inter-correlation between the items. When running a two-tailed Pearson correlation test, we get the following data:

Correlations

		Overall, I have a positive attitude toward organizations who publicize their CSR activities.	Overall, I had a positive attitude toward the Carolina Wireless news clip when presented with a portion-of-the-profits initiative.	If Carolina Wireless came to my city, I will buy from them if a portion-of-the-profits scheme is implemented.	Carolina Wireless is committed to using a portion-of-the-profits donation to help the local commnutiy.	Communities are benefitting from Carolina Wireless' portion-of-the-profits contributions.	Carolina Wireless integrates portion-of-the-profits contributions into its business activities.	Carolina Wireless is involved in corporate giving campaigns.
Overall, I have a positive attitude toward organizations who publicize their CSR activities.	Pearson Correlation	1	.644*	.725**	.651*	.418	.483	.570
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.024	.008	.022	.176	.112	.053
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Overall, I had a positive attitude toward the Carolina Wireless news clip when presented with a portion-of-the-profits initiative.	Pearson Correlation	.644*	1	.905**	.874**	.817**	.797**	.944**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.024		.000	.000	.001	.002	.000
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
If Carolina Wireless came to my city, I will buy from them if a portion-of-the-profits scheme is implemented.	Pearson Correlation	.725**	.905**	1	.811**	.753**	.581*	.778**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.000		.001	.005	.048	.003
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Carolina Wireless is committed to using a portion-of-the-profits donation to help the local commnutiy.	Pearson Correlation	.651*	.874**	.811**	1	.784**	.724**	.878**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.022	.000	.001		.003	.008	.000
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Communities are benefitting from Carolina Wireless' portion-of-the-profits contributions.	Pearson Correlation	.418	.817**	.753**	.784**	1	.778**	.807**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.176	.001	.005	.003		.003	.002
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Carolina Wireless integrates portion-of-the-profits contributions into its business activities.	Pearson Correlation	.483	.797**	.581*	.724**	.778**	1	.906**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.112	.002	.048	.008	.003		.000
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Carolina Wireless is involved in corporate giving campaigns.	Pearson Correlation	.570	.944**	.778**	.878**	.807**	.906**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.053	.000	.003	.000	.002	.000	
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12

As there is significance between the positive attitude relating to portion of the profit donations as CSR, we can determine that **H2** is valid.

H3: *Portion of the Profits raises consumer skepticism*

When analyzing the inter-correlations of the in-person POP group, the correlations of POP donations and skepticism were satisfactory based off of a Cronbach's alpha of .953 (skepticism), and .962 (POP). To determine the validity of this measure we can look at the inter-correlation between the items. When running a two-tailed Pearson correlation test, we get the following data below.

Correlations

		Overall, I had a positive attitude toward the Carolina Wireless news clip when presented with a portion-of-the-profits initiative.	Carolina Wireless is committed to using a portion-of-the-profits donation to help the local commnutiy.	Carolina Wireless integrates portion-of-the-profits contributions into its business activities.	Carolina Wireless is involved in corporate giving campaigns.	The motives for CSR activities are different from those presented publicly.	Corporations are honest in conveying the reasoning behind their CSR initiatives.	Corporations have a "hidden agenda" in promoting CSR initiatives.	Corporations use CSR programs for ulterior motives.	Corporations disguise their true motives by implementing CSR.	Corporations complete CSR activities because they truly care about their publics.
Overall, I had a positive attitude toward the Carolina Wireless news clip when presented with a portion-of-the-profits initiative.	Pearson Correlation	1	.874**	.797**	.944**	-.214	.895**	-.439	.038	-.039	.142
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.002	.000	.505	.000	.153	.907	.903	.659
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Carolina Wireless is committed to using a portion-of-the-profits donation to help the local commnutiy.	Pearson Correlation	.874**	1	.724**	.878**	-.531	.919**	-.629*	-.244	-.328	.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.008	.000	.075	.000	.028	.445	.298	1.000
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Carolina Wireless integrates portion-of-the-profits contributions into its business activities.	Pearson Correlation	.797**	.724**	1	.906**	-.362	.716**	-.527	-.132	-.197	-.142
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.008		.000	.248	.009	.078	.683	.539	.659
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Carolina Wireless is involved in corporate giving campaigns.	Pearson Correlation	.944**	.878**	.906**	1	-.342	.908**	-.539	-.125	-.149	.067
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.277	.000	.070	.700	.644	.836
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12

As there is little to no significance between increased skepticism due to portion of the profits, we can determine that **H3** is invalid.

H4: Consumers are more likely to trust a corporation that communicates effectively about CSR versus Portion of the Profit donations.

This Hypothesis cannot be declared valid or supported as there the reliability of trust between POP (.674) and CSR (.695) is not at or above a minimum of .70. A scale cannot be valid if it is not reliable. Due to this issue, we feel that there is a need to collect data from more participants from wider age ranges.

At the end of the questionnaire participants were asked an open response question about their opinions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and POP donations. A few select responses are:

"I believe it is hard to know exactly what is going to be done with your money after you donate it, but if your heart is in the right place then you have done your part." Or, "Yes, corporations should uphold social responsibility initiatives and contribute to the communities they affect." And, "I am a fan of CSR, but sometimes I can see how a corporation could use CSR to seem like a better/ more charitable organization."

These responses give differing opinions about CSR, particularly that participants felt there was no oversight into what happens after the donation, but they believed that corporations need to be transparent regarding CSR activities.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to determine which is superior: POP or traditional donation campaigns and its connections with traditional CSR methodology, skepticism and trust. We had anticipated that skepticism of CSR practices would increase if consumers viewed communications regarding POP campaigns. In order to test if POP raised skepticism and if consumers trust organizations that communicate about CSR, we ran a series of two-tailed Pearson correlation tests. The one that yielded the best results showed that participants knowledge of CSR would be greater if they supported socially responsible corporations. This was surprising as **H4** regarding trust and communications of CSR tactics was unsupported. Our results confirm that more research is needed to study which CSR tactic is superior: POP or traditional donation campaigns.

Conclusion and Limitations

The aim of this research was to investigate which tactic is more effective: POP or traditional donations and if messaging surrounding them raises skepticism. We chose students as our primary participants, as they are an important stakeholder group and are generally part of the millennial generation or younger. This was important as this target market likes to purchase goods from socially responsible organizations (Deloitte, 2019; Nielsen, 2015; Pomering & Dolnicar, 2008; Manignan, 2001). While this was a pilot study, we implemented this experiment online in the Spring of 2020 to obtain a better n value, allowing for better data analysis. In this study the data analysis completed based on the four concepts shows there is a need for further exploration, and that consumer attitudes will be greater for those who have a positive view of portion of the profit donations as CSR, compared with those who do not.

The study has certain limitations that should be corrected in the future. Initially, it was an in-person experiment that was targeted towards college students; thus, the researcher did not have control over how many students completed the survey or their compensation. Secondly, having such a small student sample as the only stakeholder group gives a small view of the situation. Extending the study and executing it online helped provide a larger sample size. Third, few studies of POP strategies as a CSR tactic exist in the public relations field. A direction for future research in this field is to review more CSR and POP initiatives to determine how skepticism can be lowered, which can improve the efficacy of CSR and the reputation of corporations.

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Do you really need that dialogue? The association between the use of dialogic communication tactics and the level of public engagement on social media pages of nonprofit organizations

Ekaterina Bogomoletc
North Carolina State University

Abstract

This study investigates possible associations between the implementation of dialogic communication principles and the success of social media communication efforts as reflected through key performance indicators commonly used by communication practitioners. More precisely, the Facebook pages of the top ten U.S. charities are analyzed to see whether the charities employ dialogic communication principles, and if so, whether the pages with more frequent usage of dialogic communication tactics demonstrate higher levels of conversation rate, amplification rate, applause rate, and average engagement rate. The quantitative content analysis is conducted at the page level (n = 10) and at the level of posts (n = 978). The study demonstrated that each of the charities implemented some of the dialogic communication tactics. The results demonstrated no association between more frequent usage of dialogic communication tactics and the levels of engagement.

Keywords: dialogic communication, social media, public engagement, nonprofit

Introduction

With the growth of social media popularity, a number of scholars encouraged companies to employ dialogic communication tactics in order to achieve relationships built on trust with their publics (see, e.g., Taylor & Kent, 2014; Sommerfeldt, & Yang, 2018). However, from a practitioner's standpoint, the benefits of employing such tactics are not always readily apparent.

This paper attempts to bridge the gap between academia and communication practitioners by investigating whether the implementation of a dialogic communication approach is associated with success of social media communication as reflected through the key performance indicators (KPIs) commonly used by communication practitioners. In the next section, I discuss the concepts of dialogic communication and engagement that informed this study.

Literature Review

Dialogic approach to communication has been extensively discussed in public relations literature. When it comes to dialogic communication theory, PR scholarship covers such topics as how to define the concept of dialogue (see, e.g., Taylor & Kent, 2014), how dialogic approach is implemented across industries, and media (see, e.g., Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010), as well as how dialogic communication is used in crisis communication, global communication, science communication, and other fields of strategic communication (see, e.g., Cheng, 2019; Kang, Kim & Cha, 2018; Lee, VanDyke, & Cummins, 2018).

Dialogue and dialogic

Dialogue can be defined as "an orientation to other people that recognizes their inherent self-worth", "an ethical process of communication" (Taylor & Kent, 2014, p. 388). Dialogue has such characteristics as mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment (Kent & Taylor, 2002). It is worth noting that dialogue does not equal to *dialogic communication*. Dialogic communication can be defined as "any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions" (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325). While dialogue is the overall orientation of an organization towards openness and trust and can be seen as a continuum, dialogic communication is seen as a set of procedures that can lead to such openness (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

Kent (2013) suggested that in order to achieve dialogic communication on social media, organizations should 1) develop social media "where organizational members actually communicate with individuals" (p. 341), 2) create new social media venues in addition to Facebook or Twitter "to allow organizational members and stakeholders/publics to freely interact and collaborate" (p. 341), 3) deanonymize participants of the conversations happening on social media, 4) set "clear rules" for participation in conversations (p. 341), 5) invite external experts to the conversation, and 6) promote participation of "divergent voices*"* (p. 341).

Measuring dialogic communication tactics on social media across industries

A number of studies addressed the use of dialogic communication tactics by organizations from various fields. Scholars examined the use of dialogic communication tactics by government organizations (Lee & VanDyke, 2015; Lee, VanDyke, & Cummins, 2018), corporations (McCorkindale & Morgoch, 2013), and the nonprofit sector (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Capriotti & Kuklinski, 2012). When measuring dialogic communication, scholars usually relied either on Kent & Taylor's (1998) dialogic communication principles for websites (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010) or on Kent's (2013) dialogic communication tactics suggested for social media (Lee & VanDyke, 2015). In most cases, scholars concluded that organizations did not use the dialogic potential of social media and the Internet to its full extent.

However, the results of a more recent study by Yang and Wang (2020) demonstrated that nonprofit organizations frequently use some of the dialogic communication tactics in their social media communication. In addition, previous studies on dialogic communication mentioned that organizations that rely heavily on the support of their publics have a greater need for implementing dialogic communication (Kent et al., 2003; Wirtz et al., 2013). Therefore, knowing how much charities depend on stakeholders' support, one might expect that the biggest organizations in the nonprofit sector would leverage the dialogic potential of social media to build trusting relationships with their publics.

RQ1: To what extent do top ten charities in the U.S. employ dialogic communication tactics?

It is worth noting that employing dialogic communication tactics requires extra resources that are often hard to find in nonprofit organizations (see, e.g., Sommerfeldt, & Yang, 2018). Therefore, nonprofits need to know that investing extra money and resources in dialogic communication efforts would bring tangible outcomes for organizations. However, there is a research gap when it comes to the association between implementing dialogic communication tactics recommended by academics and the real-world audience response to such efforts. For example, few studies have been done to see whether a higher number of dialogic tactics used on companies' social media pages is associated with higher levels of public engagement (see, e.g., Men et al., 2018).

Defining public engagement

Communication scholarship offers a number of ways to define public engagement. Overall, when it comes to consumer engagement, the definitions could be combined in two broad categories: engagement as an emotional construct and engagement as a behavioral construct (Tsai & Men, 2014). Engagement as an emotional construct encompasses feelings and a mental state associated with a brand (Calder, Malthouse & Schaedel, 2009; Calvert et al., 2014; Smith, Smith & Knighton, 2018). For example, Smith and colleagues (2018) define engagement as a "dynamic motivational state, comprising multiple levels of absorption or involvement in an experience, event, or issue" (p. 564) thus, focusing on the "state" of a person rather than on their actions. Engagement as a behavioral category focuses on specific actions performed by organizations' publics (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Tsai & Men, 2014). For example, Tsai and Men (2014) define engagement as "a behavioral construct with hierarchical activity levels, from passive message consumption… to active content contributing which includes two-way conversation, participation, and online recommendation" (p. 6).

This study focuses on behavioral aspects of public engagement and relies on Men et al. (2018) who define engagement on social media as "interactions between organizations and publics" (p. 87). According to Men et al. (2018), "proactive engagement of reacting, sharing, and responding to … posts indicate publics' enthusiasm to interact, and invest time and effort beyond what is required" (p. 88). I believe that this conceptualization fits the idea of dialogic communication as it emphasizes the role of publics in participating in a dialogue and building a two-way relationship.

Public engagement trends

Previous research demonstrated that certain types of posts and the number of posts may affect audience engagement (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015; Lee, Hosanagar & Nair, 2018); that information seeking and entertainment are the dominant motivations for users engaging with brands on social media (Tsai & Men, 2014); and that levels of engagement differ depending on a

culture (Tsai & Men, 2014). Studies demonstrated that the usage of dialogic communication principles also affects public engagement (Men et al., 2018; Yang & Wang, 2020).

Measuring public engagement

PR scholarship and industry experience offer several ways to measure audience engagement on social media. When evaluating social media engagement as a behavioral construct, scholars focused on the number of likes, comments, and shares/retweets resulting from organizations' posts (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015; Lee et al., 2018; Men et al., 2018; Yang & Wang, 2020), on the valence of comments (Men et al., 2018), and on the purpose and quality of comments (Men et al., 2018).

Some communication practitioners measure the same aspects of users' behavior. For example, a digital marketing expert Avinash Kaushik (2011) suggested measuring audience participation using such criteria as conversation rate (the number of comments), amplification rate (the number of shares), applause rate (the number of likes and other positive reactions), and economic value. In addition, practitioners use measures such as *engagement rate* which allows organizations compare their performance to those of their competitors (see, e.g., Hootsuite, 2018). This metric demonstrates whether organization's content "resonates" with the audience (Hootsuite, 2018) and considers the number of interactions with a post and the number of followers of a page.

Aiming to bridge the gap between academic research and practitioners, this study examines if a higher number of implemented dialogic communication tactics suggested by Kent (2013) and widely promoted in academia areassociated with a better performance when it comes to criteria that are used by communication practitioners.

RQ2: At the **page** level, what is the relationship between the number of implemented dialogic communication tactics and and a) conversation rate, b) amplification rate, c) applause rate, d) and average engagement rate of the page?

RQ3: At the **post** level, what is the relationship between the frequency of usage of dialogic communication tactics and a) conversation rate, b) amplification rate, c) applause rate, d) average engagement rate of the page?

Methods

To answer the research questions, I conducted a content analysis of Facebook pages of the top ten nonprofit organizations in the U.S.

Sampling

Using the most recent *Forbes* ranking, I selected the top ten largest charities in the U.S. in 2018 (Forbes, 2019). The list included United Way Worldwide, Feeding America, Americares Foundation, Task Force for Global Health, Salvation Army, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Direct Relief, Habitat for Humanity International, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, and YMCA of the USA.

Facebook pages of the top ten charities were analyzed using content analysis. The content analysis was conducted at the level of the pages and at the level of Facebook posts. To be included in the analysis, the pages needed to be official pages of the organizations which was indicated by the link to the page on the organization's website or the "verified" check mark on the Facebook page (N = 10). At the page level, a page was a unit of analysis.

In the second stage, Facebook posts were exported using a special app, Popsters (Popsters, 2019). This is a tool that allows exporting posts published within a certain time period along with basic statistics such as likes, comments, shares, and average engagement rate. A

single post was a unit of analysis. To be included in the analysis, Facebook posts had to meet the following criteria: 1) be published within the six months prior to the analysis (April 1st 2019 – October 1st 2019); 2) be published by the organization itself (as opposed to user generated content); 3) contain a textual component. The time frame was dictated by the need to cover possible low and high seasons in terms of social media activity. At the same time, I wanted to analyze recent activity of nonprofits as Facebook technological affordances change over time. The textual format of the data is dictated by the limitations of the tool used for data collection.

First, I exported the posts from ten groups (N = 1508). The posts that did not contain text or were written in a language other than English were eliminated thus resulting in a sample of 1451 posts (N = 1451). Then, a necessary sample size for each Facebook group was calculated based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) approach. The final sample included 978 posts selected from the list of posts in each Facebook group using a random number generator (n = 978).

Coding

The coding scheme was informed by Kent's (2013) suggestions for dialogic communication on social media and Lee and VanDyke's (2015) work that operationalized these suggestions. However, some changes were made to the way the variables were measured due to the changes that happened to Facebook since the study was published in 2015.

Dialogic communication. Page level. I used three measures at the level of social media pages. I coded (1) whether the page provided community policies and guidelines; (2) whether the social media team of the organization introduced themselves; and (3) whether the organization allowed visitors' posts. Each point was coded as either yes (1) or no (0).

Dialogic communication. Level of social media posts. I employed five measures to code the content at the level of social media posts. Drawing upon Lee and VanDyke's (2015) work, I coded (1) *feedback,* (2) *additional information,* (3) *behavior,* and (4) *acknowledgement of user comments* (p. 537). I have also added an extra measure: 5) expressing gratitude to individual supporters for their offline actions. I believe that this measure might be a valuable addition to operationalization of dialogic loop as it connects the behavior measure with organization's reaction to such behavior which is aligned with the idea of the two-way communication. Each post was coded as 1 (yes) or 0 (no) for the presence of the dialogic communication tactics.

To measure *the frequency of usage of dialogic communication tactics,* I first calculated the sum of the posts with at least one dialogic communication tactic for each organization. Then, a variable representing the proportion of all the posts that contained at least one tactic was created. By operationalizing the frequency of usage of dialogic communication tactics in this way, I am focused on consistent implementation of dialogic communication tactics as opposed to using as many tactics as possible within a single post.

For all the measurers, a second coder was used to ensure the intercoder reliability. First, ten pages of nonprofits that are not part of the analysis, were coded by the researcher and a second coder using the instructions for the page-level analysis. Then, intercoder reliability was achieved for coding at the post level. The reliability sample included 10% of the posts from the actual sample. The data were coded with another second coder. Reliability scores were calculated using Krippendorff's alpha (2004) and ranged from .67 to 1 (see Table 1).

Coding definitions and reliability scores for the dialogic communication measures

	Definition	Agreement	Krippendorff's alpha
(Page level)			
Policies and guidelines	Providing community rules on the page or giving links to external pages with guidelines	100%	1
Introduction of social media team	Introducing representatives of the organization in the "about" tab, "team members" section, or in the comments	100%	1
Allowing visitors' posts	Allowing visitors' posts on the page	100%	N/A due to invariant values
(Post level)			
Feedback	Asking for feedback from the users in the form of comments, likes, shares, votes	96%	.78
Additional information	Encouraging users to seek additional information	85%	.67
Behavior	"Explicitly asking to engage in any sort of offline behavior"	98%	.88
Acknowledgement of user comments	Acknowledging users' comments by liking them or responding to them	98%	.82
Expressing gratitude to individual supporters	Expressing gratitude for the past offline behavior of organization's individual supporters	99%	.97

The definitions are based on Lee and VanDyke's work (2015), p. 537.

Engagement measures. Engagement measures were calculated automatically using the Popsters tool (Popsters, 2019). *Conversation rate* was measured by calculating the average number of comments per post. *Amplification rate* was measured by calculating the average number of shares per post. *Applause rate* was measured by calculating the average number of reactions per post. It is worth noting that I counted all the reactions offered by Facebook. This decision was made due to the specifics of the nonprofit sector. I assume that while negative reactions might indicate negative emotions towards an organization in the for-profit sector, they may indicate publics' feelings regarding societal issues in case of nonprofits. *The average engagement rate* by post was measured by dividing the sum of engagement rates of single posts by the number of posts. Engagement rate of a single post was calculated by dividing the number of engagements (likes, shares, comments) for the post by the number of followers and multiplying the result by 100.

Analysis and Results

To answer the research questions, descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis were used. SPSS and Excel were used as software for analysis.

RQ1: The pages are employing the dialogic communication principles

For the first question, the percentage of pages and posts employing three page-level and five post-level dialogic communication tactics was calculated. At the page level, each of the ten organizations demonstrated the implementation of at least one dialogic communication tactic. Allowing visitor's posts was the most popular tactic implemented by 80% of the organizations (n = 8). Half of the organizations (n = 5) provided rules of the community to their subscribers, and two organizations had social media managers who introduced themselves to the audience.

At the level of Facebook posts, 64.6% of the posts (n = 625) used at least one dialogic communication tactic. Overall, *encouraging users to seek additional information* proved to be the most prevalent tactic with 30.9% of posts containing such an encouragement (n = 299). The tactic of *acknowledging users' comments* was found in 18.8% of the posts (n = 182). The tactic of *encouraging users to engage in offline behavior* was found in 15.9% of the posts (n = 154) and was the third popular. Among the posts, 12.5% *asked users for feedback* (n = 121), and 6.7% *expressed gratitude* for the past offline behavior (n = 65). The distribution of dialogic communication tactics within each page can be seen in the Table 2. It is worth noting that a single post could contain more than one tactic. Therefore, the percentages could exceed 100%.

The Distribution of Dialogic Communication Tactics Within Each Page of the Nonprofits

	Asking for feedback		Encouraging to seek additional information		Encouraging offline behavior		Thanking for offline behavior		Acknowledging comments	
	N	Frequency	N	Frequency	N	Frequency	N	Frequency	N	Frequency
Feeding America	26	(19.1%)	46	(33.8%)	12	(8.8%)	18	(13.2%)	8	(5.9%)
Boys & Girls Clubs	11	(14.5%)	24	(31.6%)	10	(13.2%)	0	(0%)	11	(14.5%)
Direct Relief	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	2	(2.9%)	0	(0%)	27	(38.6%)
St. Jude Children's Research Hospital	0	(0%)	5	(25%)	3	(15%)	3	(15%)	0	(0%)
The Y	25	(13.1%)	36	(18.8%)	37	(19.4%)	4	(2.1%)	7	(3.7%)
The Task Force for Global Health	11	(10.7%)	58	(56.3%)	17	(16.5%)	2	(1.9%)	3	(2.9%)
Americares	27	(22.5%)	20	(16.7%)	22	(18.3%)	26	(21.7%)	47	(39.2%)

The Salvation Army USA	0	(0%)	14	(33.3%)	12	(28.6%)	3	(7.1%)	1	(2.4%)
Habitat for Humanity	9	(7.1%)	51	(40.2%)	11	(8.7%)	8	(6.3%)	59	(46.5%)
United Way	12	(14.5%)	45	(54.2%)	28	(33.7%)	1	(1.2%)	19	(22.9%)

RQ2: More dialogic tactics do not mean more engagement

Based on the number of implemented dialogic communication tactics at the page level, the pages were grouped into two categories: 1) the pages with one tactic at the page level and 2) the pages with two tactics at the page level. On average, the posts in the communities received 310.90 likes (M = 310.90, SD = 363.15), 53.51 shares (M = 53.51, SD = 49.21), and 14.11 comments (M = 14.11). The average engagement rate for ten pages is .14% (M = .14, SD = .14). Descriptive statistics can be found in the Table 3.

Dialogic Communication Tactics and Levels of Engagement

	Number of tactics at the post level	Frequency of posts with dialogic communication tactics	Conversation Rate	Amplification Rate	Applause Rate	Average Engagement Rate (%)
Feeding America	2	66.2%	39.43256	132.96	859.65	0.17
Boys & Girls Clubs	2	57.9%	9.71	41.58	296.06	0.157
Direct Relief	2	41.4%	3.02	17.43	204.37	0.158
St. Jude Children's Research Hospital	2	50%	50.13	103.63	1045.42	0.052
The Y	2	46.6%	1.55	23.79	42.07	0.02
The Task Force for Global Health	1	73.8%	0.28	1.84	9.45	0.513
Americares	1	82.5%	2.41	5.85	35.76	0.129
The Salvation Army USA	1	57.1%	14.32	85.44	205.21	0.091

Habitat for Humanity	2	70.9%	18.38	109.02	382.20	0.082
United Way	1	89.1%	1.86	13.55	28.80	0.021

Overall, when it comes to engagement at the page level, the descriptive statistics demonstrated higher levels of applause, conversation, and amplification rate for the pages that implemented two tactics as opposed to one. However, the level of engagement rate was lower for the pages with two tactics.

RQ3: No association between dialogic tactics at the post level and engagement

For the third research question, Pearson correlation analysis was run to see if a more frequent usage of dialogic communication tactics at the post level is associated with higher levels of engagement measures of the Facebook page: a) conversation rate, b) amplification rate, c) applause rate, and d) average engagement rate.

The study found no correlations between the frequency of usage of dialogic communication tactics and *conversation rate*, $r = -.24$, $p = .51$; *amplification rate*, $r = -.20$, $p = .59$; *applause rate*, $r = -.31$, $p = .39$; and *average engagement rate*, $r = .163$, $p = .65$.

Discussion

This paper studied trends of using the dialogic communication approach and the relationship between the use of dialogic communication tactics and user engagement on Facebook pages of the top ten nonprofits in the U.S.

Trends of using dialogic communication tactics

The study demonstrated that the top ten nonprofits use dialogic communication tactics both at the page level and at the level of the posts. In fact, all the pages implemented at least one tactic at the page level and on average had around 60% of posts containing one of the post-level tactics. The result differs from earlier studies that demonstrated low levels of dialogic tactics implemented by nonprofit organizations online (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Capriotti & Kuklinski, 2012). On the other hand, this result corroborates recent findings showing that most posts by nonprofit organizations included at least one dialogic tactic (Yang & Wang, 2020).

The difference might be explained by several factors. First, the current study was conducted in 2019, and it is possible that more companies have started using dialogic communication tactics since previous studies were published. Second, the differences in the results might be explained by the differences in methodology and specifically the differences in operationalization of the dialogic communication principles. Unlike some studies in the area (Men et al., 2018; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010), the current study focused on the dialogic communication principles offered specifically for social media. Some of the dialogic tactics could appear in the analysis due to the principles being tailored specifically to the features of social media communication. Future research should investigate the trends of using dialogic communication tactics over time. Did organizations really start using more dialogic posts in their communication? How and when do companies decide that it is time to start implementing dialogic communication tactics on social media? What changes does it bring into public relations processes?

Dialogic communication tactics and engagement

The pages with more tactics at the page level demonstrated higher levels of applause, conversation, and amplification rate but lower levels of engagement rate. This finding might be

explained by the fact that the pages with two implemented tactics at the page level on average had more subscribers which brought the engagement rate down despite the higher number of comments, likes, and shares. Based on the evidence from communication practitioners, the growth of activity on social media pages is usually not proportionate to the growth of the number of subscribers (Hickman, 2020; Marketing Charts, 2020). In other words, a social media page does not receive 500 more comments by adding 500 subscribers. Hence, lower engagement rates of the pages with higher applause, conversation, and amplification rates are not surprising. The higher number of tactics at the page level also seems reasonable for the pages with a higher number of subscribers. It might be the case that once an organization's page hits a certain number of subscribers, the organization implements more tactics. For example, it would make sense to introduce rules of the community when one sees their community growing.

The study also demonstrated no significant association between a more frequent usage of dialogic communication tactics at the post level and engagement levels. This differs from previous research that demonstrated that the implementation of dialogic communication principles is associated with higher levels of engagement (Men at al., 2018; Yang & Wang, 2020). In addition to the differences in operationalization of the variables mentioned above, the different result might stem from the differences in organizations/persons that were studied. Since Men and colleagues (2018) examined accounts of CEOs and received different results, the study raises questions about the differences in public reactions to dialogic communication efforts when it comes to an account of a persona vs. an account of an organization. Furthermore, while some of the previous studies focused on Twitter (Yang & Wang, 2020), this study examines the use of dialogic communication on Facebook. A different social network brings its own technological affordances and culture, and it might result in different audience expectations and reactions.

The finding raises questions about the differences in implementing dialogic communication principles across platforms. Do users have different expectations from organizations when it comes to dialogic communication on Facebook and Twitter? If this is the case, do scholars and practitioners need to come up with independent lists of dialogic principles for different platforms? In addition, if more dialogic posts on Facebook do not lead to higher levels of engagement, is there a point where engagement peaks and then goes down? Is there such thing as dialogic communication fatigue when users stop reacting to dialogic communication efforts?

Limitations

The current study has certain limitations. First, the sample size at the page level includes ten pages, and the results might change with a larger sample size. The second limitation is that the analysis only included text-based content thus omitting dialogic communication tactics that could have been conveyed through pictures and videos. Furthermore, the study focused on the top ten organizations in the U.S., and the results might not be applicable to other cultural contexts. Finally, the study focused on Facebook thus excluding other social networks.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The study offers several theoretical and practical implications. For scholars, the study demonstrates the importance of connecting the dialogic communication approach to real-world outcomes. The analysis from the perspective of practice oriented KPIs opens up a promising area for discussion of various aspects of the approach such as its applicability to different platforms and contexts. The results of the study also underscore the need to agree upon the ways to operationalize dialogic communication principles for various Internet platforms.

In addition, the findings are useful for communication practitioners. First, the study provides a list of commonly used dialogic communication tactics in the nonprofit sector. Knowing the trends in using specific dialogic communication tactics can be helpful in strategic planning of an organization's social media communication activities. Second, the results of the study demonstrate the need to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of dialogic communication tactics in order to change the approach and/or redistribute organizations' resources if the popular dialogic communication tactics do not evoke the desirable effect (e.g., public engagement).

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Increasing Sincerity and Credibility through CCS to Stabilize Crisis Outcomes

Courtney D. Boman
Erica J. Schneider
University of Missouri

Heather Akin
University of Nebraska Lincoln

Abstract

Continuing the prescriptive nature of SCCT, this experimental study provides an understanding of crisis strategies beyond textual content. The proposed latent variable model provides practitioners and researchers assurance that regardless of who controls dissemination of the message, exhibiting sincerity can optimize outcomes such as organizational reputation and negative social amplification.

Keywords: Public Relations, Source Credibility, Situational Crisis Communication Theory, SEM, Crisis Communication Strategies

With publics increasingly using social media during crises, public relations professionals need to understand how to not only match crisis types and responses but also strategically optimize social-network tools (Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2014). People are no longer seeking crisis-related information solely from official sources within traditional media but are actively getting it publicly via information and communication technology (Brynielsson et al., 2018). With this shift to online and social media channels by information consumers, organizations also must respond and engage with audiences through these channels during a crisis to correct inaccuracies and address concerns (Wollan, Smith, & Zhou, 2010). Social media gives organizations the ability to inform, interact, and seek input from relevant publics (Hand & Ching, 2011) in real-time with their own words, which can be especially crucial during a crisis.

With an average of 1.59 billion daily active users on Facebook alone, social media is an essential tool for organizations to use in crisis communication strategies (CCS) to reach stakeholders (Facebook, 2019). Research suggests that social media networks can be useful in times of crisis by quickly and effectively distributing information (Jahng & Hong, 2017; Jin et al., 2014; Wollan et al., 2010). Educating the public regarding risks, encouraging support of an organization or cause, and establishing a venue for open dialogue online are all strategies for using social media during a crisis (Chan, 2014; Gretry, Horváth, Belei, & van Riel, 2017). Although the values of social media are recognized in public relations research, there is a need for theory-driven research to transition the strategic integration of social media into crisis communication research (Wang & Dong, 2017). It has been noted that how audiences seek and use information channels should be factored into crisis management to maximize the message reach and effectiveness (Austin, Fisher Liu, & Jin, 2012). Consideration of whether more variability and variance can be accounted for on new-media could help communicators understand if the effects of channels should be modulated.

While CCS research has been widely conducted, current theory fails to reflect the complexity of a crisis, which inhibits its ability to be implemented in practice (Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2016; Zhao, 2017). A goal of this study is to help expand current CCS literature by applying foundations of SCCT to post-crisis responses using a variety of sources via Facebook. It has been noted that regardless of the influence the social media landscape holds, crisis communication theory, specifically SCCT, does not thoroughly investigate its influence (Cheng, 2018; Holladay & Coombs, 2012). This study is in response to these unanswered calls expressed by multiple researchers (Cheng, 2018; Holladay & Coombs, 2012; Wang & Dong, 2017). To examine this issue and provide response strategies for organizations or individuals experiencing crises, the study is designed to examine effective CCS on Facebook in regards to response type and source that will mitigate crisis outcomes such as organizational reputation and negative social amplification.

Literature Review

Crisis Management

Crisis management is a well-established practice used in a wide variety of industries, including healthcare, government, medicine, food, and nonprofits, to protect an organization and stakeholders during a threat (Chan, 2014). The present study conceptualizes crisis management as the practice of protecting an organization and its stakeholders from threats and/or reduce the impact felt by threats (Coombs, 2015). Crises can do great harm, but an organization can create an opportunity for conversation and education with its publics when crises are managed

effectively (Chan, 2014). However, once a crisis event occurs, socially mediated messages have the potential to add confusion, elicit anger, and hurt an organization's reputation (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). Therefore, crisis managers should have a guideline of what CCS, based on theory, is best to use when designing responses to use across traditional and new media. Crisis communication research has increasingly grown as a public relations paradigm dominated by inquires using theories such as the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT).

Amplification of CSS on Social Media

Social amplification, adapted from word-of-mouth literature, explores the capacity of news sharing and interacting on social media that potentially prolongs the reach of a message (Bobkowski, 2015; Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013). As negative posts gain attention and traction, the message proliferates, reaching large audiences and harming an organization's reputation along the way (Breland, Quintiliani, Schneider, May, & Pagoto, 2017; Strekalova, 2017). When a crisis occurs, negative social amplification refers to the potential for crisis messaging to be distributed through social media and garner negative online interactions (e.g., sharing, reacting, or commenting). This is a significant behavioral intention to recognize in crisis research because of the potential for it to generate detrimental outcomes, such as viral boycotts and hashtag activism. Further developing crisis literature, we propose the following hypothesis to examine how the perception of an organization's positive reputation can decrease the likelihood of negative social media interactions:

> *H1: Higher levels of organizational reputation will decrease negative social amplification.*

Situational Crisis Communication Theory

SCCT views crisis communication as a way for organizations to maintain or re-establish a favorable reputation during and after a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 1998). The theory applies a categorical approach to assigning crisis responsibility by designing three postures that can classify a crisis. Each posture aligns with a crisis type that includes victim cluster, accidental cluster, and preventable cluster. The key to retaining a positive organizational reputation is utilizing a response strategy that is appropriate for each crisis (Coombs, 2015). According to SCCT, there are four different responses, or what Coombs and Holladay (1996) define as postures, that can be used during a crisis to help control organizational reputation loss. Within the theoretical framework, matched and unmatched responses have differentiating effects on an organization's reputation. A matched response is one in which the organization assigns its crisis to the appropriate crisis cluster and then utilizes the crisis response strategy that is associated with the cluster (e.g., using an apology strategy in the rebuilding posture when responding to a preventable crisis). A matched response is preferred because this alignment meets stakeholder expectations of a satisfactory response.

An essential function of the response strategies is to mitigate the negative impacts on an organization's reputation. As reputation is accumulated throughout an organization's history, it is critical to protect and sufficiently evaluate how well an organization is meeting stakeholder expectations. The relationship between the effect of crisis types on organizational reputation has been thoroughly investigated to find that preventable crises are the most harmful to organizational reputation (Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013; Claeys, Cauberghe, & Vyncke, 2010). In addition, previous CCS research has demonstrated a positive relationship between response content and account acceptance (Yao & Lai, 2019). Specifically, this area of work finds that effectiveness is evaluated by assessing its acceptance and impact on organizational reputation

(Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Account acceptance is "how respondents feel about the crisis response offered by the organization" (Coombs & Holladay, 2008, p. 253). If there is high account acceptance for a given crisis response, it should result in the desired effect (Coombs & Tachkova, 2018). Thus, to support this application of crisis response strategy and further explore its impact within this experimental study, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Higher levels of account acceptance will increase organizational reputation.

Crisis Response Perceptions

Perceived Credibility. Perceived credibility can be defined through the message and the source of information. Message credibility is recognized as the degree stakeholders trust the information provided during a crisis, the degree they would rely on it, and their confidence in its accuracy (Flanagin & Metzger, 2013). Studies have confirmed that higher perceptions of credibility in a source induce more persuasion (Horai, Naccari, & Fatoullah, 1974; Schulman & Worrall, 1970). In crisis communication, the credibility of the source must also be taken into consideration, as it is conceptualized as the characteristics of the sender that impact the receiver's processing of the message (Lee, Kim, & Wertz, 2014). Previous literature has examined spokesperson strategies with regard to how crisis responsibility is perceived. For instance, Coombs (2007a) found that when a spokesperson uses a denial strategy in response to a preventable crisis, neglecting crisis responsibility and not apologizing, stakeholders will be less inclined to forgive the organization in crisis. Another vein of research has explored how the credibility of the communicator influences message outcomes. Heath (1997), for instance, found that the credibility of the communicator during a crisis becomes critical to influencing how the quality of crisis communication is perceived.

To expand upon this literature, we explore how the type of source utilized can influence outcome variables like account acceptance and organizational reputation through perceived sincerity and source credibility. Source credibility has been developed to evaluate variables such as fairness, bias, completeness, accuracy, and trust (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Meyer, 1988; Slater & Rouner, 1996; Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Account acceptance, or the belief that a crisis response is acceptable, has been isolated in studies to analyze the effect of crisis types, alongside other crisis outcomes, such as behavioral intentions and organizational reputation. Prior to analyzing the mediating effects of credibility for message strategy on message acceptance, we put forth the following hypothesis to ensure the variables align with previous literature:

H3: Higher levels of message credibility will increase account acceptance.

Perceived Sincerity. Sincerity, or how honest and genuine stakeholders believe the crisis response to be, is also influential in how stakeholders process a response (Aaker, 1997; Heath & Palenchar, 2009). When a crisis response is perceived as sincere, as they are more likely to forgive the organization and have less negative evaluations (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Schumann, 2012). In the context of corporate communication, Kim (2011) found that the sincerity of a message encouraged a positive influence over stakeholder evaluations of an organization. Previous studies have brought us to understand the strength of the effect of sincerity on message credibility and the evaluation of source credibility, including variables such as trust, fairness, and accuracy (Flanagin & Metzger, 2013; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Meyer, 1988; Slater & Rouner, 1996; Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Yang, Kang, and Johnson (2010) found sincerity to be a function that reduces audience suspicions, affirming that the sincerity of a credible source helps reduce suspicions of malintent and increases favorable views of the organization. SCCT literature has explored how strategies of taking responsibility for a crisis and

asking for forgiveness (i.e., corrective action and mortification) are influenced by the organization's perceived sincerity (Holladay & Coombs, 2012). To test if SCCT's proposed response strategies evoke perceived sincerity, and therefore increase credibility, the following hypothesis is proposed to ensure sincerity can be regressed on credibility:

H4: *Higher levels of perceived sincerity will increase message credibility*.

Gaining Deeper Insight into Crisis Outcomes

As explored above, past research has examined how CCS put forth by SCCT, along with source type, effects post-crisis outcomes. Since these studies have been conducted in isolation, they provide an opportunity for a comprehensive assessment of CCS features and how messages are processed, leading to positive or negative outcomes post-crisis. Thus, this study sets out to evaluate the tangible impacts that organizations can expect to see when their organization is faced with executing crisis responses. In addition to the practical implications, this study also contributes to the growing scholarly work that seeks to evaluate how crises are perceived and how message strategies can mitigate negative impacts online by using latent variable modeling. Therefore, a hypothesis examining the combined effects of SCCT and message source is put forth accounting for mitigation effects on post-crisis outcomes (Figure 1).

H5: *Compared to the other experimental conditions, the CEO's crisis response will have less detrimental effects on perceived sincerity and credibility, therefore positively affecting account acceptance, organizational reputation, and negative social amplification.*

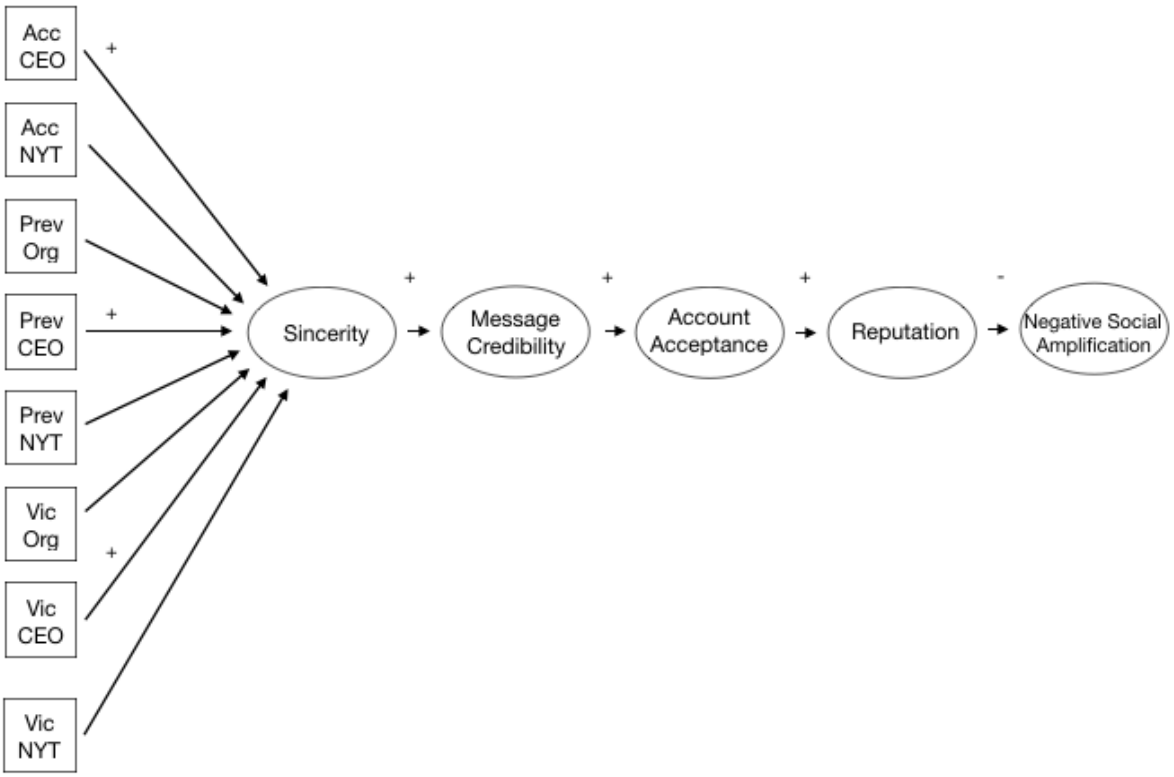

Figure 1. Hypothesized framework.

Methodology

For this study, researchers conducted a 3 (crisis type: accidental, preventable, victim) x 3 (source type: organization, CEO, *New York Times*) factorial experiment to understand how the crisis types and sources are impacted by measuring perceived sincerity and perceived credibility. In addition, account acceptance, organizational reputation, and negative social amplification were measured to examine post-crisis outcomes.

Sample Overview

Participants for this study were recruited through a paid Qualtrics survey. Qualtrics allowed specific filtering capabilities for descriptive statistical analyses and provided a diverse sample quota-stratified on race, gender, and age to match recent US Census data (Qualtrics, 2005). In total, there were 623 participants ranging in age from 19-85 (M = 45.62, SD = 16.81) living in the United States. After an initial analysis of the data, 33 cases were removed due to being outliers, exceeding a significant amount of time spent in the survey.

Procedure

After signing the IRB-approved informed consent statement, participants proceeded through the experiment and survey, which on average took approximately 15 minutes. First, they were provided with background information regarding a fictional organization called Bank Your Way and told to proceed as if they are a customer with an account at this bank. Participants were randomly assigned to receive one of nine conditions, which was a combination of the three different sources and the three crisis types with matched responses. After the stimulus, participants completed dependent measures of perceived sincerity, perceived credibility, account acceptance, post-crisis organizational reputation, and negative social amplification.

Manipulations

SCCT guided manipulations of the three crisis clusters (accidental, preventable, or victim) and matched response strategies. The source disseminating the information (general organization, CEO, or New York Times) was also manipulated. A bank was selected as the organization type, given that the banking industry is one of the most crisis-prone industries (Institute for Crisis Management, 2019). Following previous crisis communication research, we used a fictitious organization, Bank Your Way, to avoid confounding effects with other organizations (Keller & Aaker, 1992). Following previous SCCT literature, a pretest (n = 60) was conducted with a separate sample and determined the crisis types had the desired effect on how participants viewed crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2007a; Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

Measurements

Organizational Reputation. Using an adaptation of Coombs and Holladay's (2002) organizational reputation scale, participants were asked to evaluate their perception of the organization's reputation both pre- and post-crisis. The six-item scale include statements such as, "The organization is concerned with the well-being of its publics" and "Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organization says" (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) (Pre-Crisis: M = 3.67, SD = .79, α = .89; Post-Crisis: M = 3.53, SD = .99, α = .93).

Perceived Sincerity. Participants received a three-item scale asking "how genuine/sincere/honest do you think the response of the organization was" to determine perceived sincerity (Aaker, 1997). The items were measured on a 7-point Likert Scale (1 = not sincere at all, 7 = very sincere) (M = 4.78, SD = 1.65, α = .93).

Credibility. Driven by Flanagin and Metzger's (2013) research on perceived credibility, the first portion of the scale inquires on the extent participants trust the source of information and

if participants perceive it as credible. The second portion of the scale identified perceived content credibility using a culmination of source credibility items placed on a semantic differential scale, asking subjects to rate the information based on perceptions of "fair/unfair", "unbiased/bias", and "tells the whole story/doesn't tell the whole story" (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Meyer, 1988; Slater & Rouner, 1996; Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Dovetailing source and content credibility, the scale collectively achieves a gauge of credibility (M = 4.55, SD = 1.44, α = .84).

Account Acceptance. Adapted from Blumstein et al.'s (1974) scale, and popularly used to evaluate the acceptance of crisis communication responses, the items of account acceptance include: "After hearing the organization's response to the situation, people affected by the incident would be ACCEPTING of the organization"; "the people affected by the incident would consider the response by the organization to be APPROPRIATE"; and "the people affected by the incident would consider the organization's response to be BELIEVABLE." This three-item scale was evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree (M = 4.38, SD = 1.61, α = .89).

Negative Social Amplification. Negative social amplification was measured using an adapted scale regarding news sharing on social media to align with the platform utilized in this study (Bobkowski, 2015; Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013). In the questionnaire, participants were asked about their willingness to interact with the social media post in a negative way, which would be unfavorable towards the organization. Participants were asked how likely on a scale of one (extremely unlikely) to seven (extremely likely) they would be to interact negatively with the post, such as sharing the post on Facebook with a negative comment, to make a negative comment in the comment section of this post on Facebook, and the likelihood of using an "Angry" reaction to this post on Facebook (M = 2.84, SD = 1.17, α= *.86*).

Results

The hypothesized model was tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) with the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012) for R. All models were estimated using robust Maximum Likelihood (MLR) unless bootstrapping was employed, in which case ML estimation was adopted. Following Kline's (2016) two-step process, a measurement model was first fit to verify the factor structure of the five variables (sincerity, message credibility, account acceptance, post-organizational reputation, and negative social amplification). A regression model was fit using the lavaan package and, after making an adjustment to the credibility latent variable, the model was found to have adequate fit, $\chi 2(488) = 880.459$, $p < .001$, robust root mean square error of approximation (rMSEA) = .036, 90% CI = [.032, .040], robust comparative fit index (rCFI) = .967, robust, non-normed fit index/Tucker Lewis index (rNNFI/TLI) = .964, standardized root mean residual (SRMR) = .040.

Hypothesis Testing

The first hypothesis predicts that higher levels of organizational reputation will decrease negative social amplification. H1 was accepted, as results from the path analysis found that perceptions of a positive reputation lowered participants' likelihood of interacting negatively with the social media post (B = -.331, se = .081, $p < .001$). The second hypothesis predicts that higher levels of account acceptance will increase organizational reputation. This was also significant and H2 was accepted (B = .464, se = .034, $p < .001$). H3, which predicts that higher levels of message credibility will increase account acceptance, was accepted (B = .875, se = .069, $p < .001$). The fourth hypothesis predicts that higher levels of sincerity will increase message credibility. H4 was accepted (B = .745, se = .044, $p < .001$).

Lastly, hypothesis five predicts that individuals who received the CEO's crisis response strategy will outperform the effects of other message strategies on outcome variables. More specifically, the effects of the CEO's response crisis will have less detrimental effects on perceived sincerity and credibility, therefore positively affect account acceptance and organizational reputation. To examine this prediction, the effects of the treatments on perceived sincerity were analyzed first followed by an analysis of the indirect effects. When compared to the referent condition of the accidental crisis response by the organization, it was found that the accidental crisis with CEO response (B = .510, se = .258, p < .001) outperformed the accidental crisis with *NYT* response (B = .485, , se = .250, p < .05) in terms of perceived sincerity. In addition, the victim crisis with CEO response (B = .838, se = .233, p < .01) outperformed both the victim crisis with *NYT* response (B = .718, se = .254, p < .05) and victim crisis with organization response (B = .622, se = .258, p < .05). However, when examining the preventable crisis cluster, it was found that the preventable crisis with organization response had the highest increase of perceived sincerity (B = 1.00, se = .239, p < .001), followed by the preventable crisis with *NYT* response *(*B = .899, se = .231, p < .001) and preventable crisis with CEO response *(*B = .579, se = .242, p < .01) (Figure 2).

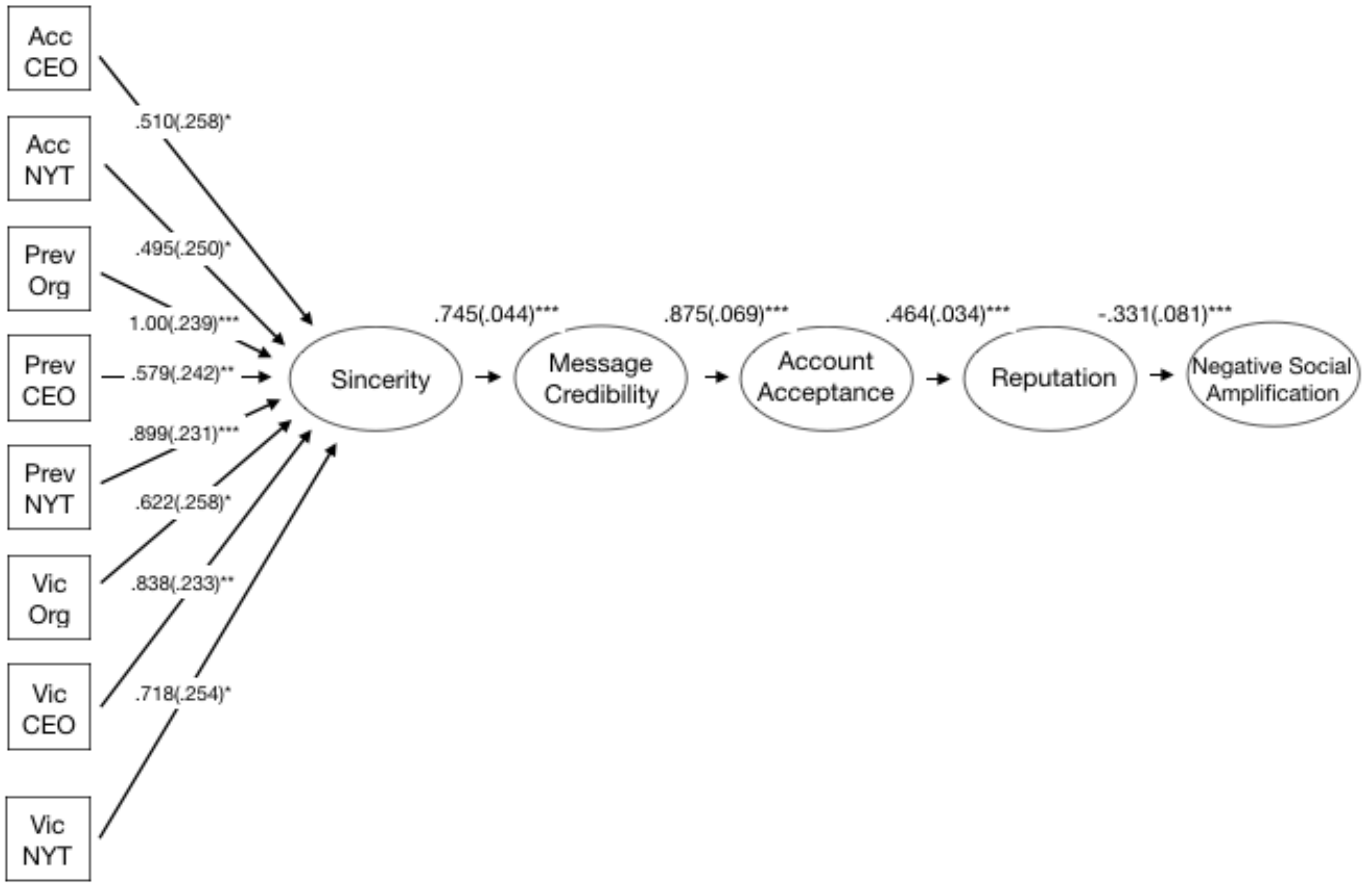

Figure 2. Results of SEM

In addition to the direct effects of the CEO response strategy on perceived sincerity, we examined the indirect effects of this condition on the outcome variables. It was found that the indirect effects of CSS on social amplification was mitigated by sincerity, account acceptance, and organizational reputation. Specifically, it was found that the accidental CEO response had an indirect effect on negative social amplification through sincerity, credibility, account acceptance,

and organization reputation [CI = -0.114, .000]. It should be noted that with the bounds of 95% bootstrap percentile confidence interval, performed with 5000 bootstrap replications, the confidence interval did not cross 0, but approached it [-.114, .000], deeming the *p*-value equal or slightly higher than .05. With results near 95% confident, we infer a small, negative effect. The preventable CEO condition also had an indirect effect on negative social amplification through sincerity, credibility, account acceptance, and organization reputation [CI = -0.121, -0.009], as did the victim CEO condition [CI = -0.159, -0.028]. Thus, H5 is partially supported by the findings from the victim and accidental crises using the CEO source having direct effects on all output variables. All conditions utilizing the CEO response had indirect effects on negative social amplification.

Discussion

In an effort to better understand the effects of combining the well-studied strategies put forth by SCCT with three different source types (CEO, third-party, organization), this research advances a comprehensive understanding of CCS perceptions. To examine post-crisis outcomes and guide response strategies for organizations or individuals experiencing crises, this experimental study sought answers for the mediating effects of sincerity and credibility, along with an analysis of organizational reputation and negative social amplification through SEM.

Our study hypothesized, based on supporting previous literature regarding credibility and SCCT, that the message strategy using the CEO as the source of the crisis response would be considered the most sincere when compared to the referent condition of the organization's response to an accidental condition. This outcome would, therefore, increase message credibility, account acceptance, post-crisis organizational reputation, and lessen negative social amplification. This hypothesis was partially supported by our findings, which show that the CEO's victim and accidental response was associated with greater perceived sincerity when compared to the referent condition and controlling for pre-crisis reputation. Most importantly, it was found that the CEO's response to the victim crisis mediated the effects of sincerity, credibility, and account acceptance on post-crisis reputation and negative amplification. This is of interest because preparing and utilizing a CEO to speak on behalf of an organization post-crisis, especially if the organization is perceived as the victim, is an actionable step for an organization to help protect or enhance its reputation. It was also determined that a higher reputation leads to lessening the likelihood of individuals spreading (i.e., amplifying) negative crisis information on Facebook.

Additionally, our findings suggest that organizations should consider building relationships with third-party sources, such as newspapers, as a proactive action prior to a crisis. We found that when Bank Your Way was perceived as a victim of the crisis or experienced an accidental crisis, having the *New York Times* source type share the information provided the second least damaging effect to sincerity out of the significant message strategy conditions, when being compared to the referent. While this strategy is more difficult for an organization to control, it does suggest that having media contacts, prior positive relationships, or sharing information about a crisis with the media, could be of benefit. Though not associated with the organization, research has shown the public tends to perceive independent sources as credible and trustworthy in times of crisis (Callison & Zillmann, 2002; Hong & Cho, 2008).

Research and Practical Implications

This study is important due to both its theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this paper adds to the limited literature that experimentally tests all three of the

SCCT crisis clusters within the same study. By doing so, it provides additional support for the widely-used SCCT framework and allows researchers to compare the effects of matched crisis response strategies. This allowed us to examine how perceived sincerity and credibility mitigated all three crisis event clusters and different source types with account acceptance, organizational reputation, and negative social amplification as post-crisis outcome variables, enhancing generalizability.

Additionally, while SEM is becoming an influential analytical tool in communication research, few studies pertaining to CCS and SCCT utilize this statistical technique. SEM provides precision in hypothesized modeling through the identification of variances, covariances, means, and relationships between latent variables. Even fewer studies that deploy SEM use latent variable modeling, frequently reporting path analysis using computed variables. By using latent variable modeling, we were able to simultaneously estimate multiple independent (message strategies), dependent (post-crisis outcomes), and mediating variables (sincerity and credibility), while also correcting for measurement error in the results. By computing a theoretically supported latent variable model, we were able to accurately estimate predictions of how source and SCCT message strategies impact organizations post-crisis with an adequate model fit and appropriate degrees of freedom. This provides results that can be confidently applied to future research and practice.

This study is applicable for public relations practitioners who are responsible for protecting the reputation and reducing harm to an organization (Brown, Dickhaus, & Long, 2012; Coombs, 2015; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2010). While organizations acknowledge that internal and external crises will and do occur, many neglect to prepare or address social media as a multifaceted platform that may induce harm or good to the organization. As a continuation of the historical prescriptive use of SCCT for practitioners, our study furthers the understanding of SCCT strategies and their effects on post-crisis outcomes, outside of the solo effect of message content. The findings of the study confirm the need for practitioners to understand the true crisis type before assigning a response and understand the role of sources when using Facebook. By finding statistically significant results regarding strategies that can be used in both preventable and victim crisis events, this study provides guidance on steps to help increase the levels of perceived sincerity of the post-crisis message, therefore enhancing credibility, and organizational reputation.

Limitations and Future Research

In an effort to understand the implications of each crisis type, the study utilized the crisis responses following the empirically tested, theoretically supported SCCT strategies of matched responses. The sources responded to each crisis type with a matched response to mitigate crisis responsibility (e.g., the accidental crisis used a scapegoat response). We made assumptions in only testing one matched response for each crisis type, which could give rise to a potential confounding variable. Future experiments should verify that the effects found in this experiment were truly from the source and crisis type, not from the response strategy. In addition, it would be of interest to replicate this study with a different victim crisis to assess if the findings are consistent.

Additionally, there are caveats to utilizing a fictitious organization in the study, such as the risk of participants not becoming fully invested. We feel this decision was justified as participants did not enter with pre-existing beliefs about the organization that would affect how they perceive the crisis responses, such as having a positive halo effect or carrying in negative sentiment towards an organization with a history of similar crises. Avoiding confounding effects

by preventing prior knowledge of a company, the study requested that participants proceed under the impression that they hold an account with the organization (Keller & Aaker, 1992). While pretests ensured neutral impressions of the organization, the CEO, the news outlet, and all graphics, further research should understand these effects in the context of a real organization experiencing a crisis. These limitations do not necessarily diminish the value of our findings but invite further applications.

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Capitalizing on Clickbait: Identifying the Effects of Listicle Type, Length, and Sponsorship

Christen Buckley
Pennsylvania State University

Yiting Chai
Pennsylvania State University

Jason Freeman
Brigham Young University

Abstract

Entire journalistic empires have been built upon sensational headlines designed to elicit consumer attention and provide advertising partners with what they want most, eyeballs on content. Listicles, a popular form of clickbait are used widely with little research addressing effective design and use of such content. This study proposes the following questions: what are the psychological mechanisms behind a user's experience with various listicle forms? How does the clickability and length of a listicle influence consumer responses? Do individuals respond differently to sponsored listicles? To answer these questions, a 2 x 2 x 2 between-subject experiment was conducted. Findings demonstrate that clickable listicle (vs. scrollable) provides users with greater control, which in turn positively predicted a variety of communicative outcomes. In addition, longer listicles led to greater frustration, which in turn negatively impacted communicative outcomes. Interestingly, the presence of a sponsor overrode the effects of type and length. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Listicles, clicking, control, frustration, sponsored content, credibility

Introduction

With the transition from print to digital news came a significant shift in the way information is distributed and monetized (Munger, Luca, Nagler, & Tucker, 2018). In today's saturated message environment, the primary resource that journalists and advertisers seek to capture is that of consumer attention (Eppler & Mengis, 2004). The ability to track and measure user engagement with online news has led to a metrics-based competition that has spurred the development of modern-day clickbait (Kormelink & Meijer, 2018; Munger, Luca, Nagler, & Tucker, 2018). To succeed in the online attention economy, journalists and advertisers alike must offer content that is both eye-catching and easily digestible. Listicles, which are defined as articles as numbered lists (Vijgen, 2014), have emerged as a prevalent journalistic format. Digital publishers are most strongly associated with utilizing the listicle, yet legacy outlets have similarly realized its value (Lieb, 2015); for example, *The New York Times* has printed journalistic headlines that include: "The Mueller Report is 448 Pages Long. You Need to Know These 7 Key Things" or "12 Wines Under $12: How Low Can You Go and Still Find Value?" Both of these titles promise the reader that an abundant amount of information has been synthesized into a few worthy bullet points.

Literature Review

Within communication research, scholars are increasingly looking beyond the content effects of media messages and more closely examine how interface affordances similarly persuade users (Sundar, 2012; Oh & Sundar, 2015). Studies in this domain promote the notion that even the subtle nuances of interface design and structure transform the way users access the core components of a given message (Oh & Sundar, 2015).

Type and Length

Online, news organizations typically serve listicles using one of two common formats: scrollable, which allow the user to view all listicle items on a webpage using the simple action of scrolling, and clickable, which require the user to actively click from one slide to the next (Freeman, 2017). Though clickable listicles may be more engaging, they tend to be deployed with heavy amounts of advertising. It is unknown if one format is preferred over another and there is limited amount of scholarly research examining the effects of these listicle formats on various communicative outcomes (Freeman, 2017; Sadri, 2019). Previous academic scholarship suggests that the clickability of an interface can lead to greater feelings of enjoyment (Dou & Sundar, 2016), stronger intentions to share (Vijgen, 2014), and greater reported ease of use (Coyle, Mendelson, & Kim, 2008). Scholars have also established the role of length in relation to information processing, memory, attitude towards content and emotions (Freeman, 2017; Mord & Gilson, 1985; Wood, Kallgren & Preisler, 1985; Singh & Cole, 1993).

Perceived Ease of Use

Perceived ease of use reflects the users' experience with online content; drawing together their usage of the information and the ease of use of the technology (Adams, Nelson, & Todd, 1992). Most scholarly research exploring the effects of clickable features examines their role related to goal use, interface design, and user experience, rather than focusing on the process of clicking itself. The few studies that have specifically examined the efficacy of clickable interfaces highlight its potential benefit (Bucy, 2004). Perceived ease of use of online content is shaped by its clarity, understandability and controllability (Adams & Nelson, 1992). Dimensions that constitute perceived ease of use have also been used to describe interactivity (Liu & Shrum, 2002). Interactivity can exist as a medium feature, source feature, and message feature (Xu &

Sundar, 2014); for the purposes of this study, perceived ease of use is a more direct outcome of different listicle formats. Perceived ease of use has also been used to evaluate dependent variables such as emotion, cognition, and behavioral intentions (Venkatesh, 2000).

Information Processing and Memory

In the realm of cognitive outcomes, information processing and memory serve as two of the most valuable measures (Lieb, 2015; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Information processing research has considered a variety of cognitive and affective antecedents and outcomes (Wyer, Clore & Isbell, 1999). Based on previous studies on message design and cognition, more motivated, capable readers are more likely to have greater elaboration related to the message (Slater & Rouner, 2002; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986); the relatively simple design of a listicle may cater to a broader audience who perceive their ability to digest this type of content with greater ease. However, preferences for format (scrollable vs. clickable) or length are still undetermined.

Emotional Communicative Outcomes

Scholars have established that measuring affective responses to messages is a valuable evaluative strategy in the study of online content (Gross, 2008; Van Noort, Voorveld, & Van Reijmersdal, 2012). Interest is regularly measured as a positive emotional communicative outcome of news consumption, with some studies showing a strong link between clickbait and interest (Chen, Conroy & Rubin, 2015). A feeling of enjoyment is also an outcome of interactions with online interfaces (Dou & Sundar, 2014). Frustration, operationalized as a delay of satisfaction or interacting with inefficient interfaces (Lawson, 1965; Dellaert & Kahn, 1999; Scheirer, Fernandez, Klein, & Picard, 2002), is also an important variable to consider in the context of online media consumption. If users are forced to wait for a "reasonable" amount of time online, delaying satisfaction has little effect (Dellaert & Kahn, 1999). Considering this, the unreasonable satisfaction delay of clickable or long listicles could lead to frustration and subsequent negative evaluations.

Behavioral Intentions

Scholars have established that shareable factors are a core strength of clickable listicles (Vijgen, 2014). Previous literature considers ad length when evaluating sharing intentions, with user being more likely to share longer content as opposed to shorter content (Shehu, Bijmolt, & Clement, 2016). This observation is in line with research in which sharing intention is considered in relation to affect and specific facets of interpersonal evaluations, such as the content quality and benefits to the recipient (Huang, Chen, & Wang, 2012).

Attitudes toward the Listicle

Positive attitudes toward online information is often a reflection of an easy-to-use interface (Lin, 2007; Suki & Suki, 2011) and is related to future sharing intentions (Hsu & Lin, 2008; Liao, To, & Hsu, 2013).

The Influence of Sponsorship

To remain competitive, organizations are utilizing listicles to capture and maintain the attention of consumers (Agrawal, 2016). Sponsorship, which consists of integrating brands, products, or persuasive messages into traditionally noncommercial contexts (Boerman, Van Reijmersdal & Neijens, 2012), has been shown to enhance brand awareness and both positively and negatively influence attitudes and intended behaviors towards the brand (Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Ross, & Maroco, 2013; Wei, Fischer & Main, 2008). Attitude towards a sponsor and the perceived credibility of the sponsor can predict future purchase intentions as well as the perception of the media outlets (Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Newell, 2002; Rifon, Choi, Trimble & Li, 2004; Wu, Huang, Li Bortree, Yang, Xiao & Wang, 2016). Scholars have long established

that highly credible sources are more valuable than low credibility sources because they generate more attention and more positive attitudes or behaviors (Craig & McCann 1978; Sternthal, Phillips, & Dholakia, 1978). Sponsor credibility has also been shown to affect information assessment more than website design features (Westerwick, 2013). Exploring how the sponsorship influences various communicative outcomes will augment these theoretical claims.

Current Study Inquires

In order to fill in gaps in the literature and examine the psychological mechanisms through which listicle type influences communicative outcomes, the following hypotheses and research questions are proposed: RQ1: What are the effects of scrollable versus clickable listicles on communicative outcomes? H1: The longer listicle will lead to greater frustration. H2: The clickable listicle (vs. scrollable) will lead to greater perceived ease of use which will in turn positively influence communicative outcomes. H3: The clickable listicle (vs. scrollable listicle) will lead to greater frustration which will in turn negatively influence communicative outcomes. The effects of listicle type and length on the communicative outcomes will be explored comprehensively and the role of sponsorship in relation to listicle type and length will also be examined: RQ2: How do type and length influence the communicative outcomes? RQ3: When the listicle is sponsored, does the perception of the sponsor moderate the influence of listicle type and length? For all of the research questions and hypotheses, age, gender, and ethnicity were controlled.

Methods

Study Design

This study employed a 2 (listicle type) x 2 (listicle length) x 2 (presence of sponsorship) between-subject factorial experiment using Qualtrics's online survey platform (Qualtrics, 2019). Participants were randomly assigned to read one of eight listicles which differed in type, length, and presence of sponsorship. Participants then returned to the survey page and answered questions about their reading experience. They were instructed to list the thoughts generated, recall details of the listicle, and answer questions measuring whether they recognized details from the listicle. Participants were then asked to report their feelings; specifically, how frustrated and interested they were and how much they enjoyed the reading experience. Participants in sponsorship conditions were asked to rate their attitudes toward the sponsor and rate the perceived credibility of sponsor. As a manipulation check, participants were asked to indicate if they were aware of the sponsor, Delta Airlines, prior to reading the listicle. All participants then rated their attitudes toward the reading experience, the listicle's ease of use, and how likely they would be to share the listicle. Participants were notified that the listicle was created for the study.

Participants

Participants were recruited at a large, public university in the northeast United States. A total number of 387 undergraduate students participated and they received extra credit in exchange for their participation. Four cases were eliminated, leaving a valid sample of 383 participants; 151 were males (39.4%), 230 were females (60.1%), and two participants did not wish to answer (0.5%). Participants' age ranged from 18 to 28 (M = 19.92, SD = 1.41). The majority of the sample were White/Caucasian (73.0%), followed by Asian (17.6%), Hispanic/Latino/Latina (4.5%), Black/African American (2.9%), Other (1.8%), and Native American/American Indian (0.3%); three participants did not wish to answer (0.5%).

Independent Variables

The stimuli for this study (provided upon request) were online listicles created using Wix.com. Each listacle recommended travel destinations and each location had a short description and a picture. The **listicle type** was manipulated to be either scrollable or clickable. In the scrollable listicle conditions, all the travel destinations were shown on the same page, and participants had to scroll to view all the content. In the clickable listicle conditions, only one travel destination was shown on each page, and participants had to click the next button to view the next destination. The **length of the listicle** was manipulated to be either short or long. In the short listicle conditions participants saw 10 recommended travel destinations and in the long listicle conditions participants saw 30 recommended travel destinations. There was the **presence of sponsorship**, or lack thereof, in each listicle. In the no sponsorship conditions, participants only saw the recommended travel destinations. In the sponsorship conditions, participants saw the phrase "sponsored by:" and a Delta Airlines logo at the beginning of the listicle.

Dependent Variables

A **thought-listing** question was used to examine how participants processed the information (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984).The first coded variable was the number of thoughts listed, which has been used as an indicator of one's information processing style in previous studies (e.g. Cacioppo, von Hippel, & Ernst, 1997). The second variable derived from the thought-listing question was visual processing, which indicated whether or not the participants used pictures in the listicle to process information. Two trained coders coded these variable and reached agreement (Cohen's Kappa = .86, Cohen's Kappa = .85). **Information recall** was measured using five prompted questions; participants got one point for each correctly answered question (M = 2.52, SD = 1.41). **Information recognition** was measured through seven multiple choice questions; participants got one point for picking the right answer (M = 4.50, SD = 1.41).

Frustration was measured using a five-item scale. The average score of the five items was used to compute a single variable that reflected one's frustration level (α = .90, M = 2.90, SD = 1.46). **Interest** was measured using a three-item scale. The average of the three items was then used to compute a variable that reflects how interested the participants were (α = .79, M = 4.65, SD = 1.28). To measure **enjoyment**, participants rated how much they agreed with certain statements and the score reflected how much participants enjoyed the reading experience (M = 4.79, SD = 1.58). **Attitude towards the listicle** was measured using an adaptation of Petty and Cacioppo's (1984) seven-point persuasion scale. A single variable was computed by calculating the average score of the four items (α = .89, M = 5.25, SD = 1.18). **Perceived ease of use** was measured using a seven-point scale adapted from Adams and Nelson (1992), which evaluated how much participants felt the listicle of travel recommendation was easy for them to use. The three items reached high reliability and the average was used to reflect perceived ease of use (α = .89, M = 5.74, SD = 1.05). **Sharing intention** was measured using a three-item scale adapted from Huang, Chen, and Wang (2012). The average score of the three items was used to compute the variable sharing intention (α = .94, M = 4.53, SD = 1.54).

Control Variables

Participants' **prior knowledge of the sponsor** was measured using one question that asked whether participants were aware of the sponsor Delta Airlines prior to this study. Among the participants who were in the sponsor conditions (n = 187), 178 participants (95.2%) said they knew Delta Airlines and 9 participants (4.8%) said they were not aware of Delta Airlines. The seven-point scale used to measure **attitude towards the sponsor** was adapted from Petty and Cacioppo's (1984) semantic differential scale. The average score of the four items was used to compute a single variable that reflects one's attitude towards the sponsor (α = .92, M = 4.91, SD

= 1.22). **Perceived credibility of the sponsor** was measured using McCroskey's (1999) source credibility scale. On a seven-point semantic differential scale, participants answered how they felt about Delta Airlines. After reverse coding five items, the average score of the eleven items was used to compute one single variable of perceived credibility (α = .89, *M* = 4.64, *SD* = .94).

Results

There were no unexpected differences between listicle conditions on demographics variables, as revealed by several chi-square analyses and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Results suggested that each listicle condition was not significantly related to gender, χ^2 = .96, *df* = 7, *p* = .89, age, *F*(7, 370) = .64, *p* = .72, or ethnicity, χ^2 = 39.03, *df* = 35, *p* = .29.

To determine whether listicle type (scrollable vs. clickable) predicted a variety of communicative outcomes (RQ1), a series of t-tests and a chi-square test were performed. The t-test revealed a relationship that was approaching significance between listicle type and perceived ease of use *t*(381) = -1.84, *p* = .07 such that clickable listicles (*M* = 5.83, SD = 1.01) were preferred to scrollable listicles (*M* = 5.64, SD = 1.08). Due to this item approaching significance, a series of t-tests were run to determine how listicle type predicted each of the three items used in the perceived ease of use scale. Only the dimension of controllability was significantly related to listicle type *t*(381) = -2.27, *p* = .02 such that clickable listicles (*M* = 5.71, *SD* = 1.21) were evaluated as more controllable than scrollable listicles (*M* = 5.43, *SD* = 1.23). The other two dimensions "clear and understandable" *t*(381) = -1.20, *p* = .23 and "easy to use" *t*(381) = -1.49, *p* = .14 were not significantly related to listicle type. Thus, the item of perceived control was decidedly used as a proxy for our ease of use variable.

None of the other outcome variables of interest were significantly influenced by listicle type: frustration *t*(380) = .50, *p* = .62, interest *t*(381) = 1.05, *p* = .29, attitude towards the article *t*(381) = -.68, *p* = .50, sharing intention *t*(381) = .44, *p* = .66, number of thoughts *t*(381) = -.71, *p* = .48, recall *t*(381) = 1.19, *p* = .23, recognition *t*(381) = .27, *p* = .79, and enjoyment *t*(381) = -.388, *p* = .70. To answer whether the type of listicle predicted the dichotomously coded variable of image processing, a chi-square test was performed, revealing no significance between listicle type and image processing, χ^2 (1, N = 383) = 1.62, *p* = .84. A t-test was performed to test if the longer listicle would elicit greater frustration (H1). The t-test revealed a significant relationship between listicle length and frustration; the longer listicles (*M* = 3.18, *SD* = .15) led to more frustration than the shorter listicles (*M* = 2.62, *SD* = 1.37), *t*(380) = -3.85, *p* < .001.

Psychological mechanisms of the influence of type and length of listicle

H2 and H3 predicted that listicle type will influence communicative outcomes through two psychological mechanisms: perceived ease of use and frustration. RQ2 asked a more comprehensive question: how does listicle type and length influence communicative outcomes. To test the hypotheses and address the research question, a structural equation model (SEM) in AMOS was built (Figure 1). As mentioned above, participants' perception of control was the major driver of the perceived ease of use, therefore a single item measure of perceived control was entered as the mediator in this SEM model. Overall, the model reached an acceptable model fit, χ^2 = 610.98, *df* = 212, *p* = .000, RMSEA = .07 (90% CI =.06 to .08), CFI = .92).

To test the indirect effects of listicle type and length on communicative outcomes, bootstrapping procedures using 2000 bootstrap samples and bias-corrected confidence intervals were employed. Results revealed several significant indirect effects of listicle type on communicative outcomes through perceived control. The clickable listicle led to more use of pictures in information processing (ß = 01, *p* = .03), an increase in the number of correct recall (ß

= .01, p = .05), a higher score of recognition questions (ß = .02, p = .02), higher level of enjoyment (ß = .02, p = .02), more interest (ß = .02, p = .02), more positive attitude towards the listicle (ß = .03, p = .02), and higher sharing intention (ß = .04, p = .01). However, the indirect effect of listicle type on number of thoughts generated through perceived control was not significant (ß = .00, p = .43). Therefore, H2 was partially supported. The indirect effects of listicle type on communicative outcomes, including number of thoughts (ß = .00, p = .97), use of pictures in information processing (ß = .00, p = .95), number of correct recall (ß = .00, p = .96), score of recognition (ß = .00, p = .94), enjoyment (ß = .00, p = .97), interest (ß = .00, p = .97), attitude towards the listicle (ß = .00, p = .97), and sharing intention (ß = .00, p = .97), through frustration were all not significant. Therefore, H3 was not supported.

In addition to the influence of listicle type, the SEM model also examined the effects of listicle length. According to the results, several indirect effects of listicle length on communicative outcomes through frustration were found. Specifically, longer listicle led to a decrease in number of accurate recall (ß = -.03, p = .01), lower level of enjoyment (ß = -.08, p = .001), less interest (ß = -.07, p = .001), more negative attitude towards the listicle (ß = -.11, p = .001), and less sharing intention (ß = -.06, p = .001). However, the indirect effects of listicle length on number of thoughts generated (ß = .01, p = .23), use of pictures to process information (ß = .00, p = .81), and score of recognition questions (ß = .00, p = .33) through frustration were not significant.

RQ2 asked about the comprehensive effects of listicle type and length; it can be concluded that type and length both influence one's cognition, feelings, and behavioral intentions. Type of listicle has significant impacts on communicative outcomes through perceived control, but not frustration. Clickable listicle led to more perceived control, which in turn positively influenced one's cognition (e.g. information processing and recall), feelings (e.g. enjoyment), attitude towards the article, and sharing intention. Listicle length also matters; longer listicles caused more frustration, which in turn negatively influenced one's ability to recall details, feelings (interest, enjoyment), attitude towards the article, and sharing intention.

Impact of sponsorship (RQ3)

To analyze whether pre-existing evaluations of sponsorship moderates the effects of listacle type and length on communicative outcomes, a MANCOVA test was performed using participants in the sponsorship condition. The type and length of the listicle were entered as fixed factors and the attitude towards the sponsor and the perceived credibility of the sponsor were entered into the model as covariates. All of the dependent variables, except for the categorical variable visual processing, were entered into the model for analysis. The MANCOVA analysis revealed a non-significant main effect for type, Wilks' Λ = .94, F (1, 175) = 1.62, p = .13, partial $\eta 2$ = .06, and a non-significant main effect for length, Wilks' Λ = .97, F (1, 175) = .97, p = .63, partial $\eta 2$ = .03. In addition, the MANCOVA analysis found a non-significant main effect for pre-existing attitude towards Delta Airlines, Wilks' Λ = .95, F (1, 175) = .94, p = 1.31, partial $\eta 2$ = .05. However, a significant main effect of perceived credibility of Delta Airlines was found, Wilks' Λ = .90, F (1, 175) = 2.67, p = .01, partial $\eta 2$ = .10. To examine the effects of the perceived credibility of Delta Airlines on our communicative outcomes, several regression tests were performed. Results revealed that the perceived credibility of Delta Airlines significantly predicted how much participants enjoyed reading the listicle ($ß$ = .37, t = 5.43, p <.001), how much they were interested in the listicle ($ß$ = .35, t = 5.01, p < .001), their attitude towards the listicle ($ß$ = .47, t = 7.19, p < .001), and how likely they would be to share this listicle with other people ($ß$ = .32, t = 4.63, p < .001). The perceived sponsor credibility did *not* predict how many

thoughts were generated while reading the listicle (ß = .14, t = 1.87, p = .06), how many recognition questions participants correctly answered (ß = .04, t = .60, p = .55), or how many details in the listicle they could recall (ß = .08, t = 1.14, p = .26). Two chi-square tests were performed to analyze the effects of listicle type and length on whether participants used pictures to assist information processing when sponsorship was present; the results showed no significant influence of listicle type, χ^2 (1, N = 187) = .49, p = .48, or length, χ^2 (1, N = 187) = .38, p = .54 on visual processing. The general conclusion from the MANCOVA and logistic regression tests is that the perceived credibility of the sponsor is a more salient factor than listicle type and length in predicting communicative outcomes when a sponsor is present.

Discussion

The scale and depth of this study yielded compelling findings that will contribute to future scholarly and industry considerations of listicles. These findings establish that listicle type and length do matter. Perceived control and frustration were also established as important variables through which certain communicative outcomes can be affected. From the findings, it can also be inferred that clickability is preferable for listicles and that modality in online interface design plays a critical role. Perceived credibility of the sponsor overrode the effects of listicle type and length, indicating the importance of considering presence of sponsorship when making design decisions.

Effect of Type and Length on Cognition

This study suggests that listicle type and length both have a significant impact on cognition (i.e. information processing and memory). Regarding listicle type, it was found that clickable listicles led to more perceived control, which in turn made people more likely to focus on pictures when they process information. Listicle type was also found to influence one's memory. Specifically, clickable listicles led to higher recognition, but not recall, through a higher level of perceived control. Though it is possible that clickable listicles do enhance one's memory, the positive effect is offset if the memory test is too difficult. Listicle length was found to influence recall, but not recognition. Since recognition questions included more aided prompts, the inhibiting effect of frustration became nonsignificant. When only few prompts were present, frustration did inhibit one's recall.

Effect of Type and Length on Emotions and Feelings

Contrary to what was hypothesized, listicle type did not influence one's feeling of frustration. This may be related to the sample, which consisted of digitally savvy undergraduate students. Clickable listicles attracted more interest and were enjoyed more as they elicited a stronger sense of control, suggesting that listicle type still impacts affective responses. Longer listicles led to more frustration, which in turn lessened participants' interest in the listicle and enjoyment with the reading experience. This was most likely due to the delayed satisfaction and "unreasonable" length. Previous studies on clickbait rarely tested the effects of length since clickbaits were usually shorter than non-clickbait articles (Chakraborty, Paranijape, Kakarla, & Ganguly, 2016). Listicles are a special type of clickbait and a qualified source of information (Freeman, 2017), therefore the results of this study fill this gap.

Effect of Type and Length on Attitudes and Sharing Intentions

Attitude towards the listicle was not significantly related to the listicle type. Still, there were significant indirect effects of listicle type on communicative outcomes through perceived control; clickable listicles led to more positive attitude towards the listicle and sharing intention. The indirect effects of listicle type on attitude towards the listicle through frustration were all not

significant indicating that the type may not be strong enough to frustrate users alone. Yet, through frustration, longer listicles negatively affected attitude towards the listicle and sharing intention, implying that length paired with an affective trigger can alter readers' attitudes.

Effects of Sponsorship

Despite the close association of sponsorship and listicles in practice, the listicle features of type and length did not interact with presence of sponsorship. More notably, sponsorship overrode the effects of listicle type and length. Perceived credibility of Delta Airlines significantly predicted how much participants enjoyed reading the listicle, how interested they were in the listicle, their attitude towards the listicle, and how likely they were to share this listicle; however, the perceived sponsor credibility did not predict how many thoughts generated while reading the listicle, how many recognition questions participants correctly answered, or how many details in the listicle they could recall. These relationships reinforce past research and demonstrate the emotional, attitudinal and behavioral effects of credibility, while highlighting the distance between presence of a credible source and cognitive processing of content (Craig & McCann 1978; Sternthal, Phillips, & Dholakia, 1978; Westerwick, 2013).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study presents several theoretical contributions. Most notably, the model presented in this study provides a conceptual and theoretical roadmap for future studies of clickbait and modality. This study identified two important design features: listicle type and length. Moreover, frustration and perceived control were found to be two powerful mechanisms for optimizing communicative outcomes, therefore augmenting frustration and control theories. Our findings also build upon previous literature concerning the power of brand image and its potential impact on the effects of interface features.

Users that interacted with the clickable format reported higher levels of perceived controllability, which in turn led to a host of positive outcomes. Given the rich modality options for deploying listicles through online websites, journalists should seek to find the optimal blend of navigation given the goal of the user and nature of the content. If a listicle invokes a heavy dose of curiosity, providing users with navigational features that give them contorl will likely lead to positive outcomes. In other cases, a user might desire immediate information over an "experience" and interface designs that delay ones' gratification may be evaluated as an obstacle. Knowing that clickable listicles are regularly used to generate additional advertising impressions, advertisers may also want to consider when and where they are willing to place their messages based on interface norms of various publishers. This is an important consideration given that long-form clickable listicles will likely lead to frustration and negative affect, which may carry over to brand evaluations.

Limitations and Future Research

The most notable limitation of this study relates to the nature of the stimuli. In line with the concept of "what's beautiful is useable" (Tractinsky, Katz, & Ikar, 2000), it is possible that the lack of distractions (e.g. banner ads) in our stimuli may have conflated the data. The higher levels of enjoyment, more interest, and more positive attitude towards the listicle, could be due to the positive skew of the content; utilizing other content topics in future studies can isolate this effect. In addition, diversifying audience profile characteristics and identifying user goals of listicle use may moderate the future findings. Finally, due to the overwhelming observed effect of sponsorship in this study, it would be beneficial to control for the role of sponsorships in future studies and more carefully consider its effect in practice.

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APPENDIX

Table 1 |*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (N= 383)*

Variable	ENJ	REC	FRUS	INT	ART	USE	SH	TH	RE	PROC
ENJ	1									
REC	.08	1								
FRUS	-.50**	-.01	1							
INT	.75**	.14**	-.39**	1						
ART	.70**	.16**	-.57**	.65**	1					
USE	.37**	.18**	-.29**	.31**	.45**	1				
SH	.64**	.07	-.35**	.61	.65	.43**	1			
TH	-.02	.09	.05	.01	-.02	-.02	.03	1		
RE	.25**	.41**	-.19**	.32**	.22**	.13*	.25**	.06	1	
PROC	.01	.11*	-.02	-.04	.04	.11*	-.04	.03	.02	1
M	4.79	4.49	2.90	4.64	5.25	5.74	4.53	2.60	2.52	.48
SD	1.58	1.42	1.46	1.28	1.18	1.05	1.54	2.06	1.42	.5

$^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Note: REC = Recognition; FRUS = Frustration; INT = Interest; ART = Attitudes Toward Article; USE = Perceived Usefulness; SH = Sharing Intention; TH = Number of thoughts; RE = Recall; PROC = Image Processing

Table 2 | *Descriptive Statistics for the Effect of Listicle Type on Communicative Outcomes*

	Mean	*SD*	Statistical value	*p* value
Frustration	S = 2.94; C = 2.87	S = 1.43; C = 1.50	*t* = .50	.62
Interest	S = 4.72; C =4.58	S = 1.29; C = 1.26	*t* = 1.05	.29
Attitude toward article	S = 4.86; C = 4.95	S = 1.02; C = 1.35	*t* = -.68	.50
Sharing intention	S = 4.57; C = 4.5	S = 1.50; C = 1.59	*t* =.44	.66
Number of thoughts	S = 2.52; C = 2.67	S = 1.53; C = 2.45	*t* = -.71	.48
Recall	S = 2.62; C = 2.44	S = 1.42; C = 1.41	*t* = 1.19	.23
Recognition	S = 4.52; C = 4.48	S = 1.45; C = 1.39	*t* =.27	.79
Enjoyment	S = 4.76; C = 4.82	S = 1.59; C = 1.57	*t* = -.39	.70
Interest	S = 4.72; C = 4.58	S = 1.29; C = 1.26	*t* = 1.05	.29
Perceived ease of use	S = 5.64; C = 5.83	S = 1.08; C = 1.01	*t* = -1.84	.07
Easy to use	S = 5.76; C = 5.94	S = 1.14; C = 1.11	*t* = -1.49	.14

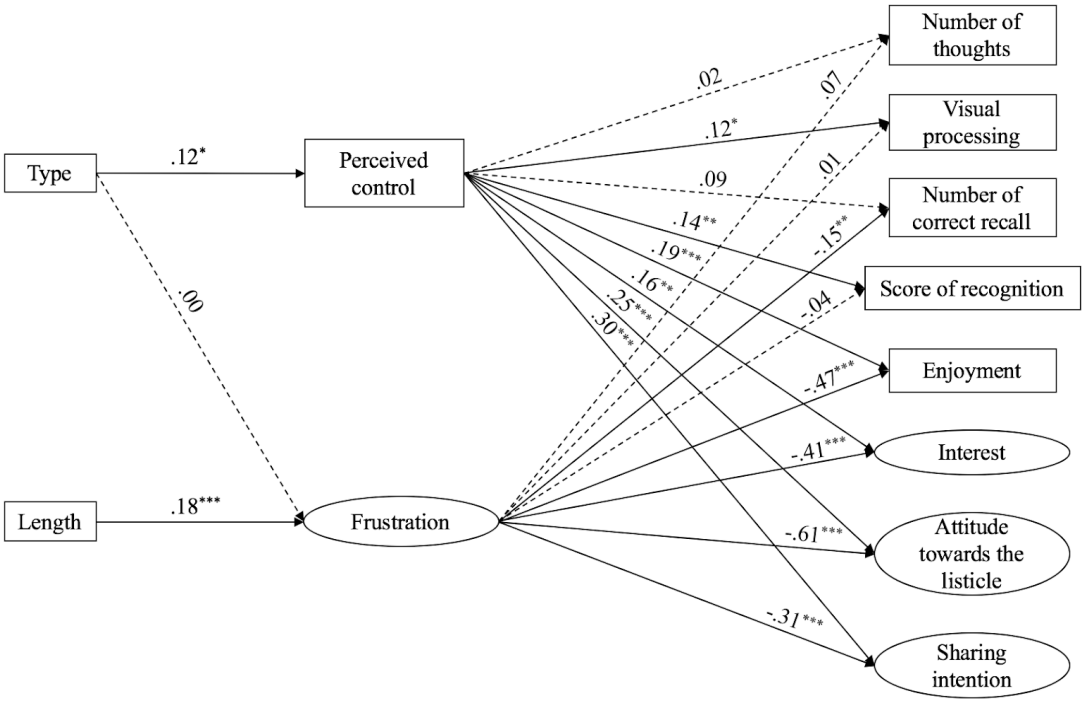
	Clear & Understandable	S = 5.71; C = 5.85	S = 1.18; C = 1.05	t = -1.2	.23
	Controllable	S = 5.43; C = 5.71	S = 1.23; C = 1.21	t = -2.27	.02
Visual processing		S = 52.2%; C = 47.8%		X^2 = 1.62	.84

NOTE: S = scrollable, C = clickable.

Table 3 |*Effects of Perceived Source Credibility on Communicative Outcomes (N=187)*

	ß	*t value*	*p value*
Number of thoughts	.14	1.87	.06
Score of recognition questions	.04	.60	.55
Score of recall questions	.08	1.14	.26
Enjoyment	.37	5.43	.00
Interest	.35	5.01	.00
Attitude towards the listicle	.47	7.19	.00
Sharing Intention	.32	4.63	.00

Figure 1 | Structural Equation Model (SEM) of listicle type, length, & communicative outcomes



$^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$
Model Fit: χ^2 = 610.98, df = 212, p = .000, RMSEA = .07 (90% CI = .06 to .08), CFI = .92
Note: Variables in rectangles are observed variables and variables in ovals are latent variables. Solid line indicates that the path is significant while dotted line indicates that the path is nonsignificant.

Effects of News Framing and Third Party Moral Licensing on Organizational Reputation

Courtney M. Callaghan
Nicholas Mannweiler
Josh Pena
Samantha Drumb
San Diego State University

Abstract

Using framing theory and third party moral licensing, researchers employed a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial design to test the impact of individual frames of a news story depicting employee misconduct outside of the office on organizational reputation. Results determined that frame affected perceived professional ethics standards but not organizational reputation. The news media can influence a third party moral licensing effect, however, only to the benefit of the employee and not the organization.

Keywords: framing, organizational reputation, third party moral licensing, news media

For many organizations, reputation enables them to operate, earn a profit, and even recruit talent to join their teams. However, in a crisis, reputation is easily tarnished or even destroyed if stakeholders lose trust and confidence in those abilities (Suchman,1995). Continued research in this vital field of study provides organizations with evidence-based public relations guidance to protect or rebuild reputation in times of crisis.

The purpose of this study is to address gaps in organizational reputation and third party moral licensing research. From an organizational reputation standpoint, anyone from the chief executive officer down to the most junior employee can find themselves in the media spotlight for misconduct originating in the workplace or a personal capacity. There are few existing studies of employee misconduct in the office and no prior studies examined the impact of off-duty or personal misconduct. Researchers identified a second research gap in identifying if the news media can influence third party moral licensing among their publics. Currently, there is no empirical evidence that the media effect occurs. By using several realistic scenarios to frame a single news story of personal misconduct, researchers analyzed how each variable influenced organizational reputation.

Literature Review

Researchers constructed the present study on organizational reputation research, commonly studied in the mass communication field with theories such as framing, agenda setting, or situational crisis communication theory. Researchers used framing theory to design the experiment by developing news frames to address each of the identified gaps in research.

Organizational Reputation

Even before organizational reputation became a framework in research and practice, people have formed cognitive and emotional thoughts and attachments to organizations that contribute to reputation (Elsbach, 2006). Arthur Page believed that public perception of an organization is built 90% by what it does through action and 10% through talking about it (The Page Principles, n.d.). Public relations practitioners must understand how to build, assess, and maintain their organization's reputation.

Reputation is a concept often associated with legitimacy; however, divergence occurs in assessing attributes of an organization (Ruef & Scott, 1998). Ruef and Scott (1998) cautioned that attributes of legitimacy should focus on "regulative, normative or cognitive dimensions;" whereas, any attribute can describe an organization's reputation (p. 879). Weigelt and Camerer (1998) defined reputation simply as "a set of attributes ascribed (socially constructed) to a firm, inferred from the firm's past actions" (p.443). Fombrun (1999) defined organizational reputation as "a perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects that describe the firm's overall appeal to its key constituents when compared with leading rivals" (p. 72). The present study conceptualized organizational reputation as "familiarity with the organization, beliefs about what to expect from the organization in the future, and impressions about the organization's favorability" (Lange et al., 2011, p. 153).

Rindova et al. (2005) proposed that organizational reputation has two dimensions, "being known" and "being known for something," or more accurately, reputation means "prominence" and "perceived quality" (p. 1035). Lange et al. (2011) added a third dimension of "generalized favorability" (p. 163). Lange et al. (2011) determined that scholars predominantly operationalize organizational reputation using one or more of the three dimensions, with most focusing on a unidimensional study exploring "being known for something" (p. 174). Most scholars seek to

understand how organizational reputation can affect future outputs, or continued growth in reputation and income (Lange et al., 2011).

Though past scholars have attempted to identify the most popular methods to operationalize organizational reputation, it is clear there is a lack of consensus (Clardy, 2012; Lange, Lee, & Dai, 2011). Lange et al. (2011) believed that scholars predominantly operationalize organizational reputation through the lens of one or more of their three dimensions of being known, being known for something, and generalized favorability. Most researchers focus on a unidimensional study exploring "being known for something" (Lange et al., 2011, p. 174). The present study operationalized organizational reputation as *being known for something.*

Organizational Reputation in Crisis

When assessing *being known for something*, it is essential to understand that the news media expose unaware publics to information and knowledge about social groups and organizations (Figenschou & Thorbjornsrud, 2015). For an organization, the news media expose stakeholders to information about the issues and current events associated with a company or organization (Chen & Meindl, 1991; Deephouse, 2000; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Deephouse (2000) found that the news media will produce and report a personal evaluation of an organization's reputation. For practitioners, this underscores the vital need for cultivating relationships with the media prior to a crisis.

The present study focuses on personal employee misconduct or a crisis brought on by an employee which occurs outside of the office. The actions of an employee in an organization can harm reputation (Thomas, 2007). These actions include criminal behavior or socially unacceptable actions (e.g., racist slurs) (Weigelt & Camerer, 1988). In today's technology and news centric society, the private-public boundaries blur, especially for spokespersons and senior leaders of an organization, emphasizing a higher expectation for professional behavior in and out of the office (Umphress et al., 2013).

Unfortunately, extraordinarily little research exists in this area. Nalick (2016) proposed such personal misconduct incidents, increases the likelihood a senior leader steps down following the incident to protect organizational reputation. One study found that police officers involved in misconduct incidents had little impact on stakeholder attitudes toward the police force (Chermak et al., 2006). However, the more a stakeholder read or watched news coverage of the police misconduct, the more convinced the individual became of the guilt of the officer (Chermak et al., 2006). The present paper seeks to contribute to the gap in employee misconduct research and the gap in personal misconduct out of the office. Public relations practitioners and managers need a better understanding of how to prepare their organization's reputation and lessen damage inflicted by personal misconduct situations.

Moral Licensing

Organizational reputation brings about the question of moral licensing and if it occurs when an organization or employee commits good and bad deeds. Moral licensing is a "non-conscious effect" in social psychology defined as "a cognitive bias, which enables individuals to behave immorally without threatening their self-image of being a moral person" (Simbrunner & Schlegelmilch, 2017, pp. 201-202). A systematic study by Monin and Miller (2001) first observed the effect. There are two types of moral licensing, self-moral licensing and third party moral licensing. Most researchers focus on self-moral licensing in the social psychology field. Self-moral licensing occurs when an individual excuses him or herself for a bad deed due to previous good deeds (Monin & Miller, 2001).

Third Party Moral Licensing

The present study focuses on third party moral licensing, which occurs when "observers reduce their condemnation of morally dubious behavior or the actor who committed it in light of the actor's previous good deeds" (Effron & Monin, 2010, p. 1618). Although there is little research on third party moral licensing, the existing research does shed light on the conditions in which observers give a moral license (Effron & Monin, 2010). Moral licensing can occur in two models: the moral credits and the moral credentials models (Effron & Monin, 2010). The moral credits model occurs when an individual's bad deeds do not outweigh their good deeds (Effron & Monin, 2010). Effron and Monin (2010) describe credits as a moral bank account. For every good deed, more is added to the bank, and bad deeds represent a loss or debt. Individuals can engage in a bad deed and receive a moral license if their moral bank has the credits built up from previous good deeds to match or exceed the debt of the bad deed. However, if the bad deed is too severe, a moral deficit is incurred, and a moral license is unlikely to occur. The moral credits model results in licensing due to balance (Effron & Monin, 2010).

The second model is moral credentials, which occurs when an individual's good deeds make their ambiguous bad deeds appear less severe (Effron & Monin, 2010). This model explains how an individual's previous good deeds cause the observers to interpret the bad deed as not bad at all (Effron & Monin, 2010). Monin and Miller (2001) observed that when males had a chance to disagree with sexist statements, it gave them moral credentials to describe a stereotypically masculine job as not suited for women. Contrary to moral credits that describe licensing as a balance of good and bad deeds, moral credentials are best described by observing future deeds through a lens which obscures the actions in a more favorable light (Effron & Monin, 2010). When using the moral credentials model, observers receive information of past good deeds, which shape how they view the present bad deed (Effron & Monin, 2010).

Researchers have built upon the credits and credentials models by providing scenarios that aid the moral licensing effect (Effron & Monin, 2010). The first scenario is that the good and bad deeds must be in different domains, or different types of actions (Effron & Monin, 2010). Conversely, a convoluted or ambiguously bad deed can receive a license in both the same and different domains (Effron & Monin, 2010). Third party moral licensing relies on the observer's interpretation of the deeds. The effect occurs because a prior good deed in the same realm could give credibility to why the vague deed is not bad (Effron & Monin, 2010). If the interpretation of a bad deed in the same realm is changed, a moral license can occur (Effron & Monin, 2010).

The present research focuses on the moral licensing of individuals. Researchers sought to determine if the news media can influence a moral license from readers based on the individual frames provided in a news story. There is currently no research empirically proving the news media can influence this effect. Researchers specifically wanted to determine if publics give moral credentials to the subject of a news story on misconduct if the media makes them aware of a previous good deed. Moral licensing effects are measured as the dependent variable by observing an increase or decrease with the independent variable (i.e., the good or bad deed). In order to measure the effect, the researchers used framing theory to develop realistic individual frames to manipulate as independent variables in the news story.

Framing

Goffman (1974) first developed the concept to describe how people interpret everyday life in their own eyes. Goffman refers to this as "schemata of interpretation" or the act of a person placing a sequence of events together to give meaning that is absent when observed individually (1974, p. 21). Gitlin (1980) defined frames as ''persistent patterns of cognition,

interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion'' used by journalists to organize large quantities of information to present to audiences (p. 7). Frames are selective information provided in the form of a narrative that construct an argument for the public's consideration (Entman, 1993). Frames can define problems, diagnose causes of issues, make moral judgments about those entities that caused the problem, and suggest solutions to the problem (Entman, 1993).

The present study used Hallahan's (1999) definition of attribute framing to conceptualize individual frames as "semantic framing used to focus on particular attributes that might be flattering or derogatory and thus, be advantageous or disadvantageous to message sponsors" (pp. 211-212). Researchers used a derogatory frame to represent a history of misconduct associated with the organization and a flattering frame to represent a previous good deed by the employee. In doing so, researchers could understand how individual frames affect an organization's stakeholders and their changing perception of the organization following an incident of employee misconduct in an off-duty incident.

RQ1: How, if at all, does employee misconduct, in a personal capacity, affect an organization's reputation?

RQ2: How, if at all, do individual frames affect an organization's reputation?

RQ3: How, if at all, do the individual frames affect perceived professional ethics standards for the organization?

RQ4: Do stakeholders give individuals a moral license to break the law?

RQ5: Do stakeholders factor a history of misconduct from the organization while passing judgement on the employee?

Method

This study employs framing through a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial design experiment with control (N = 411). The independent variables are service (U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps), history of organizational misconduct (present, absent), and previous good deed by the employee (present, absent). Researchers received approval to complete the experiment through the Institutional Review Board on December 6, 2019, protocol identification number: HS-2019-0286. There are drawbacks to this method. The design used a single stimulus design, and a participant's previous exposure to news stories of misconduct by servicemembers is uncontrollable.

Participants

Participants ranged in age between 18 and 47 years old (M = 21, SD = 3.15), with 97% age-eligible to join the U.S. Marine Corps and 99% eligible for the U.S. Navy. Females accounted for 79% of participants, and 21% were male. Of the participants that indicated political party affiliation, 44% were Democrats, 12% Republican, 12% Independent, and 29% reported no political party.

Researchers determined the sample size by performing a power analysis with an alpha = .05 and a power of 0.80. The projected sample size required 38 participants in each cell. Thus the study's sample (N = 411) is appropriate.

Procedure

The researchers collected data in December 2019. The researchers created a news story of a servicemember arrested for allegedly driving under the influence to serve as the stimulus. Researchers chose an alcohol-related incident based on research, which shows that California news media give stories involving trauma and driving drunk more prominent coverage compared

to other stories involving alcohol (Myhre et al., 2002). By creating a fictitious scenario, the researchers were able to prevent any prior exposure to news coverage of previous misconduct.

The independent variables are the frames in the news story. Researchers manipulated the branch of service, a history of organizational misconduct, and a moral licensing frame for the employee. There were eight versions of the local news story, four as a U.S. Navy Sailor and four as a U.S. Marine, presented to participants. We manipulated the independent variables as follows:

- *news story* (Navy *n* = 52, Marine Corps *n* = 54): Served as the experiment control. Participants were presented with a local news of a servicemember arrested for allegedly driving under the influence and causing a car accident, injuring two civilians.
- *history of organizational misconduct* (Navy *n* = 51, Marine Corps *n* = 51): Participants were presented with the same news story of a servicemember arrested for allegedly driving under the influence and causing a car accident, injuring two civilians. An additional paragraph states this is the fifth incident of a servicemember driving under the influence in the previous 30 days.
- *employee moral license* (Navy *n* = 53, Marine Corps *n* = 50): Participants were presented with the same news story of a servicemember arrested for allegedly driving under the influence and causing a car accident, injuring two civilians. An additional paragraph is added to state the servicemember made news during Hurricane Dorian relief efforts when he rescued a family trapped in their attic from the storm surge.
- *history of organizational misconduct and employee moral license* (Navy *n* = 49, Marine Corps *n* = 51): Participants were presented with the same news story of a servicemember arrested for allegedly driving under the influence and causing a car accident, injuring two civilians. The *history of misconduct* and the *moral licensing* paragraphs were added to state this is the fifth incident of DUI and the servicemember saved a family during Hurricane Dorian.

The dependent variable is how participants respond to the individual frames of the news story and the effects on the reputation of the organization and moral licensing.

Three manipulation checks were used, one for each of the independent variables. The manipulation checks worked.

Instrument

The experiment employed pretest and posttest. The pretest asked participants to provide their gender, age, and political affiliation before completing two scales with the U.S. Navy in mind, and again for the U.S. Marine Corps. The posttest repeated the two scales.

The Coombs and Holladay (1996) organizational reputation scale is a unidimensional, 10-item scale measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). This scale was used in the pretest and posttest for each service. Cronbach's alpha for reliability scores were as follows: .84 for the U.S. Navy pretest, .84 for the U.S. Marine Corps pretest, and .79 for the posttest.

The Valentine and Fleischman (2008) professional ethics standards scale is a five-item unidimensional scale measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The scale was developed to measure the perceptions of organizational ethical standards. In the absence of a moral licensing scale, the PES scale was used in the pretest and posttest. Researchers sought to determine if a change in perceived ethical standards of the organization and individuals can be used to determine if a third party moral licensing effect

occurred. Cronbach's alpha for reliability scores were as follows: .87 for the U.S. Navy pretest, .86 for the U.S. Marine Corps pretest, and .84 for the posttest.

Due to a lack of moral licensing scales, the researchers crafted two items, measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5), to provide a starting point for a moral licensing scale. The two questions included "the servicemember should receive a harsh punishment from the military" and "the servicemember is a good person."

As a final question, researchers asked participants what, if any, connection they have to the military. Researchers combined participants with a connection to the military and those without to serve as a nominal variable for analyzing results. Of the participants that provided a response, 51% reported a connection to the military either through personal service or close family or friend, and 43% reported no personal connection to the military.

Results

Researchers analyzed the data using independent samples t-tests, paired samples t-tests, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and one-way repeated measures ANOVAs.

Organizational Reputation

Researchers first wanted to determine if a news story depicting an employee's misconduct in a personal capacity (e.g., outside of the office) affects organizational reputation (RQ1). A series of paired samples t-tests showed that organizational reputation (U.S. Navy M = 2.83, SD = 0.38; U.S. Marine Corps M = 2.87, SD = 0.40) showed little change after reading a news article about employee misconduct (U.S. Navy M = 2.91, SD = 0.36; U.S. Marine Corps M = 2.92, SD = 0.35), $t(395) = -3.44$, $p = 0.001$ and $t(395) = -1.89$, $p = 0.059$, respectively.

Once it was determined there was little change in organizational reputation after

Table 1

Means and standard deviations for organizational reputation by article type and service.

Article type		Pretest		Posttest	
	N	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
U.S. Navy					
News article	51	2.86	0.40	2.84	0.39
History of organizational misconduct	47	2.80	0.33	2.96	0.48
Employee moral license	53	2.85	0.32	2.92	0.28
History of organizational misconduct with employee moral license	47	2.82	0.36	2.83	0.29
U.S. Marine Corps					
News Article	52	2.88	0.35	2.91	0.22
History of organizational misconduct	51	2.89	0.31	3.05	0.31
Employee moral license	47	2.85	0.45	2.90	0.42
History of organizational misconduct with employee moral license	50	2.91	0.36	2.90	0.37

Note. Organizational reputation was rated as a 10-item index on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).

participants read a news story of an employee's misconduct, researchers needed to determine how, if at all, does each frame affect organizational reputation (RQ2). A one-way ANOVA showed a statistically significant effect of the article type on organizational reputation, $F(3, 402) = 3.29$, $p = .021$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that mean score for the history of organizational misconduct ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.40$) was significantly different from the control news story ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.32$) and the news story containing both a history of organizational misconduct and an employee moral license ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.33$). However, the news story with only the employee's moral license was not statically different ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.37$).

Organizational reputation change scores were subjected to a one-way repeated measures ANOVA to determine if there is a significant difference in mean scores from the pretest to posttest based on article type and service (see Table 1). The U.S. Navy one-way repeated measures ANOVA determined there was no significant effect of the article type on organizational reputation from the pretest to posttest. No significant main effects were observed among the article type (Wilks’ Lambda = .984, $F(1, 194) = 3.16$, $p = .077$) and no interaction effects between article type and organizational reputation from the pretest to posttest, Wilks’ Lambda = .977, $F(3, 194) = 1.50$, $p = .217$. The same analysis for the U.S. Marine Corps yielded the same results with no main effects, Wilks’ Lambda = .983, $F(1, 196) = 3.32$, $p = .070$, and no interaction effect, Wilks’ Lambda = .981, $F(3, 196) = 1.26$, $p = .289$.

A series of independent samples t-tests found no significant impact of gender (male $M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.36$; female $M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.36$), $t(403) = 1.060$, $p = .290$, or military connection (no military connection $M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.39$; has military connection $M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.30$), $t(378) = -0.28$, $p = .783$, on organizational reputation.

Professional Ethics Standard.

Researchers used the perceived professional ethics standard to determine how an employee’s misconduct affects an organization’s ethical reputation (RQ3). A series of paired samples t-tests showed that professional ethics standards (U.S. Navy $M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.76$; U.S. Marine Corps $M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.72$) showed a significant decrease after reading a news article about employee misconduct (U.S. Navy $M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.72$; U.S. Marine Corps $M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.72$), $t(403) = 12.26$, $p < 0.001$ and $t(402) = 11.98$, $p < 0.001$, respectively. A one-way ANOVA determined there was no significant effect of article type on perceived professional ethics standards $F(3, 401) = 2.09$, $p = .101$.

Table 2

Means and standard deviations for professional ethics standards by article type and service.

Article type		Pretest		Posttest	
	N	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
U.S. Navy					
News article	52	3.49	0.72	3.04	0.84
History of organizational misconduct	50	3.34	0.77	2.91	0.51
Employee moral license	52	3.64	0.76	3.01	0.66

History of organizational misconduct with employee moral license	49	3.38	0.59	2.73	0.64
U.S. Marine Corps					
News Article	52	3.31	0.89	3.04	0.22
History of organizational misconduct	50	3.21	0.75	2.67	0.31
Employee moral license	49	3.40	0.63	2.89	0.42
History of organizational misconduct with employee moral license	50	3.32	0.74	3.09	0.37

Note. Professional ethics standards were rated as a 5-item index on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare professional ethics standards by articles with a history of organizational misconduct. There was a significant difference in the scores for articles with a history of organizational misconduct present (M = 2.85, SD = 0.70) and absent (M = 2.30, SD = 0.73), $t(403) = 2.05$, $p = .041$. Two additional independent-samples t-tests determined there was no significant difference between the articles with an employee moral licensing (present M = 2.93, SD = 0.67; absent M = 2.92, SD = 0.77, $t(403) = -0.22$, $p = .830$) nor by service (U.S. Navy M = 2.93, SD = 0.68; U.S. Marine Corps M = 2.92, SD = 0.76, $t(403) = 0.07$, $p = .943$).

Professional ethics standards change scores were subjected to a repeated-measures ANOVA to determine if there is a significant difference in mean scores from the pretest to posttest based on the article type (see Table 2). The analysis determined there was no significant impact on professional ethics standards from the pretest to posttest based on article type. There is a significantly large main effect observed among the professional ethics standards, Wilks' Lambda = .727, $F(1, 400) = 149.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .27$. There were no significant interaction effects of the article type on professional ethics standards scores, Wilks' Lambda = .996, $F(3, 400) = 0.57$, $p = .638$.

A series of independent samples t-tests found no significant impact of gender (male M = 3.02, SD = 0.73; female M = 2.90, SD = 0.72), $t(402) = 1.43$, $p = .153$, or military connection (no military connection M = 2.92, SD = 0.68; has military connection M = 2.91, SD = 0.78), $t(377) = 0.13$, $p = .896$, on professional ethics standards.

Third Party Moral Licensing

In the absence of a moral licensing scale, researchers asked each participant to indicate to what degree an employee is a good person and if the employee should receive a harsh punishment from the organization. The analyses determined whether participants give employees a moral license to break the law (RQ4) and if the history of an organization's misconduct impacts the perceived severity of punishment (RQ5).

Good Person

Researchers analyzed participants' responses to determine to what degree participants felt the servicemember was a bad person to determine if a third party moral license occurred. An independent samples t-test showed that participants who received one of the two articles with an employee moral license present, viewed the individual as a better person than the articles without a moral license variable (employee moral license present M = 3.40, SD = 0.87; absent M = 2.81, SD = 0.82), $t(407) = -7.12$, $p < 0.001$.

With significant results indicating that participants gave the servicemember a moral license, researchers analyzed to what degree by article type. A one-way ANOVA showed a significant effect of the article type on how participants responded, $F(3, 405) = 17.07$, $p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that mean scores for the employee moral licensing article ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.79$) and the history of organizational misconduct with an employee moral license article ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.95$) were both significantly different than the control news story ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.01$) and the history of organizational misconduct article ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 0.79$). However, the moral license article was not statistically different from the history of organizational misconduct with the employee moral license article.

An independent samples t-test found a significant difference in mean scores based on whether the participants had a connection to the military ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.87$) or not ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.93$), $t(380) = -2.26$, $p = .024$). A second independent samples t-test found no significant difference in mean scores based on gender (Male $M = 3.18$, SD 0.86; Female $M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.91$), $t(406) = 1.01$, $p = .314$. A final second independent samples t-test found no significant difference between mean scores and service (U.S. Navy $M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.85$; U.S. Marine Corps $M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.93$), $t(407) = 1.71$, $p = .088$.

Punishment

To determine if third party moral licensing effects included a lesser punishment, researchers asked participants to indicate to what degree they felt "*the servicemember should receive a harsh punishment from the military.*" The item was reverse coded to reflect a more severe punishment as a lower mean score and a less severe punishment as a higher mean score.

An independent samples t-test showed that participants who received one of the two articles with an employee moral license present, felt the servicemember should receive a less harsh punishment from the military (employee moral license present $M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.04$; absent $M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.97$), $t(409) = -2.99$, $p = 0.003$.

A one-way ANOVA showed a significant effect of the article type on the severity of the punishment participants felt the servicemember should receive from the military, $F(3, 405) = 17.07$, $p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that mean scores for the article of a history of organizational misconduct with an employee moral license ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.12$) was significantly different from the history of organizational misconduct ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 0.96$). However, the control news article ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 0.97$) and the employee moral license article ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 0.95$) was not statistically different from the history of organizational misconduct with the employee moral license article.

An independent samples t-test found a significant difference in mean scores based on whether the participants had a connection to the military ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 0.94$) or not ($M = 2.43$, SD 1.01), $t(382) = 2.64$, $p = .009$. A second independent samples t-test found no significant difference in mean scores based on gender (Males $M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.07$; Females $M = 2.30$, $SD = 0.99$), however, the findings are just outside of significance, $t(408) = 1.87$, $p = .062$. A final independent samples t-test found no significant difference in participants' responses based on service (U.S. Navy $M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.04$; U.S. Marine Corps $M = 2.35$, $SD = 0.98$), $t(409) = -0.13$, $p = .897$.

Discussion

The assumption that any negative news coverage may affect an organization's reputation is not new, with a plethora of research to support the thought. For the military, if there is an emotional appeal for students or potential recruits, a diminished reputation can result in potential

recruits deciding not to join the military (Einwiller et al., 2010). The same goes for an organization looking to recruit and hire top talent. Understanding the impact of employee misconduct on organizational reputation is important for public relations practitioners.

Organizational Reputation

The first research question asked *how, if at all, does employee misconduct, in a personal capacity, affect an organization's reputation*? The difference in mean scores from the pretest to the posttest indicates a slight increase in organizational reputation after exposure to a negative news article. For the U.S. Navy, the difference was significant, and the U.S. Marine Corps' difference was just outside of significance. Therefore, a negative news article does not negatively impact organizational reputation. Additionally, the individual frames (RQ2) had little effect on organizational reputation. The findings show that even a history of organizational misconduct did not have a different effect on the control news story. Nor did a moral license, indicating that stakeholders judge an employee based on his or her actions and do not view less of the reputation of the organization.

Perceived Ethics Standards

The professional ethics standards scale was used by researchers to look at reputation from an ethical angle. Although organizational reputation is a good scale, it does not address how an organization holds accountability for its employees or ethical values. Research question three asks *how, if at all, do the individual frames affect the perceived professional ethics standards of the organization*? The results of the paired samples t-test and ANOVAs show a significant decrease in mean scores following any negative news article. The results indicate that while organizational reputation escapes relatively unharmed, an organization's perceived ethical standards take a significant hit. Articles with a history of organizational misconduct frame also had a significant effect on the organization's ethics standards, but moral licensing and service did not. The results indicate that stakeholders are judging the organization based on the actions of the employee, and a good deed does not alter their impressions of the misconduct.

Third Party Moral Licensing

The most significant finding in the present paper is that the news media can influence a moral licensing effect in stakeholders, a media effect never previously observed experimentally (RQ4). Findings show that stakeholders do not factor a history of organizational misconduct while passing judgment on the employee (RQ5). Stakeholders determined that the employee's good deed should lessen their punishment for their misconduct. Interestingly, a connection to the military showed a significant difference in views of punishment severity. That is, those with a connection to the military, either through personal service or having close family and friends who served, felt the servicemember should receive a harsher punishment than those with no connection to the military. An individual may benefit from a moral licensing effect; however, the findings indicate that an organization does not receive any benefit.

Limitations

In designing the experiment, the researchers did not control for an individual not in the military to determine if participants gave some level of a moral license in the control news story for being in the military. Researchers did not include a variable to look for differences in the gender of the servicemember arrested for personal misconduct. Because females determined the servicemember should have a harsher punishment than males, replicating the study with a female could provide researchers data to determine if females respond the same toward a female's misconduct.

Future Research

The purpose of this study was to address several research gaps in organizational reputation and third party moral licensing. With any research, each finding results in more questions for future studies to answer.

The present study has found that employee misconduct outside of work does not negatively affect an organization's reputation. However, this study focused on two similar military organizations. Future research should consider replicating the study using different types of non-military organizations to determine if the same results occur. More research is needed to determine if the severity of the misconduct may change the impact on the organization. The researchers specifically chose the misconduct for the moral license, but a more severe incident could have different results on organizational reputation.

Third party moral licensing now has a wide range of considerations for future research in the mass communication field. First and foremost, a moral licensing instrument is needed to fully capture the effect in experiments and the degree to which the news media can influence the effect. With evidence of the effect empirically proven, researchers need to identify the upper and lower bounds of the good and bad deed to determine at what point the effect ceases to exist, or the effect is no longer beneficial. In the present study, the good and bad deeds were very clearly defined; however, some actions may be ambiguous as to the intention of the actor. Alternatively, stakeholders may not agree amongst themselves. An organization may view a deed as bad and take steps to punish an employee and find society disagrees, potentially negatively impacting the organization. Research should determine if or at what point stakeholders could force the hand of an organization to act differently than desired by senior leadership or executives in order to protect reputation.

Conclusion

Organizational reputation research focusing on employee misconduct is limited. The present study determined that local news coverage of employee misconduct does not impact organizational reputation. The same results held for an organization with a history of employee misconduct. However, the significant negative impact on an organization's perceived professional ethics standards is concerning and underscores the importance of assessing more than one attribute associated with an organization. Lastly, the empirical evidence of the news media's ability to influence audiences to use moral credentials to moral license an individual's misconduct is significant. The third party moral licensing effect impacts how participants perceive the individual as a good person and the perceived severity of punishment. Although this study is the first to observe the effect, extensive research is necessary to fully understand the impact and effects of third party moral licensing.

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Understanding Online Risks: Developing an Analytic Framework Integrating Paracrisis Types and Response Strategies

Feifei Chen
College of Charleston

Sherry J. Holladay
Texas A&M University

Abstract

This study systematically examined 143 paracrisis cases to extend and refine typologies of paracrisis clusters and organizational response strategies. By connecting refined paracrisis clusters with organizations' actual uses of single and combined paracrisis response strategies, a paracrisis communication framework was proposed, which can guide decision making on appropriate responses.

Keywords: paracrisis, crisis risk, social media, paracrisis response strategies, paracrisis cluster

For almost a decade, scholars and practitioners alike have used the term "*social media crisis*" to refer to both crisis risks and full-fledged crises that spread on social media platforms (e.g., Aula, 2010; Oelschig, 2018; *"Speed and Scope,"* 2009). Recent surveys (e.g., ERM Initiative & Protivit, 2019) indicate that many organizations feel ill-prepared to manage risks in and through social media. Scholarly research in this area has lagged behind practice and has failed to offer conceptual understandings to guide practice.

Coombs and Holladay (2012) proposed the term "*paracrisis*" to distinguish *crisis risks* from actual crises emerging in digital media. This conceptual distinction is theoretically meaningful because the nature of the digital media "event" (risk vs. crisis) presents different exigencies for organizations. They further conceptualized paracrisis clusters and response strategies for challenge paracrises contingent on an organization's corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices and elaborated the paracrisis concept and response strategies (Coombs, 2017, 2019; Coombs & Holladay, 2015a). Other scholars also have begun to incorporate the concept of "paracrisis" into risk and crisis research. However, paracrisis research is still in its infancy and would benefit from research that seeks to refine the concept and describe how organizations could identify and respond to paracrises. The external validity of proposed paracrisis typologies has not been tested empirically, and the appropriateness of applying crisis response strategies to paracrisis responses is also open to question.

This project uses a case series study of 143 naturally-occurring paracrisis cases for more precise examination of the nature of and organizational responses to paracrises. The cases were systematically collected from both news coverage and trade publications and used to develop a communication framework that connects paracrisis clusters with response strategies. The following section presents the rationale for discontinuing use of the overly-general term "social media crisis," and describes the method and research findings of the case series study. The paper concludes with a brief discussion on its contributions and future research directions.

"Social Media Crisis" as a Confusing Term

When it comes to the context of social media, many scholars and practitioners have not distinguished between online crisis risks and actual organizational crises. This confusion is evident in the prevalent use of the term "social media crisis" to refer to a threatening situation that originated in and/or is magnified by social media (Coombs, 2019). When social media was in its infancy and its use was not well understood, use of this term served to attract attention to potentially negative impacts of its contents. However, at present, the term "social media crisis" is too generic to meaningfully capture the variation and range of online threats that organizations may face and need to manage. Scholarship and practice would benefit from more precise conceptualizations of specific forms of "social media crises," now more appropriately called *paracrises* (Coombs & Holladay, 2012).

Noting differences between a *crisis risk/threat* (paracrisis) and an actual crisis reveals the nature and severity of online "events," thus helping managers recognize how response strategies should be contingent upon the level of risk. A *crisis risk* is different from a crisis because a risk only has the *potential* to affect organizational reputation and operation. Managing a crisis risk is a form of crisis *prevention* – not crisis management. Although an organization may need to respond publicly when a crisis risk is visible to publics on social media, response strategies for managing a crisis might not be a good fit for crisis risks (Coombs, 2019; Coombs & Holladay, 2015a; Kim et al., 2016). After all, crisis response strategies were developed for severe events or situations that involve substantial harm to important stakeholders and threaten organizational survival (Coombs, 2019).

The lack of conceptual clarity on the differences between a crisis risk and a crisis might also interfere with crisis communication research within the social media context. For example, if a study claiming to explore online crisis communication actually uses a crisis *risk* (paracrisis) case as either an experiment scenario or case for content analysis, its conclusions are likely to be misleading. In addition, almost all crises will involve the channels of social media, as used by the publics, the organization, and many traditional media's social media extensions. Evidence indicates some practitioners are wary of applying the term "social media crisis" to describe both crisis risks and crises (e.g., Van den Hurk, 2013). Scholarly efforts are needed to address practitioner concerns through clear illustrations of the distinctions and connections between risk communication and crisis communication in the social media context.

Paracrisis Clusters and Responses

Initially, Coombs and Holladay (2012) defined a paracrisis as "a publicly visible crisis threat that charges an organization with irresponsible or unethical behavior" (p. 409). The challenge paracrisis was the first type to be identified and elaborated (Coombs & Holladay, 2012, 2015a). Later, customer service, misuse of social media, venting (see Coombs, 2015), faux pas, rumor, and collateral damage (see Coombs, 2019) were identified as paracrisis types. Though paracrises may seem similar to crises because the social media environment increases the necessity and visibility of an organization's public response, it is important to remember that paracrises are only crisis threats/risks that often arise from legitimacy gaps that require the management of meaning (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Thus, paracrisis response strategies are a form of *crisis prevention* and not crisis management. Given the differences between crisis prevention and crisis management, we should consider if and when crisis response strategies can be applied to paracrisis communication. For example, Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) recommends matching response strategies with levels of *crisis responsibility* attributed to an organization. However, as discussed by Coombs and Holladay (2012), the level of attributed responsibility for a crisis is much higher than for a paracrisis.-Because paracrises often arise from subjective values and social issues (e.g., a stakeholder group claims the organization's actions are immoral or irresponsible), the *legitimacy* of stakeholder challenges must be considered (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Although paracrisis and crisis communication share the goal to protect reputation, a distinct set of paracrisis communication strategies may be more appropriate for addressing the nature of paracrises.

Existing descriptions of crisis response strategies may provide a useful foundation for developing categories of paracrisis response strategies. For example, drawing from Benoit's (1995) integration of apologia and account analysis, Coombs and Holladay (2015a; also see Coombs & Holladay, 2012) developed six response strategies for *challenge* paracrises: (1) refusal, (2) refutation, (3) repression, (4) recognition or reception, (5) reform, and (6) revision. *Refutation* includes two sub-strategies: denial with evidence and dispute (Coombs & Holladay, 2015a). Other sporadic efforts have examined response strategies used in specific paracrisis cases. For example, Kim et al. (2016) identified the strategies of self-mockery from an organizational leader and mocking the accuser in their paracrisis case study on an unusual faux pas paracrisis. They found that traditional crisis responses did not work well for this paracrisis case. However, it is likely these two response strategies could only be used in highly unusual situations like the one they selected. There is a need for more systematic examination of how organizations are managing different types of paracrises in the social media environment.

Refining Paracrisis and Response Strategy Typologies with a Large Sample of Paracrisis Cases

An important step towards theory development is to test and refine paracrisis and response strategy typologies with a large sample of naturally-occurring cases. Systematic examination and refinement will increase the external validity (Schmuckler, 2001) of the paracrisis typology to better guide paracrisis research and communication practices. Strong external validity reflects effectively what occurs in actual contexts and increases confidence in the generalizability of the paracrisis typology. An empirically tested paracrisis typology will further clarify the confusion between a *crisis* and a *paracrisis*, as well as a *paracrisis* and a *problem* that may only constrain organizational thriving but not survival (see Coombs, 2002).

Research on paracrisis also highlights the importance of developing an empirically tested paracrisis typology tied to a response strategy typology. For example, two studies (Honisch, 2018; Kim et al., 2016) purporting to study paracrises produced discrepant response recommendations. Kim et al. (2016) suggested humorous mocking work well for paracrises; but Honisch (2018) found a humorous strategy was least effective and a reform strategy the most effective. The inconsistent findings may be attributed to the examination of two vastly different types of paracrises, further demonstrating the need to distinguish between paracrisis clusters. This effort could parallel work that identifies distinct crisis clusters and responses and allow meaningful comparisons within and between paracrisis categories.

The research questions seek to address the void in current paracrisis research by describing paracrisis and response strategy typologies and the relationship between the two:

RQ 1: To what extent do the current paracrisis typologies categorize paracrisis occurring from 2014 to 2017?

RQ 2: What response strategies did organizations use to address paracrises occurring from 2014 to 2017?

RQ 3: What single and combined response strategies were used to address different paracrisis clusters occurring from 2014 to 2017?

Method: A Case Series Approach

In the field of crisis communication, the case study method has been widely used to gain in-depth knowledge on crises as complicated, naturally occurring phenomena (Jaques, 2008) that cannot be fully assimilated by experimental designs (Yin, 2009). However, the traditional case study method, with its focus on a single case or a few cases, is prone to deficiencies in validity, reliability, and generalizability (Cutler, 2004; Michael et al., 2008). To increase the external validity of research findings, this study employs a *case series*, a method used in clinical research, to identify, categorize, and describe paracrises and responses to paracrises.

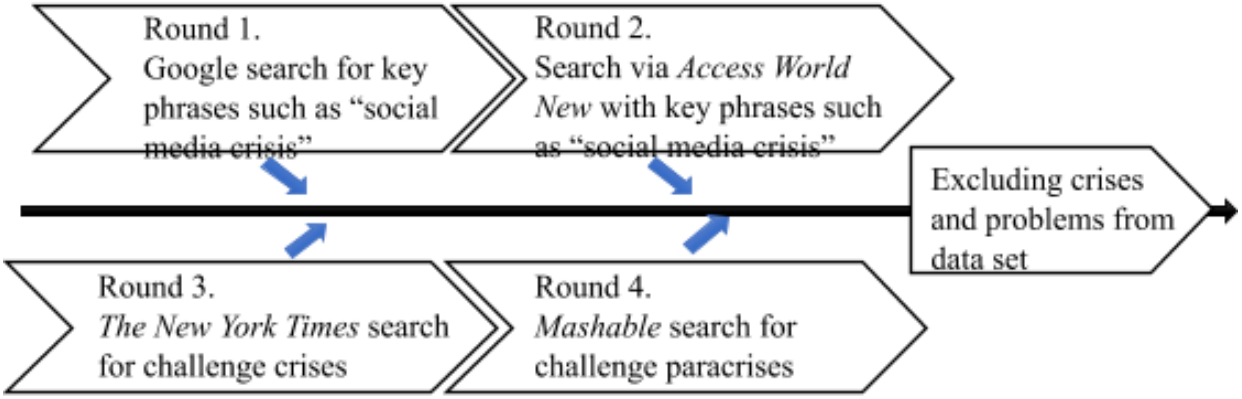
The case series approach is a descriptive, unobtrusive research method that allows clinical researchers to "follow a group of patients who have a similar diagnosis or who are undergoing the same procedure over a certain period of time" (Kooistra et al., 2009). In the absence of experimental protocol or a comparison group, case series offer an observational approach that enables patients and doctors to decide whether treatment is given or to obtain reports on novel diagnostic or therapeutic strategies. Compared to other clinical research methods, the case series excel in *external validity* because the study results resemble those obtained in actual, routine clinical practice. The primary purpose of a case series study is to develop hypotheses that can be tested later in clinical analytical studies with stronger methodological rigor. The principles and logic of case series offer a good fit with research that aims to identify externally valid paracrisis clusters and organizational response strategies.

Data Collection: Selecting the Sample

The unit of observation for this study is a paracrisis case that occurred during January 2014 to December 2017. Following the case series study's guideline to collect a diverse range of cases, this study aimed to cast a wide net to identify various clusters of paracrises reported over the four-year time frame. The goal is to capture both the overall characteristics as well as the peculiar elements of paracrises which might occur less frequently, but still warrant attention from scholars and professionals. Four separate rounds of literature search were conducted to collect cases from various sources. The last two rounds focused only on challenge paracrises, because this cluster may be more complex and less likely to be labeled as simple social media crises. Figure 1 summarizes the case collection and cleaning process, which produced a sample of 143 paracrisis cases.

Figure 1

Task Flow Chart for Data Collection and Cleaning



Since a case series approach is developed for clinical research and thus provides few guidelines on building a text-based data set, this study refers to Yin's (2009) data collection principles developed for case studies to ensure the rigor of this process. Two linked steps were taken: (1) use of multiple sources of evidence and (2) summary of cases to create the database.

The case study data set (Yin, 2009) – here, a case series - summarized information, including but not limited to, name of the organization facing a paracrisis, name of challengers (if any), description of the crisis risk, platform(s) on which the crisis risk was made publicly available, date on which the paracrisis first appeared, and organization's response(s) via its own social media account(s), the corporate website, and/or statements reported by news media and/or trade publications. Also included in the data set are specific researcher notes made when summarizing cases and collecting organizational responses.

Given the scope of the four rounds of search, it is reasonable to expect the data set is comprehensive in paracrisis clusters. The case series includes various types of organizations experiencing paracrises, including government agencies, nonprofits, large companies headquartered in different countries, medium-sized companies, and small family-owned businesses. Therefore, analyses based on this data set can be expected to have satisfactory external validity to account for paracrisis cases outside of this data set.

Analysis Procedure

The three research questions are addressed using different units of analysis. For RQ1 concerning paracrisis clusters, the unit of observation is each paracrisis case. For RQ2 on paracrisis response strategies, it is an organization's public reaction towards a paracrisis. For RQ3 connecting paracrisis clusters with response strategies, it is each paracrisis case, including a

paracrisis scenario and the response strategies used to address the paracrisis. A three-step mixed content analysis was conducted. Firstly, a round of open coding was performed, with reference drawn from existing paracrisis typologies and challenge paracrisis responses (Coombs, 2015, 2019; Coombs & Holladay, 2012, 2015a) as well as other crisis responses and elements identified in (para)crisis communication literature. After this round of opening coding, a constant comparative analysis (CCA) was conducted to distill open codes into main codes. CCA is an iterative and inductive qualitative analysis procedure that allows categories to emerge by reducing data through constant recoding (Fram, 2013). The second round of in-depth analysis led to a paracrisis typology with six paracrisis clusters and a response strategy typology containing seven strategies. Operational definitions for categories also were drafted. For the last step, the two typologies were returned to the entire data set to examine if they can account for all cases and responses, and if revisions to operational definitions were needed. During this step, the authors refined the operational definitions for faux pas paracrisis and concluded that there was no outlier piece of data that could not be explained by the framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These two revised typologies were then returned to the data set to recheck coding of clusters and response strategies. Based on the audited coding results, the authors proceeded to calculate the frequencies of paracrises clusters, as well as different response strategies used to address different clusters of paracrises. Intercoder reliability was assessed using Krippendorff's alpha. The results were satisfactory (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007) for both paracrisis clusters ($\alpha = .89$) and response strategies (refusal $\alpha = 1.00$; recognition $\alpha = .85$; refutation $\alpha = 1$; revision $\alpha = .93$; repression $\alpha = 1.00$; disassociation $\alpha = 1.00$; reference to organization values $\alpha = .84$).

Results

Typology on Paracrisis Clusters

The case series analyses informed the identification, description, and/or renaming of six paracrisis clusters based on shared characteristics: (1) faux pas (2 types), (2) challenge, (3) guilt by association, (4) misinformation, (5) social media misuse, and (6) social media account hacking (RQ1). Definitions of the clusters and the observed frequencies are reported in Table 1.

The *challenge* and *social media misuse* clusters were identified following Coombs' definitions (2015, 2019). The conceptualization of the *faux pas* cluster was modified to further distinguish two different types of faux pas paracrises. The first type, or Type I faux pas, follows Coombs' definition as a situation where an organization engages in an action that is perceived by at least some publics as embarrassing, offensive, or insensitive. The second type, or Type II faux pas, refers to a situation where an organization unwittingly a*llows* people to generate embarrassing, offensive, and/or insensitive content that can be attributed to the organization. For Type I faux pas, the organization is fully responsible for the action, albeit with no deliberate intention to upset the publics. But for Type II faux pas, the locus of control is more ambiguous, which might enable an organization to attack those who generate inappropriate content.

C*ollateral damage* (Coombs, 2019) was renamed as "*guilt by association*" to describe an organizational risk situation where "some negatively viewed actor mentions or is publicly associated with the organization" (p. 59). Through renaming, the authors distinguish this type of paracrisis from the frequently used meaning of "damage" in the crisis literature, as in reputational, financial, and/or operational damage.

Table 1

Typology on Paracrisis Clusters

Paracrisis Cluster	Description	Frequency
Faux Pas	organization takes an action with good or no bad intention but is perceived by at least some publics as embarrassing, offensive, or insensitive (Type I); (2) an organization unintentionally allows someone to generate embarrassing, offensive, or insensitive content that can be attributed to the organization (Type II)	56
Challenge	An organization's existing practice is charged by discontented stakeholders as unethical or irresponsible.	44
Guilt by Association	egatively viewed actor is publicly associated with an organization.	32
Misinformation	sk triggered by the circulation of messages about the organization that lacks veracity.	5
Social Media Misuse	tuation when an organization incurs crisis risk because it violates social media rule(s).	4
Social Media Account Hacking	tuation happens when an organization's social media account is hacked and generates crisis risk	2

Rumor paracrises (Coombs, 2019) is renamed as *misinformation* to account for all situations where messages lacking truth value are "purposefully circulated about an organization or its products in order to harm the organization" (p. 59). To include all paracrises emanating from messages with varying degrees of veracity, the authors adopt Rojecki and Meraz's (2016) conceptualization of misinformation as covering four types of unverified messages: rumor, gossip, disinformation, propaganda, and factitious information blend (FIB), which refers to misinformation generated by elites and "opinion entrepreneurs" who seek to discredit political rivals. In some cases, it is both impossible and unnecessary for organizations to distinguish misinformation types to manage a paracrisis. One example is the situation experienced by Roberta's, a Brooklyn restaurant, in 2016. Misinformation on social media sites linked this restaurant to the so-called Pizzagate hoax that claimed Hillary Clinton led a child-abuse gang that harbored children as sex slaves in a pizza restaurant. Suddenly this local restaurant became the center of national political fights and was harassed because of the misinformation, which included rumor, misinformation, disinformation, and even FIB (Rosenberg, 2016). Using misinformation as an overarching term thus may more accurately capture the complicated online flux of unverified information posted against organizations.

The analysis also revived a paracrisis type Coombs dropped in his 2019 typology: *social media misuse*. This cluster represents situations where organizations violate the often-unarticulated ethos of social media use. Take, for example, DiGiorno Pizza's inappropriate use of #WhyIStayed. After a video surfaced of Ray Rice punching his then-fiancée, thousands of female Twitter users used #WhyIStayed to discuss their tortuous, heartbreaking experiences in abusive relationships. DiGiorno jumped onto the trendy hashtag and tweeted "#WhyIStayed You had pizza." This vehemently denounced tweet could not be interpreted as an innocent mistake, because it commercialized an emotion-laden hashtag and trivialized the issue of abusive relationships (Meyer, 2015).

S*ocial media account hacking*, the newly identified cluster, also occurred infrequently but clearly was distinct from other clusters. The hacked account would be used to post insensitive, controversial, or even egregious content, and provoke short-term social media attention. Though many hackings are crises because they jeopardize an organization's daily operation and threaten information security, social media account hacking typically poses relatively minimal risk and can be managed with appropriate responses.

Typology on Paracrisis Response Strategies

Building on the six response strategies proposed for challenge paracrises (Coombs & Holladay, 2015a), this study identified seven primary response strategies (Table 2) used to address all paracrisis cases (RQ 2).

Table 2

Typology on Paracrisis Response Strategies

Response Strategy	Description
Refusal	·ganization deliberately ignores a paracrisis by not making any direct response
Refutation	·ganization denies a challenge accusation, an accused bad intention, or attack the accuser
Repression	·ganization takes efforts to silence discontented stakeholders through actions such as deleting negative social media posts
Recognition	·ganization acknowledges the validity of a challenge accusation or an accused negative intention
Revision	·ganization takes action to make change(s) regarding a faux pas or a challenged existing organizational practice
Reference to Organizational Values	·ganization refers to its organization values and/or its long-termed commitment to pursue the values to address an accused negative intention or a challenge
Disassociation	·ganization denies its connection with a negatively perceived actor or action that generates crisis risk

The *reform* and *revision* strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 2015a) were collapsed into the *revision* strategy. Originally, the revision strategy referred to an organization's partial fulfillment of the challenger's request with *minor modifications*, whereas the *reform* strategy was reserved for cases where the *exact change* demanded by the challenger was implemented. However, different challengers may hold different expectations for revision and/or reform with respect to a specific issue and thus it can be difficult to distinguish between reform and revision. Because a paracrisis may require a quick response, it is not uncommon to first make an immediate, easy-to-implement revision and/or promise a more extensive reform, and then engage in a relatively long-term issues management process to negotiate with challengers and take further action. In such scenarios, only the initial response to the challenge would be counted as a response; whether the organization eventually implements the reform is not a concern for paracrisis communication at this point. Therefore, reform and revision were collapsed into a single revision strategy to refer to efforts to implement changes regarding a faux pas or a challenge paracrisis.

Two new response strategies were identified in the data set: *disassociation* and *reference to organizational values*. Disassociation is typically used to address guilt by association and social media hacking. The goal is to separate the organization from a negatively viewed action (e.g., a racist tweet posted by a hacked account) or an actor (e.g., an employee who engaged in racial

profiling of a customer). There are two forms of disassociation: *direct disassociation* and *indirect disassociation*. The former is used when an organization publicly announces its disconnection with the entity and the negativity associated with the entity. The latter is used when an organization drops its connection with the entity *without* publicly addressing the negativity element. This often was observed when a controversial or even divisive issue is involved. For example, in 2017, online activists organized a boycott to urge department stores to drop Ivanka Trump's brand because of President Trump's political stances. Though several department stores dropped the brand, none of them stated publicly that their decision was in reaction to the protests or had anything to do with their stances toward Trump (Taylor & Hanbury, 2018).

The other newly identified response strategy is *reference to organizational values*. When organizations are accused of offending people or engaging in unethical or irresponsible behaviors, they may refer to their organization's values to counter criticism and to remind publics of their commitments to certain causes. Though this strategy might resemble *bolstering,* a secondary response strategy identified in the crisis communication literature that can be used to remind publics of an organization's good deeds, bolstering cannot stand alone but should be combined with primary crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2019). However, as a paracrisis response strategy, *reference to organizational values* can be used alone because an organization can justify its (in)action or stance by claiming it was consistent with its values.

Connecting Paracrisis Response Strategies with Paracrisis Clusters

In all, this study identifies five single and 18 combined paracrisis response strategies (RQ 3). Due to space limits, the results focus on response strategies used for the three most frequently observed clusters: challenge, faux pas, and guilt by association. For *challenge paracrises,* the most frequently used strategy is the combined use of refusal and revision, followed by refutation and reference to organizational values, and recognition and revision. The heavy use of multiple strategies, including those seemingly contradictory ones, such as refusal and revision, might demonstrate complex concerns that underlie the need to address various CSR challenges. *Faux pas paracrises* were also addressed mostly with multiple strategies, including refutation to deny a bad intention, recognition to acknowledge the unintentional act and admit it could be a valid concern, and revision in the form(s) of deleting problematic social media content, halting offensive marketing campaigns, and/or promising to prevent similar situations from re-occurring.

Table 1

Response Strategies to Address Faux Pas, Challenge, and Guilt by Association Clusters

Single and Combined Response Strategies	Faux Pas		Challenge		Guilt by Association	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Refusal	3	16.25	4	9.1	5	15.6
Refusal & Revision	1	0.45	11	25	2	6.25
Refusal & Disassociation	0	0	0	0	1	3.15
Refusal & Reference to Organizational Values	0	0	0	0	1	3.15
Repression & Reference to Organizational Values	0	0	0	0	0	0
Refutation	2	0.37	9	20.45	5	15.6
Refutation & Repression	1	0	0	0	0	0
Refutation & Recognition	2	0.04	1	2.27	0	0
Refutation & Revision	6	0.04	1	2.27	0	0
Refutation & Reference to Organizational Values	2	0.24	6	13.64	5	15.6

Refutation, Recognition, & Revision	21	0.12	3	6.81	1	3.15
Refutation, Revision, & Reference to Organizational Values	1	0.04	1	2.27	0	0
Refutation, Recognition, & Reference to Organizational Values	3	0.04	1	2.27	2	6.25
Refutation, Recognition, Revision, & Reference to Organizational Values	0	0.04	1	2.27	2	6.25
Refutation, Recognition, Reference to Organizational Values, & Disassociation	0	0	0	0	2	6.25
Recognition	2	0	0	0	0	0
Recognition & Revision	8	0.16	4	9.1	2	6.25
Recognition, Revision, & Reference to Organizational Values	3	0	0	0	0	0
Revision	0	0.04	1	2.27	2	6.25
Revision & Reference to Organizational Values	0	0.04	1	2.27	0	0
Reference to Organizational Values	1	0	0	0	0	0
Disassociation	0	0	0	0	1	3.15
Reference to Organizational Values & Disassociation	0	0	0	0	1	3.15

Note. The *n* size is the frequency of a single or combined use of response strategies employed to address a paracrisis cluster; percentage represents the *n* size of a strategy divided by the total number of paracrises within the cluster.

Guilt by association is a unique paracrisis cluster because it concerns negative perceptions of an organization that arise *not* because of its own (in)action but because of its association with another negatively viewed entity. Though an organization can use disassociation to sever its connection with a negatively viewed entity, this strategy was employed less frequently than strategies such as refusal and refutation when counting both single and combined uses. This is probably because denying association with a negatively viewed entity often comes at a tangible cost, ranging from terminating a partnership with a controversial celebrity hunter (Mirabella & Barker, 2016) to a business owner's self-resignation because of his offensive remarks on political, religious, and feminist issues (Lindelof, 2017). Furthermore, when an entity is viewed negatively by some publics because of a complicated, divisive issue, using disassociation to sever its connection with the entity could fail to address the concerns of different publics who supported the association. Shifts in alliances might even make an organization looks inconsistent given its previous connection with the entity.

Limited case frequencies hinder the ability to discern response strategy patterns for misinformation, social media misuse, and social media hacking paracrises. However, these clusters may be easier to manage because the loci of responsibility and control are less ambiguous. For *misinformation* paracrises, the most appropriate response strategy is *refutation* that denies a falsified charge and provides verified information. For *social media misuse* paracrises, we believe an organization should use (1) *recognition* to admit and apologize violating social media ethos, and (2) *revision* to fix its mistake. For *social media account hacking*, *refutation* can be used to deny agency in posting offensive social media content, together with *recognition* to acknowledge the inappropriateness of content posted by hackers,

and *revision* to remove the objectionable content and promise future action to prevent similar paracrises from re-occurring.

Discussion

Systematic examination of trade publications and news media coverage of "social media crises" confirms the term is vague and misrepresents crisis risks as actual crises. A paracrisis arises when a crisis risk is made public, typically through online communication including social media and sometimes traditional media as well, and publics may observe the content of the risk (i.e., the type of paracrisis) as well as if and how the organization responds to the risk.

The data analysis confirmed that while operational incidents spreading online are often called "social media crises," they are actually customer relations problems, online labor rights protests, or other operational problems that can be addressed by management functions other than risk or crisis management communication. These problems are not paracrises because paracrises are closely aligned with stakeholders' CSR associations with an organization, *not* corporate ability (CA) associations. The distinction is clarified below.

Sohn and Larisy (2014) distinguished two types of reputational crises: CA reputational crises and CSR reputational crises. CA reputational crises affect reputation related to the "expertise of products and service, technological innovation, and industry leadership", whereas CSR reputational crises threaten reputation "associated with norms and values cherished by society and socially expected obligation" (p. 25). If we extend this CA-CSR distinction to online crisis threats, it is clear that paracrises are CSR crisis risks contingent upon social obligations, and customer complaints and other operational problems are CA incidents that might evolve into a CA crisis if not addressed properly. But before a CA incident shows signs of escalation, intervention should be delivered from its corresponding operational function, *not* crisis communication professionals. Paracrisis responses may be appropriate to address a CA problem only when an organization's unfair or unjust treatment of customers or employees and triggers a CSR risk.

This research also can help understand previous research's discrepancies in the effectiveness of response strategies. Recalling the contradictory results between Kim et al. (2016) and Honisch's (2018) studies, what Kim et al. examined can be classified as a faux pas paracrisis triggered by the organizations' unintentionally exaggerated tweet, whereas Honisch (2018) seemed to investigate challenge paracrises regarding a CSR issue. Although humorous self-mockery can be a creative way to *recognize* a faux pas and *refute* a deceptive intent, it probably is inappropriate for communicating an organization's stance on a serious CSR concern. With a consensus understanding of paracrisis clusters, future work on response strategies will be more productive in generating theories to guide practice.

The set of response strategies identified in the data set supports Coombs' (2017) argument that paracrisis responses are variations of crisis responses. Though paracrisis response strategies might resemble crisis response strategies, they may differ when applied to paracrisis communication practices. For example, both refutation and denial strategies for crisis communication involve the element of attacking the accuser. But denial as a highly defensive strategy would be inconsistent with more accommodative ones such as compensation (provides money to victims) or excuse (minimizes the organization's culpability for the crisis). However, refutation frequently was used in combination with other more "accommodative" strategies such as recognition and/or revision to manage challenge and faux pas clusters, so that an organization can deny its intention to cause harm while admitting the validity of an accusation and taking

corrective actions. Such combined use of strategies underlies the dynamic of agitation and control (Bowers et al., 2009; Coombs & Holladay, 2015b) during paracrisis communication, which, arguably, is what separates paracrisis response strategies from crisis response strategies. When a paracrisis emerges, publics may observe if and how the organization responds. Effective responses serve as *crisis prevention*, not crisis management (Coombs, 2018; Coombs & Holladay, 2012), and may mitigate the threat and preserve the organization's reputation.

Conclusion and Practical Implications

This project is the first to systematically identify and describe paracrisis clusters and response strategies and to formulate a framework with rich possibilities for developing and testing hypotheses. This study's rigorous description can provide an externally valid foundation for future analytic studies that can examine and test the response strategies used to address different paracrisis clusters and offer additional distinctions between paracrises and crises.

Although the term "paracrisis" may not yet have entered social media professionals' vocabulary, the case series demonstrates many practitioners have intuitively acted upon the distinctions and responded accordingly. Yet when faced with sudden, intense social media backlash, an organization might misdiagnose the situation and fail to respond appropriately, as in the case the Houston Rockets firing its digital manager for sending "a dumb, but harmless tweet" and triggering more criticism for doing so (Gaines, 2015). Articulating more explicit terminology for online crisis risks and response strategies thus has heuristic value for theory-based practice, especially for organizations with relatively fewer resources or less experience on social media monitoring and communication.

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Understanding Boycotts of Japanese Products in South Korea via Patriotism, Government-Foreign Public Relationship, Animosity, and Communicative Action

Myoung-Gi Chon
Auburn University

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand what motivates South Koreans to engage in boycott movements toward another country's products. The research is conducted through the lens of public relations in the context of the 2019 trade dispute between Japan and South Korea. Using the concepts of patriotism, the relationship quality established between a government and foreign publics (i.e., Koreans), and consumer animosity, this study tested a theoretical model to predict South Korean boycott of Japanese products. The results of this study show that government-foreign public relationship with patriotism is strongly associated with consumer animosity and predicted both peer communication behavior and boycott behavior of South Koreans against Japanese products. The results contribute to international strategic communication.

Keywords: Government-foreign public relationship, patriotism, consumer animosity, 2019 South Korean boycott of Japanese products

A national boycott movement is a complicated phenomenon that is intertwined with nation-to-nation relationships, foreign politics, and consumer behaviors. For example, a large-scale boycott movement against Japanese products has been actively conducted in South Korea since the summer of 2019. Covering food, beer, cosmetics, cars, and travel, the unprecedented calls for South Koreans to boycott Japanese goods intensified after the Japanese government placed restrictions on exports of semiconductor materials and removed South Korea from its "white list" of preferred trading partners (Lee & Dooley, 2019). This trade tension has been fueled by the legacy of World War II (Green, 2019), showing how foreign consumers in the globalized market environment are sensitively influenced by political conflicts (Brazinsky, 2019).

Why do South Koreans avoid purchasing products or services related to Japan when their governments are in conflict? Scholars in consumer behavior research have suggested that patriotism, nationalism, and internationalism influence foreign publics' boycotting movements in the context of the territorial dispute between Japan and China (Yang et al., 2015). Animosity and negative emotion also play a vital role in publics' boycotting behaviors against a hostile country (Antonetti et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2015). Despite the importance of understanding boycott movements from the perspective of the government-public relationship and foreign publics' communicative behaviors, however, previous researchers have not taken an integrative approach using public relations and consumer behaviors to examine publics' collective behaviors toward a foreign country and its products.

Therefore, this study aims to understand what motivates publics to engage in boycott movements toward another country's products through the lens of public relations and consumer behavior. Using the framework of government-foreign public relationship and consumer animosity, we examined the effects of individuals' patriotism and the relationship quality established between a foreign (i.e., Japanese) government and publics (i.e., Koreans) on public animosity including historical, economic, and situational animosity. We further focus on three categories of boycott movement (i.e., food, clothing, & car) to test how animosity and individuals' active communicative actions affect boycotting intentions in the context of the Korea-Japan conflict. The results of this study will contribute to international strategic communication by understanding a given issue between two countries.

Literature Review

Consumer Animosity

The concept of consumer animosity (CA) was introduced by Klein et al. (1998), who defined it as remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events. Klein et al. (1998) identified two major types of animosity (i.e., war animosity and economic animosity), but later researchers have suggested different dimensions of CA. For example, Nes et al. (2012) proposed a four-dimensional construct of animosity including economic, military/war, people, and politics/government. Scholars have generally believed that consumer animosity can be explained by longstanding antipathy (i.e., historical animosity) and "recent" or temporary hostility newly instigated by a conflict between countries (i.e., contemporary) (Yang, Snell, & Tsai, 2015). In a dual-dimensional model, Lee and Lee (2013) similarly proposed and conceptualized historical animosity as strong antagonistic emotions accumulated over time that stem primarily from past war hostility and contemporary animosity that is situational and is underpinned by hostile recent economic disputes.

Other researchers have distinguished two different types of animosity: stable versus situational. Juag et al. (2002) defined stable animosity as "general antagonistic emotions accumulated over the years because of historical events such as previous economic or military hostilities between countries" (p. 527). Stable animosity is antipathy toward another country that can be inherited and not necessarily personally experienced, such as contemporary Korean consumers' enduring antagonism against Japan due to historical events. In contrast, situational animosity is conceptualized as "strong emotions of enmity associated with a specific circumstance at hand" (Jung et al., 2002, p. 527) sparked by recent or ongoing conflict, such as Korean consumers' response to the latest economic crisis.

Given that the boycott movement of Koreans toward Japanese products in 2019 is not only based on citizens' antagonism resulting from past historical conflicts between the two countries but also evoked by situational and contemporary international issues, this study conceptualizes and tests a multidimensional CA by delineating historical, contemporary, and situational animosity as three distinct constructs.

Antecedents of Consumer Animosity

Patriotism

Defined as a love of one's own country and the level of one's identification with one's nation and its symbols (Sharma et al., 1995), patriotism has been studied to understand consumers' motivations for purchasing foreign products. Patriotism is related to two different perceptions of the sense of belonging to one's nation: instrumental and sentimental attachment (Meier-Pesti & Kirchler, 2003). Instrumental attachment implies the benefits that a person can gain as a member of a certain nation, while sentimental attachment develops in situations where personal values coincide with national ones. Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) suggest that patriotism is associated with one's sentiments of attachment, affection, and loyalty to one's own country without hostility toward other nations.

Patriotism is based on emotional attachment to one's own nation and thus acts as a defense mechanism for the in-group (Adorno et al., 1950; Mihalyi, 1984). Patriotic individuals feel a sense of pride and affection for domestically made products that makes them prefer domestic products to foreign ones (Han, 1998). Scholars have also found that consumers who are patriotic are likely to have high levels of animosity (Klein & Ettenson, 1999). As patriotism is inherently favorable attitudes toward one's native country, consumers' strong patriotism is strongly related to their animosity toward another country (Yang et al., 2015).

In the context of the current study, when an international dispute such as the Japan-Korea economic crisis occurred, patriotic Korean consumers are more likely to have antagonistic emotions toward Japan. In other words, Korean consumers who are highly patriotic toward Korea may exhibit greater animosity toward Japan during the period of an international dispute. The following hypothesis is thus proposed:

H1. Patriotism is positively associated with consumer animosity.

Government-foreign public relationship

In this study, we also examine how the relationship quality between Japan and South Korea will predict animosity toward Japanese products. Scholars in strategic communication have studied the role of relationship to increase organizational effectiveness (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Ki, Kim, & Ledingham). In particular, scholars have used the Organization-Public Relationship (OPR) Scale or the Organization-Public Relationship Assessment (OPRA) to measure the quality of relationship between different types of organizations and their publics in different contexts (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2001). The OPR scale has been tested in the

public sector. For example, Chon (2019) found that a positive relationship between government and its citizens led to advocating communication of citizens in a government crisis situation.

In the context of public diplomacy, Lee and Jun (2013) used the OPR scale to measure relationship quality between Korean college students and the US embassy in Seoul, Korea. However, their findings suggested that it is necessary to develop new scales to measure the relationship between a country and its foreign publics. Responding to this suggestion, Tam and Kim (2017) proposed the Relationship Assessment of Diplomatic Interaction Outcome (RADIO) scale. Relationship quality is considered to be a public diplomacy outcome between a country and its foreign publics (Tam & Kim, 2017). Following a distinction of experiential and reputational relationships (Grunig & Hung-Baesecke, 2015), the RADIO also distinguish one's direct experiences and indirect experiences via mass media. In this study, we conceptualized govenremnt-foreign public relatoinsihp as the relationship quality between the government of Japan and its foreign publics (i.e., South Koreans). We measured the quality of government-foreign public relationship in this study by adapting scales of the RADIO.

Given the previous findings that the positive relationship between an organization and its publics leads to positive attitudes and behavioral intentions to benefit the organization (Ki et al., 2015), we predict that the relationship between the Japanese government and foreign publics (i.e., Koreans) is associated with animosity. The following hypothesis is thus proposed.

H2. The relationship of the government of Japan with South Koreans (i.e., Govenrent-foreign public relationship) is negatively associated with animosity.

Consequences of Consumer Animosity

The negative effect of consumers' animosity on their willingness to buy products of countries for which they have animosity has been well-established in the literature (e.g., Klein et al., 1998; Nijssen and Douglas, 2004). To further extend the existing consequences of CA, this study incorporates a communication perspective and expects that it significantly affects consumers' communication strategies, namely, negative peer communication.

Peer communication is defined as obvious peer interactions among publics (Churchill & Moschis, 1979). Peers refer to people who have similar backgrounds in terms of age, education, or social hierarchy (Pedersen, Razmerita, & Colleoni, 2014). Interactions with peers who act as important socialization agents influence individuals' attitudes and decision-making processes (Churchill & Moschis, 1979). In the context of an organization, if peers convey negative attitudes toward an organization, publics can develop unfavorable perceptions of the organization and vice versa (Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege, & Zhang, 2013). In this sense, negative peer communication has been defined as an interpersonal communication through which people proactively engage in negative discussion with peers regarding companies, brands, products, or other subjects (Qin & Men, 2019; Weinberger, Allen, & Dillon, 1981).

When publics feel annoyed due to a "hot" international issue such as 2019 Japan-South Korea trade dispute, they are likely to actively talk about it with people close to them. Public relations scholars have explained that emotions such as anger considerably affect publics' behaviors (Jin et al., 2012). That is, publics enact different communication strategies to cope with crisis-stimulated stress such as obtaining information and taking actions to deal with the situation. Similarly, negative emotions experienced due to an international dispute play an important role in encouraging publics to communicate about the dispute in order to cope with their stress and vent negative feelings. Using cognitive-affective theories of emotion, Harmeling et al. (2015) also highlighted individuals' communication behaviors as a way to cope with

animosity. Therefore, it is expected that consumer animosity may evoke their engagement in conversations with peers.

Furthermore, negative peer communication plays an important role in the process of socialization, and thus, public behaviors are significantly influenced by peer communication as a form of socialization (Wang et al., 2012). That is, peers are likely to develop similar perceptions of an object as an outcome of the socialization process when publics express their negative opinions about objects (Men & Muralidharan, 2017). In the current study, therefore, when consumers communicate with their peers by talking negatively about the country of Japan, they are more likely to share similar negative perceptions of it, which in turn makes them likely to engage in a boycott movement. Therefore, this study suggests the following hypotheses:

H3. Animosity is positively associated with negative peer communication.

H4. Animosity is positively associated with boycotting behaviors.

H5. Negative peer communication is positively associated with boycotting behaviors.

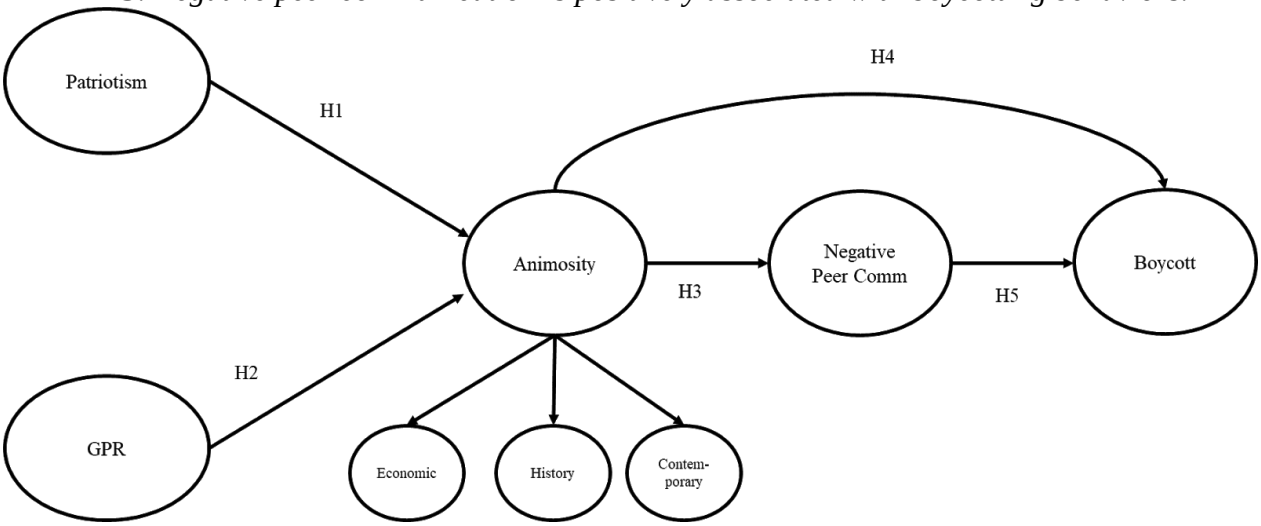

Figure 1. Theoretical model

Method

Participants

We conducted an online survey by recruiting participants through panel data managed by a Korean web survey company in Seoul, Korea, during July 2019. A total of 470 people participated in this online survey (54% male, *n* = 254; 46% female, *n* = 216). The age range of participants was from 20 to 59 years old, with an average age of 39.7. In terms of education, 13.2% of respondents (*n* = 62) had a high school degree or less, 74.9% (*n* = 352) had a bachelor's degree or less than four-year university level, and 11.9% (*n* = 56) had a post-graduate degree or some graduate education.

Measures

A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree was used to measure all items in the study. Patriotism was measured with five items (α = .922) adopted from a previous study (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). To measure government-foreign public relationship, we used five items adopted from the RADIO scales (Tam & Kim, 2017). We also adopted five items to measure interactional bilateralism, power mutuality, trust, relational satisfaction, and continuance (α = .868). We used fifteen items adopted from previous research (Yang et al., 2015) to measure animosity: four for economic (α = .733), five for history (α

= .879), and six for contemporary (α = .934). Negative peer communication was measured with six items (α = .894) adopted from Wang et al. (2012). Three items (α = .975) adopted and revised from previous research (Antonetti, et al., 2019) measured boycott behaviors. Table 1 provides the lists of all items.

Table 1. Estimate, means, and standard deviation (SD)

Variable	Measurement Items	Mean	SD
Animosity (Economic)	Japan takes advantage of Korea in trade.	4.33	0.87
	Japan causes economic problems in Korea.	3.81	1.06
	Japan has too much economic influence in Korea.	3.74	1.01
	The Japanese are doing business unfairly with Korea.	4.05	0.95
Animosity (History)	I have always disliked the Japanese.	3.05	1.19
	I have always felt angry toward the Japanese.	3.08	1.22
	I dislike this country because of past historical events.	4.04	1.04
	I will never forgive Japan for the Japanese military sexual slavery.	3.92	1.03
	Japan should pay for what it did to Japanese military sexual slavery.	4.17	0.99
Animosity (Contemporary)	Recently, I dislike the Japanese.	3.75	1.21
	These days, I feel annoyed by this country.	4.03	1.13
	I will never forgive Japan for the current economic retaliation.	3.95	1.13
	Japan should pay for what it did to Korea during economic retaliation.	4.10	1.10
	Japan has recently caused political conflicts between Japan and Korea.	4.27	1.06
	Japan ignores Korea’s positions in international affairs.	4.43	0.85
Patriotism	I love my country.	4.30	0.78
	I am proud to be Korean.	4.05	0.91
	I am emotionally attached to my country and emotionally affected by its actions.	4.13	0.86
	Although at times I may not agree with the government, my commitment to South Korea always remains strong.	4.18	0.82
	When I see the Korean flag flying I feel great.	3.96	1.02
GPR (Government-Foreign Public Relationship)	The government of Japan seeks to build mutually beneficial relationships with South Korea.	1.80	1.04
	The government of Japan considers South Korea’s interests when making decisions.	1.43	0.86
	The government of Japan treats South Korea fairly and justly.	1.43	0.80

	The government of Japan is satisfied with their interactions with South Korea.	1.64	0.88
	The government of Japan wants to maintain a long-term relationship with South Korea.	1.80	1.02
Negative Peer Communication	I talk negatively about Japan with my friends or family members.	3.09	1.20
	I talk about boycotting the Japanese products with my friends or family members.	3.26	1.21
	I obtain negative information about Japan from my friends or family members.	3.58	1.07
	My friends or family members encourage me to boycott the Japanese products.	3.27	1.15
	I ask my friends of family members for advice about boycotting the Japanese products.	2.79	1.17
	I talk about negative experiences with Japan with my friends and family members.	2.64	1.18
Boycott	Whenever possible, I avoid buying Japan food.	4.53	1.03
	Whenever possible, I avoid buying Japan clothing brands.	4.57	0.99
	Whenever possible, I avoid buying Japan cars.	4.61	0.93

Table 2. Factor and item loadings (N=470)

Second-order factor	First-order factor	First-order factor loading	Item loading
Animosity	Economic	.76	.57
			.55
			.44
			.76
	History	.89	.67
			.69
			.81
			.85
			.77
	Contemporary	.95	.75
			.87
			.94
			.91
			.82
			.74
	Patriotism		.87
			.88
			.92
			.82
			.74
	GPR		.77

	.62
	.84
	.78
	.74
Negative Peer Communication	.92
	.90
	.69
	.62
	.81
	.79
Boycott	.95
	.99
	.96

Results

We conducted SEM analysis to test the given theoretical model to predict boycotting behaviors of Korean people toward Japanese products in South Korea. The results of the first test showed that $\chi^2(519) = 1990.288$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .078, CFI = .892, SRMR = .0653. After modification indices, the model fit was improved and confirmed the results of the model reached satisfactory model fit based on Hu and Bentler's (1999) joint-cutoff criteria approach: $\chi^2(508) = 1990.487$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .054, CFI = .892, SRMR = .0527. Thus, the hypothesized paths are Shown in Figure 2.

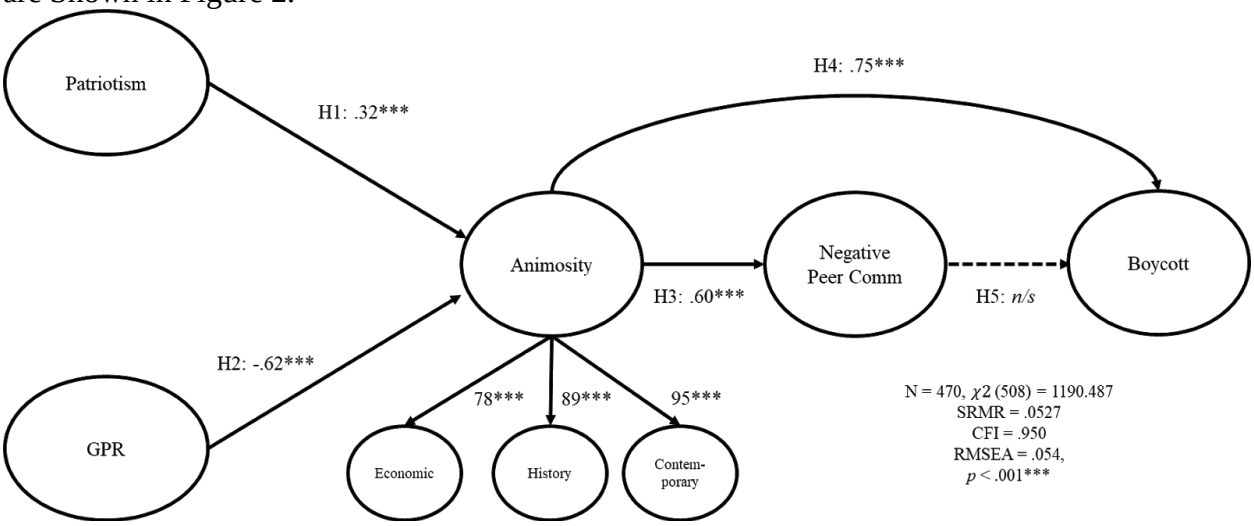

Figure 2. The results of theoretical model

In H1, we expected a positive effect of patriotism on consumer animosity. As expected, the path was positive and significant ($\beta = .320$, $p < .001$). H1 is thus supported. H2 examined whether the government-foreign public relationship had a negative effect on consumer animosity. Results showed that the path was negative and significant ($\beta = -.617$, $p < .001$).

Therefore, H2 is also supported. That is, Korean consumers who are patriotic and who perceive an unfavorable relationship with the country of Japan are more likely to exhibit higher levels of animosity when an international crisis occurred.

H3 tested how consumer animosity is associated with consumers' negative peer communication. CA indeed had a significant and positive influence on negative peer communication in the model (β = .596, p < .001), which supports H3. In H4, the relationship between consumer animosity and Korean consumers' boycotting intentions toward Japanese products was examined. It turned out that the relationship was positive and significant (β = .752, p < .001). H4 is thus supported, indicating that consumer animosity plays an important role in encouraging Korean consumers to negatively talk about Japan to their peers and to participate in the national boycott movement. H5 investigated the effect of consumers' negative peer communication on their boycotting intentions. The results show no significant effect, which suggests that Korean consumers' negative communicative action is not directly associated with their boycott behaviors against Japanese products.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study is an attempt to understand why South Koreans avoid purchasing products or services related to Japan when their governments are conflict by suggesting a theoretical model. The results of this study show that patriotism and government-foreign public relationship as antecedents increased consumer animosity, and consumer animosity increased both negative peer communication behavior and boycott behavior. Given the results, we suggest theoretical and practical implications as follows.

First of all, the findings of this study contribute to explaining how patriotism influences consumer behaviors in the situation of an international conflict by confirming that patriotism is positively associated with consumer animosity. According to previous studies, consumers who are patriotic tend to have high levels of animosity and inherently favorable attitudes toward their home country (Klein & Ettenson, 1999). Consumer patriotism based on emotional attachment to one's own nation is related to consumers' behaviors to feel a sense of pride and affection for domestically made products (Han, 1998). From the perspective of consumer behaviors to predict animosity, this study also suggest one of reasons to boycott behaviors of South Koreans against Japanese products. Patriotic Korean consumers in the context of economic tension between South Korea and Japan were more likely to have antagonistic emotions toward Japan.

However, it is not simple to understand why South Koreans' boycotting behaviors through consumer behavior perspectives. For this reason, we attempted to understand boycott movements in South Korea by using the lens of public relations. While previous researchers have focused on patriotism, nationalism, and internationalism as antecedents to predict consumer animosity (e.g., Yang, Snell, & Tsai, 2015) from consumer behavior, we applied the concept of relationship between a government and foreign publics and tested it using the RADIO scale. Following previous research in public relations, we examined the role of relationship quality between the government of Japan and South Koreans. With patriotism, this study found government-foreign public relationship was a strong factor to predict consumer animosity.

The application of the RADIO scale contributes to the efforts to develop scales in public diplomacy studies. In general, scholars in public relations have used the OPR scale to measure the relationship between an organization and its publics to predict positive outcomes. The OPR scale, however, is not sufficient to predict foreign publics' attitudes or behavior intentions in the context of public diplomacy (Lee & Jun, 2013). Moreover, very few studies address relationship

quality in the economic conflict between two countries by using the RADIO scale. That is, this study contributes to theory building using the RADIO scale, which is proposed to measure public diplomacy outcomes. More importantly, the government-foreign publics relationship was a stronger factor to increase consumer animosity (β = -.62) than patriotism (β = .32) in the proposed model. This result suggests that the relationship quality between the Japanese government and Korean citizens is a significant factor to influence consumer animosity. Accordingly, we emphasize the importance of cultivating a relationship between two countries to solve the current economic conflict and prevent future issues. As positive relationships play a vital role in decreasing negative attitudes and behaviors, the governments of South Korea and Japan should work together with long breaths to build a good relationship.

Our findings suggest that the South Korean boycott of Japanese products can be understood in terms of the historical animosity between the two countries. Regarding consumer animosity's sub-dimensions (i.e., economic, historical, and contemporary animosity), historical animosity (β = .89) was a stronger factor than economic animosity (β = .78) in consumer animosity. Accordingly, it is possible to interpret the 2019 Japan-South Korea trade dispute as being based on historical background as well as economic problems. In fact, the official cause of the conflict was the Japanese government's request of export control security regulations by removing South Korea from a list of trusted trading partners (Denyer, 2019). Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that the main reason for escalating tensions between two countries was South Korean court rulings that required Japanese companies to compensate South Koreans for forced labor during World War II (Yamaguchi, 2019). Given the fact, a dispute over legacy of Japanese colonialism of the Korean peninsula caused the economic conflict between two countries. Consequently, the animosity of Korean consumers against Japanese products is historical in nature; a political issue became an economic problem.

Finally, this study demonstrated that consumer animosity increased Koreans' peer communication behaviors and boycott behaviors against Japanese products. This result is consistent with previous findings that consumer animosity leads to negative effects on individuals' willingness to buy products of foreign countries consumers have animosity toward (e.g., Nijssen & Douglas, 2004). Furthermore, consumer animosity increased peer communication behaviors against Japanese products. Considering that negative peer communication plays a vital role in the process of socialization (Wang et al., 2012), the result suggests that animosity against Japanese products can negatively influence overall the public opinion in South Korea toward Japan.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations of this study should be addressed in future research. First, the results of this study should be carefully interpreted because we used a nonprobability sample. Second, the sample of this study came from an online panel, which limits statistical generalization. Future researchers should use probability samples to be able to better generalize the results. Third, the theoretical model of this study was tested in the context of the 2019 South Korea-Japan economic conflict. Future researchers should replicate the model with other topics related to international conflicts. Despite its limitations, this study contributes to understanding the boycott movements of South Koreans against Japanese products from the perspective of consumer behavior and public relations, building theory and suggesting practical implications.

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So, You Got Them to Your Article, but How do You Make Them Stay? Factors that Increase Reader Engaged Time of Online News Articles

Angela M Dwyer
Lippe Taylor

Allison Horton
Memo

Ebin Joby
Lippe Taylor

Alycia Burnett
Brigham Young University

Abstract

Are slideshows dead? Is celebrity endorsement worth it? Do roundups engage more than features? Through content analysis of 600 articles in the skincare industry, this research answers the following research question: Which article formats and factors increase reader engaged time of online news articles? The results help PR professionals optimize both media pitching and measurement.

Keywords: engaged time, article types, PR content, PR measurement, skincare communications

Introduction

Are slideshows dead? Is the celebrity endorsement worth it? Do readers spend more time on a feature than a roundup? Public relations professionals work with brands to reach key audiences through news coverage taking on different article formats—but which one generates the best results? Looking at an article for three seconds does not yield the same effect as three minutes. Recall research shows that longer exposure increases recall—it allows the reader to be more influenced by the content (Krishnan, Sullivan, Groza & Aurand, 2013).

With the advanced publisher metric of average engaged time, this study answers the question: Which online article formats and factors garner higher average engaged time?

Literature Review

Average Engaged Time

While research exists on topics surrounding engaged time, such as recall and content, little research has been published on average engaged time (how long readers actively engage with an article on average), due to the recent accessibility of this metric. Historically, only online publishers had access to their own user data. Recently, researchers have gained access through partnerships with publishers that allow them to acquire this data and analyze it to help brands improve communications performance. Time of exposure influences potential consumers to recall the information of articles or ads, in which recall significantly reflects engaged time (Heckler et al., 2014). The way information is framed can influence how it is understood by audiences, and the information is subject to the theories of agenda-setting, framing and priming that have the ability to influence the message communicated to potential consumers and how they consume the information (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; McCoombs & Shaw, 1972).

Despite the little research on engaged time and time of exposure to news articles, several studies have looked at the ability to recall brands and information. One recall study found that brand recall was more effective for semantic processing rather than sensory processing. This revealed that more familiar and relevant words provide better recall (Shamsollahi et al., 2017). Repeated exposure of ads without interference from other brands produces a higher and more accurate recall for consumers (Heckler et al., 2014). The ability to recall information is dependent on several key factors, including the type of article and the reader's intention.

Article Types

Different types of articles may influence readers' engagement. While there may not be research about every type of article, research exists around the inclusion of celebrities in persuasive content. Celebrity endorsement with ads found better results than without celebrity promotions (Kaushik & Baliyan, 2017). Malik and Sudhakar (2014) found that brand positioning with celebrities was more effective in advertising than without the celebrity endorsement or influence. Based on this research, the presence of a celebrity associated with a brand in an article would receive better results with potential consumers. However, research also shows that the content needs to be paired with certain types of celebrities. Panis and Van de Bulk (2014) studied celebrities endorsing certain social causes—and not all celebrities received meaningful coverage. Celebrities that received press coverage were paired strategically with content, improving the effect of the celebrity endorsements.

Not only do celebrity endorsements aid in higher recall and influence on consumers, but the creativity of the content can also affect consumer engagement. Some article types lend themselves to a more creative or story-based approach. For example, a how-to article might be more interesting to a reader than business news. Key learnings from research around ads can

apply to news articles as it refers to how readers perceive and remember persuasive content. Competitive and creative ads make regular ads forgettable and impair recall of regular ads in comparison (Jin et al., 2019). More creative content persuades readers to engage with text. The engagement is also influenced by a reader's comprehension and interest. The ability of content to influence comprehension, interest and recall is related to the concreteness of the text or image (Goetz et al., 2000). Just like a concrete ad maintains greater engagement than an abstract ad, an article with a clear structure and story-based content would garner greater reader participation (Van Cauwenberge et al., 2015).

Article type often guides the format of an article and the factors that frame the article to a reader—some factors may incite greater engaged time. Visual elements are effectively used to frame topics to influence readers. In one study, military articles found more success in portraying peacemaking photos rather than conflict photos—making it clear that the "framing implied by photos" can impact the support and engagement with the portrayed subject (Soroka et al., 2016 p. 574). The format of content can affect how consumers engage. Another study looked at refugees and discovered that reading the articles invoked more advocacy for refugees than watching videos because video did not evoke a strong emotional response (Powell et al., 2018). This research shows that article format can influence how readers perceive the subject. Readers may respond better to certain images, content or media formats.

Other Factors

Besides article types focused on recall and framing, influences of credibility of the source—a publisher or an influencer—can affect consumer response. Use of influencers can improve or heighten engagement of the user. A recent study found that blogger expertise, campaign intent and hedonic value influence interactions on blogs and social media. This is particularly impactful when expert endorsement is published under a high-involvement, low-distraction social media site (Hughes et al., 2019). Research also shows that users will have a more positive attitude toward ads and websites when the source is disclosed, specifically with consumer content creators (Çınar, 2018). Readers do not like to feel deceived or misguided with content that feels one-sided. The concept of credibility may affect whether articles on certain publisher websites obtain a higher average engaged time. In addition, it could reflect in higher credibility influencers capturing audiences more effectively than other influencers.

Another factor for keeping readers engaged in content is the actual length, or word count, of an article. Mudambi and Schuff (2010) found that the length of an Amazon review positively helps other reviews and users with the review's helpfulness. The word count of an article, however, may have a certain threshold as expressed by a 2015 study that examined online reviews and found a decline in helpfulness from the review after 144 words (Huang et al., 2015). While little research can be found specifically for word count in articles and their engagement, these studies reveal that there may be a specific range for word count to keep consumers engaged.

In addition to the content itself, reader engagement may be affected by how the individual arrived at the content. While on social media, active-seeking users will be more likely to engage and share news than consumers who are incidentally exposed to it (Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018). Active users of media include consumers who are seeking out information, rather than stumbling upon it. Traits of individual readers could influence the engaged time, as well. Giakoumaki and Krepapa (2020) recently discovered that consumers with a higher self-concept of brand engagement were involved in more posts and engaged with more individuals. The predisposition of readers and their emotional relationship with content may also influence their

engagement. One study found that when primed with positive or negative messages before exposure to content, readers maintained that initial primed emotion toward content (Baumgartner & Wirth, 2012). The individual emotions of readers can affect how they interact with news content. One element that reflects the emotional state of readers is how they arrive at the content. More active seekers of information—those who search for a specific question or receive content directly—may be more engaged readers.

The type of images in articles can influence the engaged time of readers. One social media study confirms that different types of images can influence different types of engagements with brands and advertisements, depending on the platform. Using colorful and high-resolution images can evoke a response for Instagram, while human faces and text capture engagement on Twitter (Li & Xie, 2020). Placing the right type of images in the right setting can improve participation. Recall of these more memorable images can also enhance the consumer's overall experience (Pips, 2009). Like the study of social media, different types of images might garner greater engaged time in skincare product articles—for example, readers might engage more in articles with a human element than a stand-alone product.

In sum, research shows the value of certain factors in influencing reader engaged time, such as article length, visual type, credibility of source or influencers, but no research exists using actual engaged time from publishers nor looking specifically at all possible article types. Research does confirm that longer exposure time leads to greater recall which influences attitudes, perceptions and potential behavior. Therefore, understanding what type of articles and factors lead to greater engaged time is valuable to professionals seeking to influence potential consumers through news content and more effectively measure the influence.

Methodology

This study analyzes editorial online articles within the skincare industry across six digital publishers during a six-month period, totaling 600 articles. Through combining a content analysis of the identified sample of articles with an average engaged time metric from the publishers, the research identifies and measures the impact of article elements on the time spent reading the articles.

Articles sampled

Industry: Researchers look at the skincare industry due to the volume of articles that include brands and products related to a common theme. Articles are defined as being within the skincare industry based on the occurrence of keywords and phrases (["skin care" OR "skincare" OR "skin-care"] AND [“cleanser” OR “acne” OR “moisturizer” OR “anti-aging” OR “fine lines” OR “night cream” OR “exfoliator” OR “face serum” OR “eye mask” OR “face mask” OR “sheet mask” OR “dry skin” OR “dull skin” OR “sunscreen” OR “face serum” OR “face wipes”]).

Publishers: Digital publishers include Allure, Glamour, Hello Giggles, Teen Vogue, InStyle and Real Simple, and are selected due to the high volume of skincare articles published and the availability of the average engaged time metric.

Average Engaged Time

The average engaged time metric is obtained from Memo, a content-analytics platform that partners with digital publishers to provide engagement metrics on news and editorial articles to the PR & Communications industry. Engaged time is measured as the duration (in seconds) between when an article loads in a browser or mobile application and when the reader either navigates away from that article or opens a new browser tab. The total engaged time on an article

from its publication date through the subsequent 27 days is averaged across all sessions to create a 28-day average engaged time metric for the article.

Content Analysis

Article Categories*:* To account for the impact different article formats might have on average engaged time, a content analysis is performed dividing articles into six format categories: 1) Celebrity, where the article focuses on the skincare routine, product picks or collaboration of a celebrity; 2) Roundups, where the article lists two or more products as part of a recommendation; 3) Review, where the article's focus is reviewing a single product; 4) How-to/Advice, where the article details advice to addressing a skincare concern; 5) Business News, where the article provides a business-related update on a skincare brand; and 6) Sales/Deals, where the article alerts readers to brands and/or retailers currently running a sale.

Article Factors*:* In addition to capturing the article format category in the content analysis, researchers also identify other factors to measure the effect on average engaged time: word count, article tone (positive, negative, neutral), number of brands, whether a brand was mentioned in the headline, number of visuals, number of influencers, visual type (product, human, logo) and influencer type (celebrity, consumer, medical).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

An analysis of article type within the highest average engaged time bracket ranks the article types with an ANOVA test to reveal the order of engaged time, answering RQ1) Does article format influence average engaged time? Which article format garners the highest average engaged time? H1) Article format will have an effect on average engaged time. Celebrity is estimated to receive the highest average engaged time, based on existing research. After investigating the primary research question, the study will test several other articles factors that may have an influence on average engaged time with subsequent research questions.

Results

Explanation of Statistical Analysis of Data

In order to determine which article formats and factors (if any) garner higher averaged engaged time across articles in the skincare industry, researchers collected data from 600 different articles and matched them with the average engaged time for each article. The analysis included seven categorical variables: article type, article source, article topic, article tone, brand headline, visual type and influencer type. The analysis also captured four integer variables: word count, number of brands, number of visuals and number of influencers. After quality checks of the data set and removal of outliers, each variable was tested independently. For the Categorical Variables, the relationships were analyzed using 2-tailed T-tests for variables with two levels and 1-Way ANOVA tests for variables with more than two levels, followed by Tukey HSD Testing if $p<0.05$. The numerical variables were tested using Pearson Correlation Coefficient and T-Tests. Variables were also tested in a group using OLS Multi Regression and 2-Way ANOVA. This statistical analysis of the data allowed researchers to answer the principal research question, as well as sub-questions for each factor tested.

Article Format

RQ1: Does article format influence averaged engaged time, and if so, which article format garners a greater influence on average engaged time?

Based on a one-way ANOVA, the null hypothesis was rejected that article format has no effect on average engaged time ($F=32.68$, $p=<2E-16$). Post-hoc Tukey testing revealed statistically significant differences in the mean engaged time of different article formats. Results

of this test show “How-to/Advice” articles have greater influence on average engaged time than all other article categories. “Sales/Deals” articles have less influence on average engaged time than all other categories. “Roundups” have more influence on average engaged time than “Reviews.” Based on the results, the initial hypothesis that “Celebrity” articles would have a higher engaged time was rejected. The results indicate that readers seek information/knowledge that is packaged in a form to help them over sales or promotions (See Table 1).

Table 1 – *Tukey Test for Article Type*

Tukey HSD Test Pairings

*=Statistically Significant	*MD*	CL_L	CL_U	*Adj. P-value*
Sales/Deals-How-to/Advice*	-47.23788	-58.931106	-35.544653	5.06E-10
Review-How-to/Advice*	-32.226263	-42.059825	-22.392701	5.06E-10
Sales/Deals-Roundups*	-32.231211	-43.900725	-20.561697	5.06E-10
How-to/Advice-Celebrity*	24.434099	13.842579	35.025619	1.93E-09
Sales/Deals-Celebrity*	-22.803781	-34.317977	-11.289585	3.51E-07
Roundups-Review*	17.219594	7.414241	27.024948	1.01E-05
Sales/Deals-Business News*	-27.830031	-44.569551	-11.090512	3.71E-05
Roundups-How-to/Advice*	-15.006669	-25.766833	-4.246504	1.06E-03
Sales/Deals-Review*	-15.011616	-25.832677	-4.190556	1.15E-03
How-to/Advice-Business News*	19.407848	3.289067	35.526629	8.08E-03
Roundups-Celebrity	9.42743	-1.137905	19.992766	1.11E-01
Review-Business News	-12.818415	-28.316122	2.679292	1.70E-01
Review-Celebrity	-7.792164	-17.412149	1.827821	1.89E-01
Celebrity-Business News	-5.026251	-21.015631	10.963129	9.47E-01
Roundups-Business News	4.40118	-11.700408	20.502767	9.71E-01

Visual Type

RQ2: Does visual type influence average engaged time, and if so, which visual types have a greater effect on average engaged time? Based on a one-way ANOVA, the null hypothesis was rejected that visual type has no effect on average engaged time (F=14.67, *p*=3.19E-09). Post-hoc Tukey testing allowed researchers to identify the statistically significant differences in the mean engaged time of different visual types. “Human visuals” have a greater influence on average engaged time than “product visuals.” Human visuals include some human element in the image and may include a product, but the image is not of a stand-alone product like the product visuals. Articles with exclusively “human visuals” also have a greater average engaged time than articles with a combination of “human” and “product” visuals (See Table 2).

Table 2 – *Tukey Test for Visual Type*

Tukey HSD Test Pairings

*=Statistically Significant	*MD*	CL_L	CL_U	*Adj. P-value*
product-human*	-19.543324	-27.552594	-11.534055	4.32E-09
human-both*	17.480469	8.773223	26.187715	1.90E-06
product-none	-12.588014	-29.566287	4.39026	2.25E-01
none-both	10.525158	-6.793315	27.843632	3.99E-01
none-human	-6.955311	-24.456404	10.545783	7.35E-01
product-both	-2.062855	-9.664804	5.539093	8.97E-01

Influencer Type

RQ3: Does influencer type influence average engaged time, and if so, which influencer types have a greater influence on average engaged time? Based on a one-way ANOVA, the null hypothesis was rejected that influencer type has no effect on average engaged time (F=7.824, *p*=4.1E-08). Post-hoc Tukey testing allowed researchers to discover the statistically significant differences in the mean engaged time of different influencer types. Medical influencers have a greater influence on average engaged time than celebrity, consumer, corporate and no influencers. In addition, multiple influencers have a greater influence on average engaged time than no influencers in an article (See Table 3).

Table 3 – *Tukey Test for Influencer Type*

Tukey HSD Test Pairings

*=Statistically Significant	*MD*	CL_L	CL_U	*Adj. P-value*
none -medical*	*-24.316537*	*-36.85414*	*-11.77893394*	*3.23E-07*
medical-corporate*	*21.038*	*8.500397*	*33.57560322*	*1.87E-05*
medical-celebrity*	*19.99938*	*7.655171*	*32.34358993*	*4.28E-05*
medical-consumer*	*25.38093*	*4.342247*	*46.41961275*	*7.07E-03*
none-multiple*	*-13.041676*	*-24.589395*	*-1.49395784*	*1.54E-02*
multiple-medical	*-11.274861*	*-22.612313*	*0.06259108*	*5.24E-02*
multiple-corporate	*9.763139*	*-1.784579*	*21.3108577*	*1.61E-01*
medical-beauty	*16.284019*	*-3.311806*	*35.87984439*	*1.77E-01*
multiple-celebrity	*8.72452*	*-2.612932*	*20.06197156*	*2.57E-01*
multiple-consumer	*14.106069*	*-6.358156*	*34.5702936*	*3.91E-01*
none-beauty	*-8.032518*	*-27.750741*	*11.68570596*	*8.92E-01*
consumer-beauty	*-9.09691*	*-35.063101*	*16.86928*	*9.45E-01*
none-celebrity	*-4.317157*	*-16.85476*	*8.22044655*	*9.50E-01*
multiple-beauty	*5.009159*	*-13.968583*	*23.98689991*	*9.87E-01*
none-corporate	*-3.278537*	*-16.006595*	*9.4495217*	*9.88E-01*
consumer-celebrity	*-5.381549*	*-26.420232*	*15.65713392*	*9.89E-01*
corporate-beauty	*-4.753981*	*-24.472204*	*14.96424285*	*9.92E-01*
corporate-consumer	*4.34293*	*-16.809805*	*25.49566388*	*9.97E-01*
celebrity-beauty	*-3.715361*	*-23.311186*	*15.8804639*	*9.98E-01*
corporate-celebrity	*-1.03862*	*-13.576223*	*11.49898344*	*1.00E+00*
none-consumer	*1.064393*	*-20.088342*	*22.21712699*	*1.00E+00*

Article Topic

RQ4: Does article topic influence average engaged time, and if so, which topics have a greater effect on average engaged time? Based on a one-way ANOVA, the null hypothesis was accepted that article topic has no effect on average engaged time (F=2.201, *p*=1.13E-01). Therefore, no post-hoc Tukey testing was required. The concept of topic influence could be further investigated in future studies.

Article Source

RQ5: Does article source influence average engaged time, and if so, which sources have a greater effect on average engaged time? Based on a one-way ANOVA, the null hypothesis was rejected that article source has no effect on average engaged time (F=2.413, *p*=3.53E-02). Post-hoc Tukey testing allowed researchers to find the statistically significant differences in the mean engaged time of different article sources. However, when this test was performed, no significant

differences were observed among the different article sources with regards to the engaged time with a family confidence level of 0.05 (See Table 4).

Table 4 – *Tukey Test for Article Source*

Tukey HSD Test Pairings				
*=Statistically Significant	*MD*	CL_L	CL_U	*Adj. P-value*
Glamour-Allure	8.9942239	-3.9654297	21.9538775	3.53E-01
HelloGiggles-Allure	11.7345232	-0.5499158	24.0189622	7.07E-02
InStyle-Allure	-0.6308935	-10.1262891	8.8645021	1.00E+00
RealSimple-Allure	4.0947824	-8.2573515	16.4469163	9.34E-01
Teen-Allure	1.0651711	-12.9870897	15.117432	1.00E+00
HelloGiggles-Glamour	2.7402993	-12.7686151	18.2492138	9.96E-01
InStyle-Glamour	-9.6251174	-23.0333807	3.7831459	3.14E-01
RealSimple-Glamour	-4.8994415	-20.4620312	10.6631482	9.46E-01
TeenVogue-Glamour	-7.9290528	-24.8726363	9.0145308	7.64E-01
InStyle-HelloGiggles	-12.3654167	-25.1222324	0.3913989	6.36E-02
RealSimple-HelloGiggles	-7.6397409	-22.6447073	7.3652256	6.93E-01
TeenVogue-HelloGiggles	-12.818415	-28.316122	2.679292	4.30E-01
RealSimple-InStyle	-7.792164	-17.412149	1.827821	8.99E-01
TeenVogue-InStyle	-5.026251	-21.015631	10.963129	9.99E-01
TeenVogue-Real	4.40118	-11.700408	20.502767	9.95E-01

Article Tone

RQ6: Does article tone influence average engaged time, and if so, which tone has a greater effect on average engaged time? Based on a one-way ANOVA, the null hypothesis was rejected that article tone has no effect on average engaged time (F=4.59, *p*=3.47E-03). Post-hoc Tukey testing allowed researchers to find the statistically significant differences in the mean engaged time of different article tones. Neutral tone articles have a significantly higher engagement time compared to positive and very positive toned articles in "Review" articles (See Table 5). This finding is interesting and merits further research. While readers may engage for more time with neutral content, exposure to positive content for less time may have a greater influence on outcomes in terms of intent to purchase. This research does show that readers engage for longer with neutral content over positive—they may seek out content that appears to be more objective and less of a sales pitch.

Table 5 – *Tukey Test for Article Tone*

Tukey HSD Test Pairings				
*=Statistically Significant	*MD*	CL_L	CL_U	*Adj. P-value*
Neutral-Negative	5.108789	-31.25105	41.4686262	9.84E-01
Positive-Negative	-7.777739	-42.96666	27.4111784	9.41E-01
Very Positive-Negative	-29.041936	-76.4561	18.3722271	3.92E-01
Positive-Neutral*	-12.886527	-23.27025	-2.5028007	7.95E-03
Very Positive-Neutral*	-34.150725	-67.58222	-0.7192311	4.31E-02
Very Positive-Positive	-21.264198	-53.41831	10.8899139	3.23E-01

Brand Headline

RQ7: Does the absence or presence of a brand in a headline influence average engaged time, and if so, which category has a higher average engaged time? Based on a T-Test, the null hypothesis was rejected that the absence or presence of a brand in a headline has no effect on average engaged time (T=4.033, *p*=6.239E-05). Thus, researchers default to the alternate hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference among the means of average engaged time between the two categories. From the data, articles without a brand in the headline have a significantly higher average engaged time compared to articles with a brand in the headline. This finding may also support the idea that readers may engage in content longer that appears more objective—about a topic instead of a specific brand.

Number of Brands

RQ8: Does the number of brands influence average engaged time, and if so, what is the relationship between the two? Based on a T-Test, the null hypothesis was rejected that there is no correlation between average engaged time and the number of brands (T=5.248, *p*=6.239E-05). The Pearson Correlation Coefficient shows a weak positive correlation between average engaged time and number of brands (*r*=0.212).

Word Count

RQ9: Does the article word count influence average engaged time, and if so, what is the relationship between the two? Based on a T-Test, the null hypothesis was rejected that there is no correlation between average engaged time and the article word count (T=14.962, *p*=<2.2E-16). The Pearson Correlation Coefficient shows a positive correlation between average engaged time and word count (r=0.527).

Number of Visuals

RQ10: Does the number of visuals influence average engaged time, and if so, what is the relationship between the two? Based on a T-Test, the null hypothesis was rejected that there is no correlation between average engaged time and the number of visuals (T=3.760, *p*=1.868E-04). The Pearson Correlation Coefficient shows a very weak positive correlation between average engaged time and number of visuals (*r*=0.154).

Number of Influencers

RQ11: Does the number of influencers affect average engaged time, and if so, what is the relationship between the two? Based on a T-Test, the null hypothesis was rejected that there is no correlation between average engaged time and the number of influencers (T=5.667, *p*=2.285E-08). The Pearson Correlation Coefficient shows a weak positive correlation between average engaged time and number of influencers (*r*=.228).

Testing the Variables on Different Article Formats

The same analysis was performed after splitting the dataset into six sets for each article format—roundups, celebrity, review, how-to/advice, sales/deals and business news.

In analysis across the six article categories, none of the sources did better than others in terms of average engaged time, except in “reviews”, where Glamour outperformed both InStyle and Allure. The topic of the article still had no impact on any article category.

Out of the six article categories, “reviews” was the only type of article that shows a difference in engaged time with regards to tone. Neutral articles perform better than positive articles in average engaged time. This is an interesting finding as most brands seek positive coverage. In reviews, readers may spend more time engaged in content that appears more objective and less one-sided with positive coverage of a brand.

Out of the six article categories, celebrity was the only type of article that shows a difference in engaged time with regards to a brand in the headline. Articles without a brand in the headline perform better than articles with a brand in the headline in average engaged time in celebrity articles. This could be indicative that readers engage more when they feel like they aren't part of a celebrity product promotion.

Average engaged time has the highest correlation to word count and is statistically significant across all article categories. The number of visuals is significant across five out of six categories. The number of brands and influencers are significant across four out of six categories.

G*roup Testing of Variables*

From the individual analysis of the variables, researchers decided to include, article format, article tone, visual type and influencer type in the linear regression model. From a correlation table between the numerical variables, all the numerical variables have a correlation to word count. Word count has the strongest correlation of all the numerical variables, and therefore, merits further investigation (See Table 7).

Table 7 – *Correlation among Numerical Variables*

Correlation	**# of Brands**	**Word Count**	**# of Visuals**	**# of Influencers**	**Engaged Time**
# of Brands	1	0.6172357	0.48563199	0.03305299	0.1927097
Word Count	0.61723571	1	0.36879952	0.23239988	0.5071391
# of Visuals	0.48563199	0.3687995	1	0.06913035	0.1161831
# of Influencers	0.03305299	0.2323999	0.06913035	1	0.24644
Engaged Time	0.19270969	0.5071391	0.11618312	0.24643999	1

The linear regression model explains 40 percent of the variance in engagement time (with an adjusted R-squared of 0.4095) which is the highest achievable after multiple iterations of testing with different groups of variables. Adding the other unused variables yielded no increase in the explanatory power of the model. A two-way analysis of variance shows that all the variables included were significant in determining the engaged time of the article (See Table 8).

Table 8 – *Two-Way ANOVA of Regression Model*

Two-Way ANOVA	**Df**	**Sum Sq**	**Mean Sq**	**F value**	**Pr(>F)**
*Significant					
Article Type*	5	120910	24182	43.5369	< 2.2e-16
Article Tone*	3	4357	1452	2.6147	5.04E-02
Visual Type*	3	9775	3258	5.8665	6.00E-04
Influencer Type*	6	8263	1377	2.4795	2.24E-02
Word Count*	1	91653	91653	165.0101	< 2.2e-16
Residuals	566	314378	555		

Analysis of Optimal Word Count

In general, average engaged time increased with word count. However, one may question at what point does the reader lose interest and increasing word count provides diminishing returns with regards to engaged time. Is there an optimal word count to maximize engagement time? Plotting the word count data on an S-curve using the formula, Y = beta^(alpha^((X/X-

max)*100)) with Alpha = 0.9, Beta = 0.1 and X-max = 3200, provided the best fit of the data, with an adjusted R-squared of 0.3. Deriving this function and taking the highest root up to the 7th derivative, allowed the discovery of the inflection points of this curve (253, 546, 799, 1036, 1264, & 1486) which were used to divide the curve and the data into seven different groups.

A One-way ANOVA across the groups identified a statistically significant difference in means (F=40.46, *p*=<2E-16). A Tukey HSD test—the family of t-tests with adjusted p-values to maintain the group confidence level of 0.05—showed that average engaged time increased with each group until the sixth group. Any additional words after the range of this group is past the threshold and does not show any incremental gains in engaged time. Therefore, the ideal range for word count is 1264-1486 words.

Discussion

Implementation

The results of this study contribute to the PR body of knowledge that professionals can access to make more strategic media decisions, using a historically unavailable metric of engagement. Proactively, PR teams can optimize pitches and supporting collateral for article factors proven to generate more engaged time within the skincare industry. PR teams can also more effectively benchmark time spent on their placements with skincare industry content with comparable factors to measure results.

Study results show that for the skincare industry "How-to/Advice" articles would generate a higher averaged engaged time than other article types. Public relations professionals can use this information to integrate their brands into this type of article. In addition, they can seek to include other factors that have been shown to have a greater effect on average engaged time. For example, including more human visuals instead of product-only visuals, as well as including multiple influencers, specifically medical professionals who lend credibility in the skincare industry, would generate higher engaged time. Public relations professionals could work with journalists to obtain coverage in articles with an optimal word count that would allow readers to engage in the content without losing interest. If a skincare brand is in a review, the public relations professional representing the brand could push for a more objective review that may lead to more engaged time.

Limitations & Future Studies

Further investigation on the effect of different article formats and factors is recommended to better understand this initial engagement time research. Limitations include the following: 1) Interactions among variables such as brands, visuals, influencers and word count could obscure the causal impact on average engaged time. 2) Limited sample size within each article format category does not allow for certain assumptions within categories. 3) Topics may have been too broad to identify any relationships. They could be more narrowly defined to allow for more potential topical insights. 4) Study is limited to skincare industry and results do not apply to other industries or publishers outside of the sample. The study could be expanded in order to apply findings across other industries.

Future studies can provide more actionable insights to the PR industry. Suggested future studies include the following: 1) Expanding analysis to different industries. 2) Widening the sample within each article type to test which topics within the skincare industry engaged readers the most. 3) Identifying optimal word count for articles within and beyond the skincare industry. 4) Looking at engagement in relation to topics across industries. 4) Studying tonality to understand how tone relates to average engaged time across article types, with further studies that look at tone in relation to purchase intent. 5) Conducting further research to expound

relationships among average engaged time, recall and purchase intent. 6) Looking into how readers arrive at content and the effect on average engaged time. 7) Understanding with research how the predisposition or emotional state of readers affects average engaged time.

Conclusion

This study introduces the metric of average engaged time as a new metric for better understanding the efficacy of earned-media placements. While researchers identify article formats and factors that are correlated with higher averaged engaged time within the skincare industry, additional studies may continue to advance the knowledge and application of engaged time.

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Impression management after image-threatening events: A case study of JUUL's online messaging

Nicholas Eng
Pennsylvania State University

Abstract

Since 2018, JUUL has been called out by the FDA for its role in the youth e-cigarette epidemic. This study uses impression management theory to illustrate how JUUL has attempted to engage in positive impression management through its evolving visual and textual messaging as a consequence of these image-threatening events.

Keywords: JUUL, e-cigarettes, impression management theory, IMT

Introduction

Electronic cigarettes or e-cigarettes were designed as a safer alternative to smoking cigarettes or other tobacco products (Cahn & Siegel, 2011). This sentiment has been echoed by governmental agencies such as Public Health England which found that these products are comparatively healthier than regular tobacco cigarettes (McNeill, Brose, Calder, Hichman, Hajek, & McRobbie, 2015). It is no wonder then that one of the most frequently cited reasons for e-cigarette use among adult smokers is to quit or cut down on smoking regular cigarettes (Pepper, Ribisl, Emery, & Bewer, 2014; Patel et al., 2016). While e-cigarettes were designed for adult smokers who want to quit smoking, the product has found its way into the lives of youth. Currently, e-cigarette use among adults stands at 3% (Arrazola et al., 2015). However, this percentage quadruples to 13% in high-school students (King, Patel, Nguyen, & Dube, 2015). In fact, e-cigarettes are now the most commonly used tobacco product among high-school students, overtaking regular cigarettes (CDC, 2015). This is worrying because while some governmental organizations might be fervent advocates that e-cigarettes are safer than traditional cigarettes, the long-term effects of e-cigarette use are largely unknown. Furthermore, there is also the risk of a gateway effect where youth might transition to combustible cigarettes after using e-cigarettes (FDA, 2018a).

This is why there has been increased attention on e-cigarette companies such as JUUL Labs (hereinafter referred to as JUUL). On September 12, 2018, the Commissioner of Food and Drugs at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued letters to five e-cigarette manufacturers including JUUL to provide "a detailed plan, including specific timeframes, to address and mitigate widespread use by minors" in 60 days (Gottlieb, 2018) and threatened to remove e-cigarettes off the market if this was not submitted in a timely manner. Then, when JUUL, the biggest player in the e-cigarette market, announced that Altria, one of the world's largest tobacco producers, invested $12.8 billion into the company for a 35% ownership (Burns, 2018), there was even more suspicion on JUUL's marketing intentions. In fact, JUUL was first singled out by the FDA for their role in youth uptake on April 24, 2018 when they announced that they have been "conducting a large-scale, undercover nationwide blitz to crack down on the sale of e-cigarettes – specifically JUUL products – to minors at both brick-and-mortar and online retailers" (FDA, 2018b). Most recently, on September 9, 2019, the FDA also accused JUUL for violating the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, citing evidence that JUUL had misleadingly marketed its products as a "safer alternative", to children in school (FDA, 2019).

In light of these image-threatening events where JUUL was casted as the villain feeding the youth epidemic, it is important to understand how their messaging has evolved to meet with the needs of its stakeholders. This can then help inform the messaging strategies of other organizations that might potentially face such image-threatening events in the future. Furthermore, JUUL is a unique organization as it can be seen as both promoting prosocial (helping adult smokers quit traditional cigarettes) and non-prosocial (youth uptake of e-cigarettes) behaviors, which make it an interesting case study. This paper will use Impression Management Theory (IMT, Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990) to qualitatively illustrate how the organization has engaged in positive impression management through its evolving visual and textual messaging on its website and social media accounts as a consequence of these image-threatening events since April of 2018. It will also show that JUUL has embedded the impression management tactics of self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication in its current messaging to maintain and construct a positive image

Literature Review

E-cigarettes and JUUL campaigns

Research on e-cigarette campaigns has been very limited. Most of the research conducted on tobacco control has been focused on traditional tobacco smoking cessation campaigns (e.g. Davis, Farrelly, Messeri, & Duke, 2009; Mudde & De Vries, 1999; Niederdeppe, Fiore, Baker, & Smith, 2008; Siegel & Biener, 2000). However, research on e-cigarette campaigns is far more uncommon. The few studies conducted in this subject area can be categorized into two groups, one that focuses on campaigns by manufacturers, and the other on campaigns by policy makers. Scholars that study campaigns by manufacturers have analyzed general e-cigarette advertisements and its effects on e-cigarette attitudes (Reinhold, Fischbein, Bhamidipalli, Byant, & Kenne, 2017) as well as specifically television advertising (Duke, Lee, Kim, Watson, Arnold, Nonnemaker, Porter, 2014) and social media advertising of e-cigarettes (Chu et al., 2015). Those that have studied campaigns by policy makers tend to focus on feedback to their anti-vaping campaigns on social media (Zhan, Emery, Yu, Wang, & Liu, 2018; Allem, Escobedo, Chu, Soto, Cruz, & Unger, 2016; Harris, Moreland-Russell, Choucair, Mansour, Staub, & Simmons, 2014).

There have been even fewer studies on JUUL, with most research conducted on individuals' knowledge, attitudes and practices of JUUL and not so much on JUUL itself as a brand. The studies on JUUL are limited to a survey on youth and young adult recognition and knowledge of the product (Willett, Bennett, Hair, Xiao, Greenberg, Harvey, Cantrell, & Vallone, 2019), how JUUL is being talked about on social media (Allem, Dharmapuri, Unger & Cruz, 2018; Kavuluru, Han, & Hahn, 2018) and JUUL use patterns and the reasons for consumer use (Leavens et al., 2019). While public recognition and opinion of JUUL is important to study, there is also a need to analyze JUUL from the organization's point of view to better understand their messaging strategies.

From the brand's perspective, there were only two studies that have been conducted to date. Laestadius and Wang (2018) studied the sale of JUUL products on eBay prior to the FDA's request to remove JUUL listings in April 2018, while Huang and his colleagues (2018) studied JUUL's retail sales, marketing and promotion. Huang and his colleagues (2018) found that JUUL does most of its marketing via social media which provides a glimpse into JUUL's advertising strategy. However, with the FDA's request to work with them to take steps to prevent sales to youth (Gottlieb, 2018) occurring after the study's publishing, it was unable to take into account the changes to JUUL's online marketing and messaging. Furthermore, after Altria Group, one of the world's largest producers and marketers of tobacco and cigarette products acquired a 35% stake in JUUL, another letter was issued by Gottlieb (2019) on February 9 to schedule a joint meeting with Altria and the FDA. It is clear that since Laestadius and Wang (2018), as well as Huang and his colleagues' (2018) published their studies, there has been an unfolding of multiple events that could directly impact JUUL as an organization. As such, this paper aims to analyze JUUL as an organization in light of these new developments and to provide a qualitative approach in understanding the changes in JUUL's messaging in response to these events.

Impression Management Theory

Particularly relevant to this study is Impression Management Theory (IMT, Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). IMT can be originally traced to Goffman's (1959) discussion of the importance of self-presentation in defining one's place in society, setting the tone of an interaction, and how one should perform in public and social interactions. Arguing that Goffman focused primarily on the role self-presentation plays in their construction of social reality, Leary

and Kowalski (1990) centered their discussion on self-presentation to others by defining impression management as "the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them" (p. 34). Leary and Kowalski (1990) conceptualized IMT into two processes: Impression motivation, and impression construction. Impression motivation consists of 1) goal-relevance of impressions, 2) value of desired goals, and 3) discrepancy between desired and current image while impression construction comprises of 1) self-concept, 2) desired and undesired identity images, 3) role constraints, 4) target's values, and 5) current or potential social image.

JUUL is motivated to engage in impression management because of the potential penalties that come with their current practices. According to IMT, the motivation to engage in impression management stems from the desire to maximize expected rewards and minimize expected punishments (Schlenker, 1980). With the FDA's unequivocal statement that noncompliance "could mean requiring these brands to remove some or all of their flavored products that may be contributing to the rise in youth use from the market" (FDA, 2018), the "expected punishment" is especially high for JUUL, which holds the largest market share. As such, more than ever, JUUL is motivated to maintain or build a positive impression so as to minimize the punishments that could come with governmental intervention.

Since JUUL is arguably motivated to engage in positive impression management, this paper contends that they are also strategic in their impression construction. According to Leary and Kowalski (1990), "people tend to convey impressions that are biased in the direction of their desired identities" (p. 40) and "try to ensure that their public image is consistent with (or at least is not inconsistent with) the role demands of a particular situation" (p. 41). With the FDA's allegations that JUUL is "contributing to the rise in youth use" of e-cigarettes, JUUL is in a position that requires them to reconstruct their desired identity and to live up the demands of their role in selling products that are targeting at helping adults quit cigarette smoking. Additionally, IMT predicts that individuals construct their impression based on the target values of their audience by "select[ing] from a myriad of possible self-images that are most likely to meet with approval or other desired reactions" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 41) and that "the impressions people try to create are affected both by how they think they are currently regarded by others and by how they think others may perceive them in the future" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 41). Impression construction based on target values and current or potential social image are inherently linked for an organization like JUUL because its social image is shaped by the FDA, and they have to make sure to meet the approval of the FDA's values.

To strategically construct a positive impression, there are number of impression management tactics that an organization can take (Jones & Pittman, 1982). *Ingratiation*, refers to ways in which individuals seek to achieve likeability. *Intimidation* is where one seeks to appear dangers or threatening. Similar, but conceptually distinct from ingratiation, *self-promotion* is to portray oneself as being competent. *Exemplification* is to portray oneself as being honest and respectable. Finally, *supplication* is to present the self as weak and vulnerable to evoke pity.

Although mostly used to study interpersonal communication, IMT has recently been used to study how organizations attempt to construct a positive image after an image-threatening event. Some scholars have studied how organizations manage their public image using prosocial claims (McDonnell & King, 2013) or how they inform consumers of data breaches that will reduce the damage to organizational reputation (Jenkins, Anandarajan, & D'Ovidio, 2014). Other scholars have also studied how organizations use impression management tactics after a crisis (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). For example, Allen and Caillouet (1994)

studied 799 statements of one organization in crisis to identify the impression management strategies they used. However, within the communication literature, limited research has been conducted using used IMT to study an organization's impression management online after image-threatening events. As such, this paper poses the following research questions: *RQ1: How has JUUL's messaging changed on its website and social media accounts to engage in positive impression management since the FDA's investigation into its marketing and sales of e-cigarettes to youth? RQ2: What impression management tactics are embedded in JUUL's current messaging on its website and social media accounts?*

Method

This paper employed a thematic analysis to answer its research questions. This is "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). It is a qualitative type of analysis that can produce insightful and trustworthy findings. The benefits of conducting a thematic analysis are that it "can highlight similarities *and* differences across the data set" and also "usefully summarize key features of a large body of data, and/or offer a 'thick description' of the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97). Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide for conducting a thematic analysis, the researcher 1) familiarized himself with the data, 2) generated initial codes, 3) searched for themes, 4) reviewed the themes, 5) defined and named the themes, and finally, 6) produced the final analysis.

Data Collection

Data was collected using internet archival service *Wayback Machine* between April 1, 2018 and March 1, 2019. JUUL's website was compared on seven dates that had available archival data on *Wayback Machine*: April 1, 2018, May 27, 2018, September 1, 2018, October 31, 2018, February 20, 2019, August 7, 2019, and October 9, 2019. April 1, 2018 was chosen as the start date of the analysis because it represents JUUL's messaging prior to any FDA press releases that have named JUUL in promoting youth e-cigarette usage. The subsequent dates were chosen because they were either one month before or a month after an FDA press release referring to JUUL. For the purpose of this preliminary study, the bulk of the analysis was conducted on JUUL's homepage over the seven dates. This is because most web users are unlikely to look beyond the first few pages of a website that they go to (Thompson, 2004) and can be considered the "most important page for every website because it is a company's face to the world of the internet" (Huang & Yang, 2011). Changes to the website over time, including new tabs and sections that were linked from the main homepage, were analyzed. On social media, JUUL's Twitter account was compared on four relevant dates that archival data was available: April 28, 2018, January 30, 2019, August 28, 2019, and October 18, 2019. Because JUUL's Facebook and Instagram accounts are no longer active as of November 13, with all posts deleted except for the announcement of page deactivation, they were removed from this analysis.

Results

RQ1 asked how JUUL's messaging have changed to engage in positive impression management since the FDA's investigations. The four main changes are: 1) (de)emphasis on bulk sales, 2) nicotine warning, 3) age requirements, and 4) muted colors and images.

(De)Emphasis on Bulk Sales

The first change was the shift in the emphasis of bulk product sales. JUUL's website on April 1st, 2018 had a banner stating "[f]ree shipping when you spend $34 or more," and a section

that was dedicated to publicizing their "[a]utoship" scheme where users could sign up to have refill pods shipped to their doorstep at a discounted rate. However, the banner was later changed to "Learn about our youth prevention efforts," and the "Autoship" section was completely removed from the website by May 27th, 2018 but resurfaced again by August 28th, 2019 . Similarly, on JUUL's Twitter page, a post for a promotion of their referral program where referring someone to purchase a JUUL product gives a $15 discount to both parties was found in the April 28th, 2018 data set. This was subsequently removed by the January 30th, 2019. This reduced emphasis on sales quantity is related to JUUL's attempt to shape its *current or potential social image*. When the FDA publicly alleged that JUUL had a part to play in the youth uptake of e-cigarette, it damaged their image as an organization which would compel them to counter or repair the "damaged image" (Goffman, 1955). They then attempted to rebuild their existing social image as an organization that was merely concerned with the sales of their products regardless of who (and how old) their customers were. By removing their promotions of "free shipping" or "15% off every order" and focusing instead on their mission to "improve the lives of the world's one billion adult smokers" -- a message prominently featured on their website since May 27th, 2018 -- they are not only repairing their existing social image, but also ensuring that their potential social image is one that is positive and prosocial in nature by promoting its product's benefits for current adult smokers.

Nicotine Warning

The second change was seen in the explicit messaging that their products contain nicotine. Prior to September 1st, 2018, the website had no messaging that JUUL contained nicotine except for a tiny disclaimer at the bottom of the page that states "WARNING" with "This product contains nicotine. Nicotine is an addictive chemical." Then, the same disclaimer was bolded and shifted to the top of the homepage, in a large, highly contrasted white font over a black banner that web users would immediately notice. According to Leary and Kowalski (1990), IMT predicts that individuals will appeal to other's *target values* and tailor their public images to the perceived values and preferences of significant others" (p.41). In the case of JUUL, the "significant other" is the FDA as they have direct control over JUUL's sales. As such, JUUL's decision to prominently highlight that their products contain nicotine is to appeal to the FDA's values to ensure that any allegations that they are promoting e-cigarettes under the guise of nicotine-free flavors are seemingly unjustified. This is also a move to build a *desired identity image* as well as a positive *potential social image*. JUUL's intentions are clear in that they want to build a *desirable identity image* that they are not trying to mislead youth into picking up nicotine products, and they want to ensure that they have a positive *potential social image* that their intentions are to help adult smokers reduce their nicotine intake by using JUUL.

Age Requirements

The third change was JUUL's decision to increase the age requirement to subscribe to the organization's email list, and to follow their Twitter account. On April 1st, 2018, to sign up for JUUL's email newsletter, users needed to be at least 18 years old to sign up. However, from May 27th, 2018 onwards, users had to be at least 21 to sign up for the email list. Additionally, on Twitter, followers were not warned that they must be "21+ to follow" prior to April 28th, 2018, but this was included in their profile by January 30th, 2019. This, of course, is a symbolic move in constructing a positive image in that there is an expectation for the organization to take on the role of a gatekeeper of sorts, where youth are kept away from picking up e-cigarettes. The age verification and age requirement to receive information from JUUL are symbolic gestures because there is no way in which they can enforce such a restriction. Users of any age can

merely enter their email address and receive information about JUUL even if they are minors by choosing a date of birth that corresponds to the company's age requirements. The decision to increase the age requirement from 18 to 21 could possibly be because of the *role constraint* that they face. As IMT posits, "people try to make their social images conform as closely as possible to prototypic characteristics of the role they are playing (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 41). Raising the age limit shows that they "are committed to preventing underage use". While they are unable to truly stop underage web users from perusing their website, it is still a part of their effort to construct a positive impression based on the expectations of them as an organization.

Colors and Images

The fourth change can be seen in the shift in colors and images by JUUL to favor one that is more muted. In April of 2018, the choice of colors on JUUL's website had more variety, using different shades of green, blue, white, and gold. In fact, the background of the website had an image of a JUUL product on a white table with a potted plant, and a blue book. The minimalistic and pastel visual design clearly appeals to the young. However, by February 2019, this became far more muted, with the background colors limited to only black and white, and the only images being those of the product itself or the faces of their users. Similarly, on Twitter, in April 2018, the header image was the same as the background image on its website in the same month. The social media posts then also had more images and colors that drew users to read their posts. In January 2019, the background header image had changed into a black banner with a white elongated hexagon shape. Posts with images were largely removed, with only abstracts of press releases in black and white. The move towards just black and white color schemes without visual images was to engage in positive impression management by appealing to *target values* of the FDA and maintaining their *role* as a prosocial company. JUUL explicitly stated on their website that that they will "not feature images or situations intended for a youth audience". This parallels the push for "plain packaging" of tobacco products which has been found to be less attractive to tobacco users and increases the noticeability and effectiveness of health warnings (World Health Organization, 2016). JUUL's choice to change their color scheme and use of images to one that is more monochromatic mimics the plain packaging found on some tobacco products to reduce the appeal of its website. This maintains their image as an organization that markets its products to adults, which would in turn appeal to the FDA.

As JUUL's messaging evolved over time to engage in positive impression management, it is useful to explore some of the impression management tactics that are embedded in their messaging after the FDA's intervention to answer RQ2. JUUL's current messaging is limited to their press releases that are posted on Twitter, as well as their main company website. Three tactics were identified: 1) self-promotion, 2) exemplification, and 3) supplication.

Self-promotion

JUUL engages in self-promotion by showcasing its success as an organization in helping adult smokers to quit smoking. Self-promotion occurs when the messenger intentionally seeks the attribution of competence (Jones & Pittman, 1982). JUUL's mission is to help the world's one billion cigarette smokers quit the habit. In order for the organization to be seen as "competent," it will need to show how it is achieving its mission. JUUL does this by featuring their JUUL customers and their testimonials on switching to JUUL products in a section called "The JUUL Community". By doing so, they are trying to influence their stakeholders (whether it is the FDA, the general public, or their board of directors) that they are indeed competent in helping adult smokers quit their addiction to smoking cigarettes. The use of headshots puts a face to the people that they are helping, which increases levels of trustworthiness and persuasiveness

(Newman, Garry, Bernstein, Kantner, & Lindsay, 2012). Similarly, customer quotes serve not only to increase their credibility as an organization, but to also bolster their level of competence.

Exemplification

JUUL uses messages to project integrity and moral worthiness by promoting how they are proactively ensuring that their products do not reach the hands of youth. Since the FDA's allegations, there was a deliberate attempt on their part to act in an exemplary manner. This can be seen on their website where a tab under "About Us" brings users to a page titled "Our Responsibility." Not only is there a statement regarding regulation and public policy and their marketing and social media code, they also provide educational resources for smokers. In this way, they are making a statement that they are serious about curbing youth uptake of their products by ensuring that their marketing and social media outreach are not targeted at youth but also to reiterate that they products for adult smokers who are already trying to quit smoking. These strategies help JUUL to portray themselves as an organization that is proactively limiting its target audience to adults, has integrity, and is acting morally.

Supplication

JUUL's social media posts display elements of supplication where they are positioning themselves as victim. While most of their previous social media posts have been deleted, JUUL kept a retweet from Washington Examiner, titled "The crusade against JUUL and other vaping products is childish, even for tobacco control." (Blair, 2018). By retweeting the article, JUUL was showing support for the sentiments of Blair, and by extension, sharing the sentiments about the "crusade" against them, and how they have been "demonized." The diction used in this article casts JUUL as a victim in the FDA's investigations. Leveraging on this, JUUL was engaging in supplication in that they used their vulnerabilities to solicit support for their organization (Jones & Pittman, 1982). Clearly the article is significant to JUUL because despite it being retweeted on April 9th, 2018, this article is atypical from the rest of its social media feed. This illustrates their desire to portray themselves as a victim amidst the allegations.

Discussion

Since April 24, 2018, JUUL has been a target of governmental and public scrutiny due to allegations that their products are being marketed and sold to the youth. Despite JUUL being the largest player in the e-cigarette industry, research on JUUL has been rather limited. There has been even less research analyzing how JUUL communicated with their audiences after the numerous FDA investigations. This paper shows that since the FDA's investigation into its marketing and sales of e-cigarettes to youth, much of JUUL's messaging on its website and social media accounts has evolved to engage in positive impression management. The fact that they shut down their Facebook and Instagram pages are gestures illustrating their desire to move away from the image of being *that company* that sells tobacco products to the youth. Shifts in their messaging by reducing the emphasis on bulk purchases and referrals, including a nicotine warning, increasing the age requirements to receive information from the company, as well as the use of muted colors and images represent attempts at curating a positive impression of their organization in accordance with the FDA's threats. Similarly, the impression management tactics of self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication are embedded in JUUL's current messaging, providing evidence that IMT is an appropriate theory that can be used to analyze an organization's impression management online after an image-threatening event.

Theoretical Implications

IMT was originally conceptualized to apply to interpersonal communication (Leary and Kowalski, 1990) and was later applied to organizations to understand how they construct a positive image of their organization after an image-threatening event or crisis (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Jenkins, Anandarajan, & D'Ovidio, 2014; Marcus & Goodman, 1991; McDonnell & King, 2013). What is unique about this study is that JUUL is an organization that is paradoxical as it can be seen as both promoting prosocial and non-prosocial behaviors. While JUUL presents itself as an organization that wants to help its users quit their addiction to traditional tobacco cigarettes, nicotine is still present in its products and is a substance that is still addictive in nature. JUUL products are in no way "healthy" but can be argued to be "healthier" than traditional tobacco cigarettes by some governmental organizations (McNeill, Brose, Calder, Hichman, Hajek, & McRobbie, 2015). At the same time, with allegations that they are marketing their products to youth, whether it is truly a prosocial organization is also questionable. The use of IMT in such an unprecedented product category extends the theory and its applicability to a variety of organizational types that are engaging in positive impression management.

While there has been some headway in applying IMT to organizational communication, there has been scant research on digital platforms. This paper shows that impression management tactics are also embedded in an online context. Individuals who want to find out more about a company or their products tend to go to their web site or their social media pages. This reflects the importance of how an organization presents itself online to the public. In one of the first studies to analyze organizational impression management and construction online, this study contributes to the literature on IMT by suggesting another platform for theory building.

Practical Implications

This case study also offers strategies for organizations who might face image-threatening events in the future. First, there are many ways an organization can engage in positive impression management. For JUUL, reassuring the FDA that they are trying to ensure that their products do not reach the hands of the youth was shown in both explicit and implicit gestures. The plastering of the warning sign that their product contains nicotine represents a grand and explicit gesture, while the move to muted colors in their online presence is far more subtle and implicit. This is to say that for organizations, they have a variety of choices that they can make online that can communicate, to varying effects, their dedication to engage in positive impression management. Second, it also provides organizations with examples of how impression management tactics are employed within an organization's online communication for preemptive measures. For example, following JUUL's strategy of *self-promotion* with their use of customer testimonials, could soften the blow of possible future bad publicity should they occur.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without limitations. Due to the lack of available crawled data, this study was unable to access the social media data of JUUL on Instagram and Facebook. Instagram is primarily an image-sharing platform which would presumably have different impression management tactics embedded as compared to Twitter. Similarly, Facebook is different from Twitter because it does not have a 280-character limit which could also reflect differences in JUUL's messaging. Future research should attempt to recover deleted posts to identify changes in social media messaging over time across these two platforms.

This study primarily looked at JUUL's homepage but since JUUL is selling a product, it might be useful to conduct an in-depth analysis of their website under the tab "SHOP" which has information on their product packages and the JUUL pods that consumers are able to purchase. It has been found that prior to making a purchase online, consumers tend to make their decisions

based on both the website characteristics (such as the scope and functionality) as well as the product characteristics (Mallapragada, Chandukala, & Qing, 2016). This is to say that specific to making online purchases, consumers might look through an organization's website more precisely to look for cues in making their purchasing decisions. Therefore, future research should look at analyzing other aspects of the JUUL website that might provide additional insight into JUUL's impression management.

It would also be useful for future research to study how these changes in messaging and the use of impression management tactics actually influence stakeholders' impression of the organization. By empirically testing how perceptions change based on the impression management tactic used, could empirically show which tactic might work better than others when it comes to rebuilding JUUL's image.

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What Brazil Does When Nature Calls: Applying Situational Theory of Problem Solving for Coalition-Building for Sustainable Agricultural Practice for Brazilian Farmers

Aurélio Martins Favarin
Embrapa Maize and Sorghum, Brazil

Jeong-Nam Kim
University of Oklahoma

Ana Laura Lima
Embrapa Eastern Amazon, Brazil

Gabriel Rezende Faria
Embrapa Agrosilvopastoral, Brazil

Joseani Mesquita Antunes
Embrapa Wheat, Brazil

Mônica Aparecida de Castro
Embrapa Maize and Sorghum, Brazil

Renato de Aragão Ribeiro Rodrigues
Researcher on Climate Change of Embrapa Soils
ICLF Network Association, Brazil

Abstract

Brazil initiated national actions toward sustainable farming in response to climate change. Qualitative studies were conducted using Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) to understand how farmers and stakeholders recognize problems and constraints in their solution adoption. A model practice of strategic communication is presented for the change agents in sustainable agriculture practice worldwide.

Keywords: Agriculture, Brazil, Coalition Building, ICLF, Situational Theory of Problem Solving, Sustainability

Amazon forests are prime safeguards for global air quality. Deforestation for expansive plantations and cattle ranches has fostered decades of debate over climate change. Concerned scientists and world citizens call for solutions. In response, Brazil has initiated national actions toward sustainable farming. Specifically, the Integrated Crop-Livestock-Forest (ICLF) was chosen in 2010 as one of seven strategies of ABC Plan (Agriculture of Low Carbon Emission).

FARIA, Gabriel Rezende. ICLF area with crop, cattle and trees.

Brazil has around 15 million hectares with ICLF system. Understanding connections between public constraints-problems is a crucial step toward implementing ICLF on 30 million hectares in Brazil by 2030, one of the country goals on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). According United Nations, "The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice." (https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/ , access on 7th January 2020).

The Integrated Crop-Livestock-Forest (ICLF) is a key innovation that can optimize land usage and reduce pressure to open new land for production. In its implementation, Embrapa and the ICLF Network Association, a public-private partnership formed by Bradesco, Ceptis, Cocamar, Embrapa, John Deere, Premix, Soesp and Syngenta, have chosen the Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS, Kim & Grunig, 2011) to define and identify strategic publics and to develop counteractions to understand and help farmers. Specifically, STOPS helps

the consortium understanding how farmers and stakeholders recognize problems and perceive constraints in their adoption of ICLF.

Need for Identifying Strategic Publics in Coalition-Building for Sustainable Agricultural Practice

The situational theory of problem solving facilitates a more comprehensive conceptualization of key constituencies and actors such as active publics (Kim & Grunig, 2011). Publics come into existence as they encounter problematic situations. They may become motivated in doing something about the situations. Publics are specific, thus, for problems of their concerns. With their motivation, publics about problematic situations may develop into a collective to influence the situations. Members of a public may or may not know each other but their common perception and motivated communicative actions centering around problems could evolve into aggregations with a common goal and begin coordinating their efforts toward it (Grunig & Kim, 2017).

Identifying key publics and constituencies need to go a step further than just splitting the population in terms of demographics, such as profession, age, regions, and gender. Demographics are useful but often limited in its utility as the social categories such as age or residential areas would lump many different types of individuals. According to the situational theory, people in the same social categories are likely to perceive and behave very differently regarding a problem or issue that communicators target to influence.

If new governmental initiative for sustainable agricultural practice, (e.g., new requirement for farmhouse-caused pollution), the same policy change could be different among farmers. Specifically, for the ICLF's policy initiatives, those target farmers of similar age or residential regions could act differently. For some farmers might not recognize negative environmental consequences as problematic. Hence, they do not see any problem and motivation for learn and adopt new policy. In other cases, some farmers in the same region have recognized the problem (e.g., new pro-environmental regulation), but feel more prohibiting to adopt new procedures as they differ in training and financial resources mobilizing for the changing practice (e.g., high constraint recognition).

The situational theory of problem solving explains when people start or not in (communicative) action for the problem at hand. Figure 1 explains the theoretical variables and their causal influences in increasing or decreasing motivated problem-solving actions. In brief, individuals' cognitive or communitive actions for problematic situations are unlikely unless they realize problems at first. Even when people recognized problem as consequential to their lives (i.e., high problem recognition), if they perceive the problem as remote to their lives and/or they find severe barriers prohibiting their capacity in changing situation, they behave not related to the problem. In other words, for Brazilian strategic environmental initiatives that ICLF Network Association drive, if individual members of farmers of the policy targets could not perceive problems and connection to their lives and limited by barriers, they will not engage in any adaptive pro-environmental actions recommended by the ICLF Network.

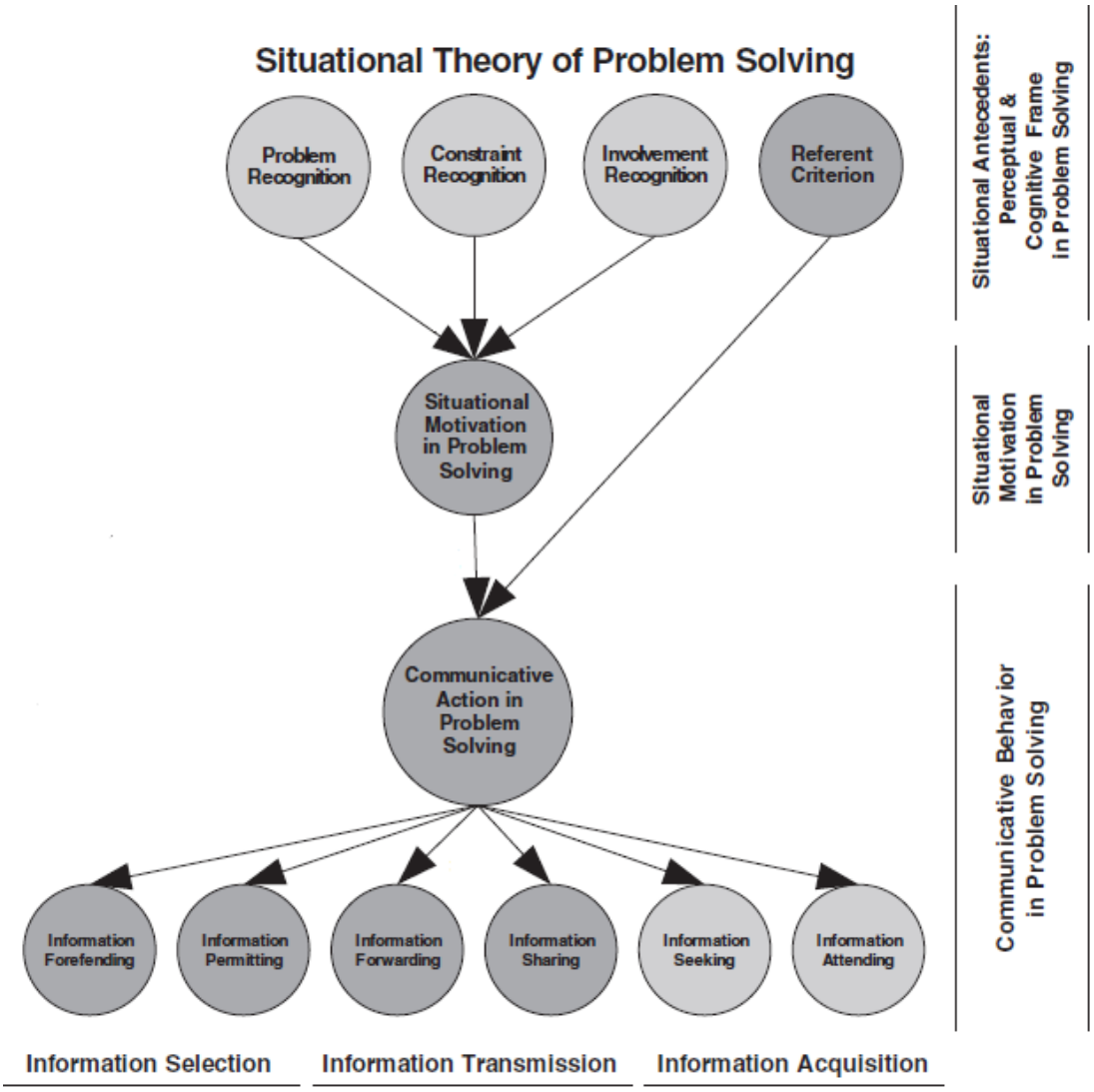

Figure 1. Situational theory of problem solving.

The ICLF Network Association's Key Publics

A company or a social institution that operate systematically develops a "map of strategic constituencies" or segmenting strategic publics who could influence or be influenced by process of their operation. Before deploying communicative programs and policy intervention, organization or any other communicators would be better off by understanding their communicative partners or targets – some people reserve more importance and/or some are more likely to engage with communicative efforts for the problems or initiatives of interest.

That way, communication becomes strategic as communicators reflect their pre-communication conditions and necessary knowledge on the current states and factors that influence their communication effects. Situational theory explains and help identify subpublic groups and individuals who recognize it more problematic, what could constrain and demotivate some farmers more than others. In brief, guided by the situational theory (STOPS), ICLF

Network could identify active and passive farmers related to its initiatives. Then, learn how and why some farmers become active or remain inactive among identified farmers (publics). Specifically, ICLF with identified subgroups of policy interest, they can develop a map what could challenge its efforts and what should earn more priority of intervention.

A map of publics – their different motivations, their causal factors, ICLF prepare and identify program goals and communicative objectives. Whilst ICLF's policy and program missions and goals are already clear, members of farmer publics are yet clear, if ever. The interests of ICLF should meet the farmers' interests at first. Then, the demotivating barriers are then removed or equip those constrained farmers with resources to have higher motivation and coping capacity. After all, the effective policy and communication programs could be moist likely when the interest of ICLF participating members and companies meet or coorient with that of farmers simultaneously (i.e., symmetrical communication, Grunig & Kim, in press).

ICLF Network Association has these main stakeholders and strategic constituencies: farmers, technical consultants, journalists, government, decision makers and leaders, urban society, educational institutions, Embrapa internal public, ICLF Network member companies, potential associated companies, financial institutions, NGOs and industry. Because small farmers often not have the same interests unlike big farmers? Differentiation of setting communicative goals and strategies are necessary. Different subgroups of farmers could exist regarding the problem ICLF communicate. Thus, ICLF decided to check systematically the problem and perceptual and cognitive characteristics of those farmers.

The expected outcomes of this research are enhanced understanding of the ICLF communicators about what and how far there are differences between ICLF and farmers, and further among farmers themselves. Achieving join orientation and compatible interests regarding the problems, ICLF could develop goals and objectives and estimate likely outcomes from communicative and policy efforts.

Thus, STOPS has been utilized to prepare identification of publics – how farmers view the problems, what constrained them, and what possible desires or needs they have related to problem solving, if they recognized and agreeing on the needs for actions that ICLF Network initiated. Specifically, the board of the ICLF Network Association want to know the problems and conditions related to farmers that influence the achievement of 30 million hectares with ICLF by 2030, considering the point of view from the publics and the board. After that, ICLF Network Association is able to create a quality relationship program focused on solving those problems.

Method: Procedures of Qualitative Study

We conducted two phases of qualitative studies (focus group and in-depth interviews), including follow-up interviews. Qualitative research is ideal for formative research at the program level, although it also can be used for evaluation at that level (Grunig & Grunig, 2001). The focus group, held on June 4, 2019, had two directors of the Association and eight high-level representatives of each enterprise. Embrapa and the ICLF Association's field leaders identified strategic subgroups of farmers (active, aware, latent publics and nonpublic) and developed understanding of the conditions that prevent ICLF adoption. The focus was a good opportunity to understand the problems from board perspective, or Organization-Initiated PR Problem (OPR problem, Kim & Ni, 2013, Grunig & Kim, 2017).

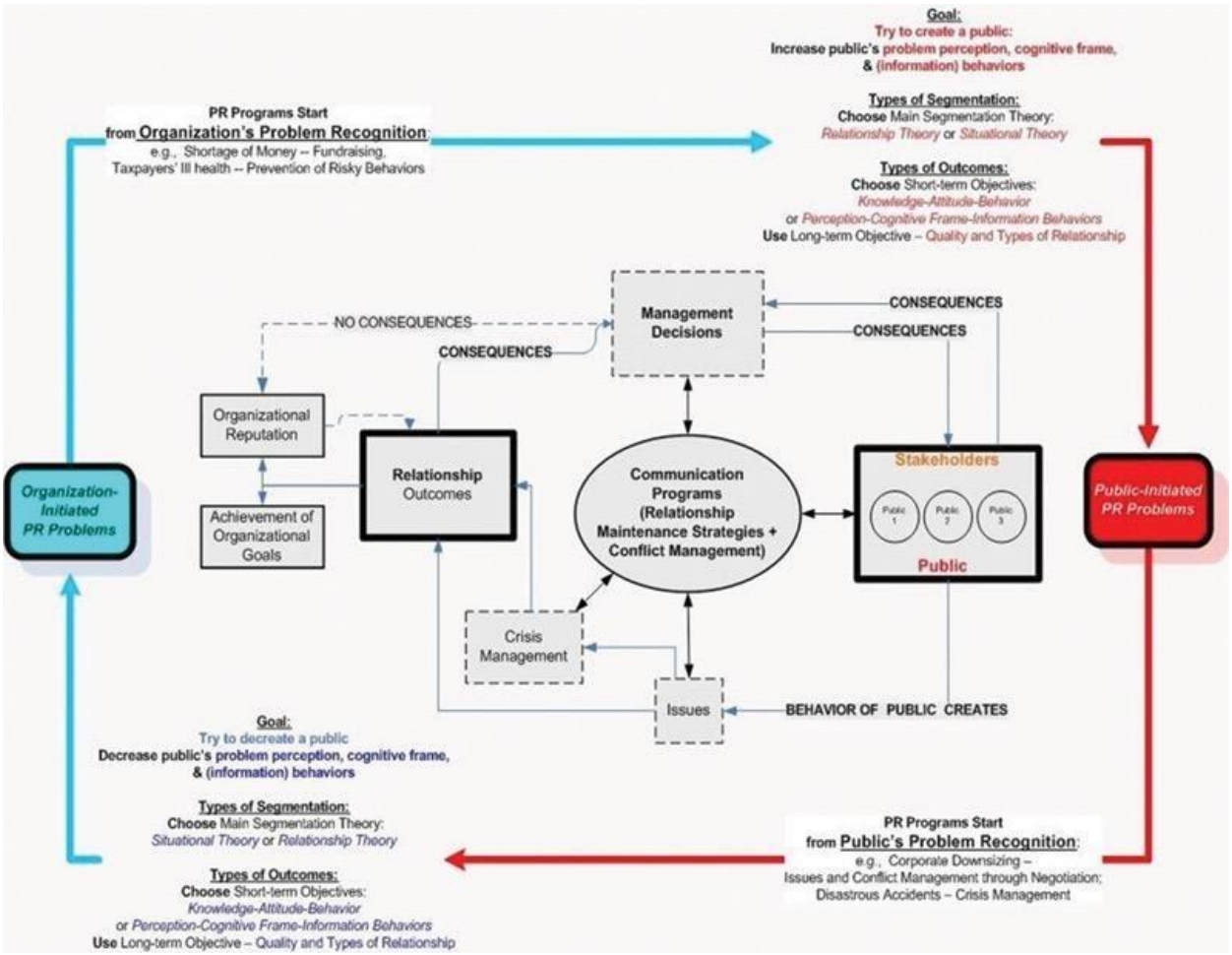

Figure 1 A taxonomy of types of PR problems in the strategic management context.

The in-depth interviews focused on four stakeholders: farmers, consultants, researchers, and college teachers. Forty-five interviews were conducted between July and September 2019, across all of the five regions of Brazil, in ten states (37% of Brazilian states): Goiás, Maranhão, Mato Grosso, Minas Gerais, Pará, Paraná, Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, São Paulo and Sergipe. In the other way, it was important to understand Public-Initiated PR Problem (PPR problem, Kim & Ni, 23013, Grunig & Kim, 2017). From the two qualitative studies, we have found 32 problems affecting the adoption of ICLF – some originating from publics and others from enterprise (ICLF Network Association). Those problems showed 11 constraints:

C: Constraint

P: Problems

OPR: Organization Initiated PR Problem

PPR: Public Initiated PR Problem

Results

The findings are summarized below from the qualitative studies (focus group and in-depth interviews) using the questions and protocols guided by the situational theory of problem solving. They are:

C1: Lower synergy between the institutions that assemble the ICLF Network Association

P1: Enterprises do not know why the other company is part of the Association (OPR)

P2: It is not known which actions on behalf of the ICLF the institutions carry out (OPR)

P3: Few joint actions between institutions (OPR)

C2: Actions taken with different audiences that sometimes do not seem to look at the Association's objectives

P4: No prioritization of stakeholders by the ICLF Network Association (OPR)

C3: Only medium and large producers adopt ICLF

P5: Lack of communication demonstrating key benefits of ICLF (OPR)

P6: Vision among ICLF farming system actors is for large producers only (PPR)

P7: Lack of knowledge of the general population about ICLF (OPR)

C4: The expansion of ICLF do not focus on key regions of interest

P8: Lack of scientific knowledge about the specificities of each biome, regions and properties for the ICLF, generating lack of security for the producer (PPR)

P9: Little information about ICLF in the Northeast of Brazil (OPR)

C5: URTs and URTPs (technology showcase) have low effectiveness in transferring regional technology over ICLF

P10: Low regional articulation with other institutions (universities, consultants, research companies) where URTs and URTPs are located (PPR)

P11: Existence of URTs with different physical structures (OPR)

P12: Existence of URTs that do not reflect reality in the field (OPR)

C6: Low use of ICLF to recover degraded pasture areas

P13: Cultural difficulty for farmer to plant grain and forest (PPR)

C7: Low participation of technicians as main disseminators of ICLF

P14: Lack of definition of technical coefficient, which must be set for technicians in order to transfer information that producers need (PPR)

P15: Lack of training of technicians in the whole production system, which generally understand either livestock or agriculture or forestry (PPR)

P16: Due to lack of technicians' knowledge, some properties adopt ICLF without customization, preventing the best results from being obtained (PPR)

P17: Few universities in Brazil teach ICLF in agronomic, veterinary or zootechnical engineering courses (PPR)

P18: Lack of training courses (specialization and postgraduate) in ICLF (PPR)

C8: Low producer interest in adopting ICLF

P19: Lack of market differential for agricultural production on properties that adopt ICLF (PPR)

P20: Missing of a Property Certification Seal (PPR)

P21: Lack of measurement of impacts, mainly financial (PPR)

P22: Lack of economic data (PPR)

P23: Many ICLF events take place at Embrapa areas and the producers do not believe in what they see. They need examples from real rural properties (PPR)

P24: Different structures and resources for farmers, ranchers and foresters, making it difficult to adopt all practices (PPR)

C9: Low use of forest in the ICLF system

P25: Only 17% of areas with integration have a forest component, due to limitations such as the small menu of species options and the absence of market in the regions. (OPR)

P26: Many areas do not have a consolidated forest market (PPR)

P27: Research generally uses eucalyptus, which has no high benefit for sawmill (OPR)

C10: Difficulty to the internationalization of the ICLF

P28: Great difficulty in internationalizing ICLF in the market. However, there is good scientific internationalization, in partnership with universities and institutions (OPR)

P29: Defining strategy and countries in which internationalization should take place (OPR)

C11: Low use by farmers for financing possibilities for adoption of ICLF

P30: Lack of proximity to the government, which can prioritize ICLF as Brazil's sustainable technology and allocate specific resources for ICLF development. (OPR)

P31: Banks' lack of knowledge of specific funding lines for ICLF and project approval parameters (PPR)

P32: Difficulty to release ICLF funding lines (PPR)

Assess and Prioritization using SUT Matrix (Severity, Urgency, and Tendency)

From the analysis of the qualitative interviews, we further prioritize 10 problems, since is not possible to work with 32 issues, the SUT Matrix (Severity, Urgency and Tendency) was filled for all of eight companies that form ICLF Network Association. Daychoum (2011) defines it as a tool that serves to prioritize the problems and treat them. To this end, it considers the factors Gravity, Urgency and Tendency, and for each one gives a score on a scale of 1 (one) to 5 (five), in which Gravity refers to non-resolution of the problem, and indicates the impact, mainly, results, and processes that will emerge in the long term. Urgency is the variable related to the availability of time required to resolve a given situation. Finally, Tendency analyzes the trend or standard of problem evolution, reduction, or its elimination.

After multiply S x U x T for each problem, the lowest number represents the most important issue, and the highest one, the less important problem. This is an easy and helpful way to prioritize problems when there is data from qualitative research. The score-sheet and analyzed results are reported in Table 1 below.

Problems	**Severity**	**Urgency**	**Tendency**	**Result**
1- Lack of training of the technicians in the whole production system, which generally understand either livestock or agriculture or forestry	1.67	1.44	2.44	5.87
2 - Due to lack of technicians' knowledge, some properties adopt ICLF without customization, preventing the best results to be obtained	2.00	1.44	2.22	6.39
3- Lack of measurement of impacts, mainly financial	1.67	2.11	2.22	7.82
4 - Lack of a property certification seal	2.00	1.56	2.78	8.67
5- Lack of training courses (specialization and postgraduate) in ICLF	1.78	2.00	2.78	9.90
6. Lack of proximity to the government, which can prioritize ILPF as Brazil's sustainable technology and allocate specific resources for ICLF development	2.11	1.78	2.67	10.03
7- Lack of economic data	1.89	2.11	2.56	10.21
8- Difficult to release ICLF financing lines	2.00	2.11	2.44	10.30
9- Lack of market differential for agricultural production carried out in properties that adopt ICLF	2.22	2.00	2.33	10.35
10- Lack of definition of technical coefficient, which must be defined for the technician to transfer the information that the producers need	2.00	2.00	3.00	12.00

Table 1. Applying SUT Matrix on Problems of ICLF Network Association

From the procedure, we could further identify 10 problems of strategic priority relevant to Brazil farmers and close or coincidental with the ICLF's interest. As these problems are resolved or reduced, farmers with the particular problems are likely to motivated or demotivated related to problems, and thus increase the adaptive problem-solving actions and communication (e.g., information seeking or information sharing) among their communities and networks of agricultural practice.

In other words, these prirority problems are to set intervention goals and related to strategies and tactics currently. The identified 10 problems from the qualitative inquiry are also used to develop a larger scale public survey following the guideline of formative research (Grunig & Grunig, 2001) and Kim and Ni's (2013) communicative goals/objectives in relation to OPR and PPR problems. The anticipated survey findings will be used for the registry of communication and policy goals/objectives, and subsequently help evaluate and determine the effectiveness of the programs by ICLF Network Association.

Conclusion

Understanding connections between public constraints-problems is a crucial step toward implementing ICLF on 30 million hectares in Brazil by 2030. To this end, our study shares Brazil's efforts toward sustainable agriculture and environmental repair. Our collective efforts will improve and expedite agricultural change with ICLF. Specifically, we used the public relations theory (STOPS) and its procedures to segment strategic publics, combining with SUT Matrix to prioritize problems. The research team identified real obstacles to ICLF adoption, and our team used the findings to develop policies and mobilize resources to remove identified constraints. We used the views of Brazilian farmers to encourage collaboration among farmers, government and industry. Our research and practice establish a model for governments and other consortiums that wish to be agents of change in environmental protection and sustainable agriculture practice worldwide.

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When Public Health meets Twitter
Communicating #globalhealth issues across the globe

Jeanine P.D. Guidry
Virginia Commonwealth University

Shana L. Meganck
James Madison University

Nicole H. O'Donnell
Virginia Commonwealth University

Alessandro Lovari
University of Cagliari

Vivian Medina-Messner
Aloni Hill
Marcus Messner
Virginia Commonwealth University

Abstract

While Twitter is increasingly used by PR practitioners in the health sector to communicate health information, until recently little was known about the content of or engagement with these messages across nations; this study examines the differences and similarities in Twitter messaging by national public health departments of 12 countries during 2019. Compared to an earlier study of 2016 tweets by the same departments, tweets still lack focus on cardiovascular and other chronic diseases. While the messages include Health Belief Model constructs, their presence is not balanced enough for optimum use of the model.

Keywords: Twitter; Public health; Health Belief Model

Background

Public health organizations strive to prevent public health problems from happening through implementing programs, recommending policies, administering services, conducting research, and promoting healthcare equity, quality, and accessibility (CDC, 2020). This important role of public health organizations encourages the need to look at how they are communicating across different countries in order to provide insights into how they can better reach audiences.

While there are several tools available for reaching these audiences, the value of using social media cannot be overlooked. There are over 3.2 billion active social media users worldwide (Kemp, 2018), and the rapid and vast adoption of these technologies is changing how people find and receive health-related information. For instance, 41% of people believe that information they get from social media impacts their healthcare decisions (Arnold, 2018). Additionally, social media provide public health practitioners and organizations a way to share information, debate health care policy, promote health behaviors, and educate and engage with audiences (Ventola, 2014).

Specifically looking at using social media as a means of seeking and sharing health information, Twitter has become an important communication and engagement tool. Thackeray, Neiger, and Keller (2012) determined that Twitter offers the opportunity to advance disease prevention, health promotion, and public health education. Additionally, Donnelle and Booth (2012) found that Twitter produces a collaborative model of distributing health information and provides a developing opportunity for consumers to seek and share health information. Twitter has become an accessible and necessary way for organizations to communicate directly with other organizations and their audiences. Additionally, public health organizations are recognizing the value of Twitter as a way for disseminating health information and encouraging actions to improve health, making it the most commonly used social media platform by public health departments (Syed-Abdul, Gabarrow, & Lau, 2016). Despite the utility of Twitter, previous studies have shown that it is often used as a one-way communication tool, broadcasting information instead of focusing on their publics' needs and preferences (Guidry, et al., 2019; Novillo-Ortiz & Hernàndez-Pérez, 2017; Syed-Abdul et al., 2016). Therefore, public health organizations are not using Twitter or other social media platforms to their full potential (Gough et al., 2017). In order to fully leverage the benefits of Twitter, public health organizations should focus on increasing their information-sharing and relationship-building strategies (Park, Reber, & Chon, 2016).

There are limited studies, however, that compare the use of social media by health departments across different countries. Novillo-Ortiz and Hernàndez-Pérez (2017) analyzed social media platforms of national health authorities in 18 different countries in Latin America and the Caribbean for the availability of information about the leading causes of death. Guidry et al. (2019) conducted a study in which the current manuscript was based: a quantitative content analysis of 1,200 randomly selected tweets published in 2016 by 12 public health departments across six different continents. This previous study found that tweets from these agencies tended to lack broad coverage of health issues with cardiovascular disease, one of the leading causes of death worldwide, only appearing in five of the 1200 tweets.

These findings lead to a need to better understand how public health organizations are using Twitter to communicate about public health issues and continue the research on whether they are utilizing certain health communication variables in the content of the tweets that affects

social media engagement levels. Consequently, the first two research questions for this study are:

RQ1: What do Twitter messages by national health departments look like in different nations?

RQ2: Are there differences in the Twitter engagement among national health department tweets of different nations?

Health Belief Model and the use of Twitter

The Health Belief Model (HBM) is one of the primary models used to explain why individuals do or do not engage in a variety of health-related actions (Glanz, Rimer, & Lewis, 2002). There are six constructs of the HBM: perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, perceived self-efficacy, and cues to action. Perceived susceptibility refers to a person's individual perception of the risk of acquiring an illness or disease. Perceived severity refers to an individual's feelings on the seriousness of a condition and the consequences (e.g., medical and social) of the condition. Perceived benefits refers to an individual's perception of the helpfulness of various methods available for reducing the threat of illness and disease. Perceived barriers refers to an individual's feelings on the obstacles to performing a recommended health action, and whether the associated costs (financial or psychological) outweigh the benefits (Glanz et al., 2002). Cues to action are the internal and external stimuli that may motivate a person to change or adopt a behavior (Graham, 2002). Self-efficacy refers to the level of an individual's confidence in their ability to successfully perform a behavior, such as eating healthy or exercising (Bandura, 2004).

The HBM is often used to design, explain, and evaluate digital health communication, including via social media (Ahadzadeh, Sharif, Ong, & Khong, 2015). Past studies have focused on body image issues (Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017), vaccines (Guidry, Carlyle, Messner, & Jin, 2015), breast cancer awareness (Diddi & Lundy, 2017), and public health communication (Guidry et al., 2019). The aforementioned study by Guidry et al. (2019) on public health department tweets from 12 nations found that while many of the departments used HBM constructs in their tweets, they focused primarily on perceived benefits, cues to action, and self-efficacy. The relevance of the Health Belief Model in public health communication and its prevalence in social media content analyses, led to the current study's third and fourth research questions:

RQ3: To what extent are HBM constructs used in national health department tweets across different nations?

RQ4: To what extent does the presence of HBM constructs in tweets by national health departments impact Twitter engagement?

Visual communication and the use of Twitter

Visuals are often used to support the dissemination of complex information, such as health information, because they can attract and keep people's attention better than text-only communication, trigger emotions that draw audiences' attention and increase engagement, and increase reader comprehension significantly (Houts, Doak, Doak, & Loscalzo, 2006; Lipkus, 2007; McCaffery et al., 2012). Additionally, several newer social media platforms are visually focused, some even requiring a visual. Even those that do not require a visual, such as Twitter, have been shown to increase responses when visuals are included (Guidry, Waters, & Saxton, 2014; Guidry et al., 2019). Since Twitter does not require visuals, but visuals are significant in both health communication as well as social media communication, it is of interest to see whether and how these tweets by national health organizations are using visuals. Therefore, the fifth and final research question is:

RQ5: To what extent are visuals used in national health department tweets across different nations, and did the presence of these visuals impact Twitter engagement?

Method

A quantitative content analysis was carried out of 1,200 randomly selected tweets by 12 national health departments: those of the United States (@HHSgov), Canada (@HealthCanada), Brazil (@minsaude), Chile (@ministeriosalud), Italy (@ministerosalute), Germany (@BMG_Bund), Nigeria (@Fohmnigeria), South Africa (@healthZA), India (@MoHFW_INDIA), Singapore (@sporeMOH), Australia (@healthgovau), and New Zealand (@minhealthNZ). The sample was derived from the same national health departments from two of the economically most productive countries on each of the six continents that were used in the 2017 study the authors conducted (Guidry et al., 2019).

On December 21, 2019, random sampling was used to collect the 1,200 distinct tweets from the 12 national health departments using Meltwater's Twitter collection utility.

Tweets were coded for Twitter-specific variables like hashtags, whether a tweet was a retweet, website connection, and visual presence and characteristics; Twitter engagement, here defined as retweet, like, and reply frequencies; health issue topics (cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, infectious disease, HIV/AIDS, mental health, natural disasters, injuries, sexual health, physical activity, diet/obesity, violence prevention, insurance/payment for healthcare, and other); whether a tweet referred to prevention, screening, and/or treatment; and Health Belief Model variables (perceived severity of the mentioned health issue, perceived susceptibility to the mentioned health issue, perceived benefits of recommended actions, perceived barriers to recommended actions, self-efficacy and cues to action related to recommended actions).

Tweets in languages other than English (Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and German) were translated into English by a research team member with the language skills needed. Intercoder reliability tests were conducted by two coders on 10% of the sample. One coder (JG) coded all content, while the other coder (NOD) coded 10% of the sample. Calculations with the ReCal statistical program showed that *Scott's Pi* (Scott, 1955) was on average .85. The individual coefficients for all coding categories were all considered to be reliable, with the lowest coefficient at .70 (complete results available upon request).

Statistical Analyses

Descriptive statistics were conducted for all variables, and Mann-Whitney U tests were used to check for differences in Twitter engagement between posts with versus without HBM variables as well as the presence of visuals.

Results

RQ1: What do Twitter messages by national health departments look like in different nations?

For the entire sample, 24.8% (n=298) of the tweets consisted of a retweet (a tweet forwarded from another Twitter user). In addition, a little under half (47.3%, n=568) of the tweets in the sample included a hyperlink, and the majority of those pointed either to the organization's own website (48.9%, n=278) or to another, related, government website (27.8%, n=158). An additional 9.5% (n=54) pointed to a social media website besides Twitter. In addition, 64.3% (n=764), of the tweets mentioned a specific health issue. A plurality, 41.9% (n=320), fit into the "other" category (including issues such as breastfeeding and blood donation); followed by infectious diseases (18.2%, n=139), substance use (9.3%, n=72), mental health (7.7%, n=59), and HIV/AIDS (7.3%, n=57). Cardiovascular disease was only mentioned

in 2.3% (n=17) of the tweets, one of the lowest counts in the sample. Of the total sample, 21.1% (n=253) referred to prevention, 2.8% (n=34) to screening, and 6.5% (n=78) to treatment.

When considering the linking practices of the countries individually, six of the twelve countries – Brazil, Germany, and New Zealand – used a great breadth of websites. In contrast, Canada almost exclusively linked to its own website, and the U.S. account almost exclusively only linked to government websites other that their own; never sharing news websites or major medical organization hyperlinks. A complete breakdown of hyperlink sources can be found in Table 1. Table 2 outlines the health topics as addressed by country. Each of the 12 countries mentioned infectious diseases in their tweets, but Germany, Brazil, India, and New Zealand each dedicated 15% or more of their tweets to this issue. Eight countries (Brazil, Canada, India, Nigeria, Singapore, South Africa, and the U.S.) mentioned cardiovascular disease, but most only mentioned it in one or two tweets. One third of the countries – Chile, Germany, Nigeria, and South Africa – did not address a specific health issue or topic in more than 50% of their tweets, instead often posting more general messages about agency activities like meetings, services, and travels.

RQ2: Are there differences in the Twitter engagement among national health department tweets of different nations?

For the complete sample, the median number of retweets was 7.00 (Range: 8,089), the median like frequency was 14.00 (Range: 35,529), and the median number of replies was .00 (Range: 2,300). When breaking the results down per country, India produced the highest median levels of engagement (retweets: 26.00, likes: 85.50, and replies: 3.00), followed by Italy (retweets: 20.00, likes: 35.00, and replies: 1.00), Brazil (retweets: 9.00, likes: 38.00, and replies: 1.00), and the U.S. (retweets: 19.50, likes: 24.50, and replies: 1.00). Among the health departments with the lowest median Twitter engagement were Australia (retweets: 2.00, likes: 3.00, and replies: 0), Canada (retweets: 6.00, likes: 7.00, and replies: 0), New Zealand (retweets: 4.00, likes: 6.50, and replies: 0) and Singapore (retweets: 1.00, likes: 0, and replies: 0)

RQ3: To what extent are HBM constructs used in national health department tweets across different nations?

Of the total sample of 1,200 tweets, 12.7% (n=152) mentioned the perceived severity of a health issue, 9.6% (n=115) mentioned perceived susceptibility to a disease or health issue, 16.5% (n=198) mentioned perceived benefits of health preventative, treatment, or screening actions, 3.1% (n=37) mentioned perceived barriers to health preventative, treatment, or screening actions, 2.0% (n=24) mentioned self-efficacy, and 29.8% (n=358) mentioned cues to action.

South Africa, Nigeria, and Singapore used these constructs in fewer than 12% of their tweets, and none of the departments address perceived barriers in more than 9% of their posts. Cues to action were present most frequently - 74.0% of U.S. posts, 58.0% of Australian posts, and 42.0% of posts from Canada; however, Nigeria only used this construct in 2% of its tweets, Singapore in 1%, and Germany in 6% of its tweets. While the U.S. and Italy used the perceived susceptibility construct in, respectively, 24.0% and 19.0% of tweets, half of the public health departments referred to perceived susceptibility to a specific health issue in fewer than 10.0% of their Twitter posts. In general, perceived benefits and cues to action were the most frequently utilized constructs (see Table 3).

RQ4: To what extent does the presence of HBM constructs in tweets by national health departments impact Twitter engagement?

In order to answer this question, this study compared engagement as operationalized by levels of retweets, likes, and replies with the presence/absence of HBM constructs within each

organization's tweets. Since the Twitter engagement variables were not normally distributed, we used the nonparametric Mann Whitney U test to compare the medians for retweets, likes, and replies by country - as long as those constructs were present in at least 5% of the tweets from that department. Except for perceived barriers and self-efficacy, all HBM constructs were at least associated with a statistically significant change in median engagement in at least one instance. In the U.S.' case, four of the six constructs (benefits, severity, susceptibility, and cues to action) were associated with a higher median engagement frequency. Cues to action was associated with seven separate instances of higher median engagement, while perceived severity was associated with six separate instances. Finally, there were no significant differences associated with the presence of any of the HBM constructs for Canada, India, Nigeria, and South Africa, and Mann Whitney tests were not carried out for any of Singapore's HBM constructs, since they were not present frequently enough (see Table 4).

RQ5: To what extent are visuals used in national health department tweets across different nation, and did the presence of visuals impact Twitter engagement?

For the entire sample, 79.1% (n=949) of the tweets contained a visual. Of those, 47.1% (n=447) consisted of primarily an image (a photo with little or no text), 20.7% (n=196) consisted of a mix of image and text, 13.4% (n=127) consisted of primarily text, and 10.7% (n=102) consisted of a video. Considering each country individually, 94% of Australia's tweets included a visual, 85% for Brazil, 69% for Canada, 93% for Chile, 89% for Germany, 90% for India, 94% for Italy, 69% for New Zealand, 89% for Nigeria, 10% for Singapore, 80% for South Africa, and 87% for the USA.

In other words, only one country, city-state Singapore, utilized visuals in just 10% of their tweets, while nine countries included visuals in 80% or more of their posts: Australia, Brazil, Chile, Germany, India, Italy, Nigeria, South Africa, and the U.S.

Moreover, Germany, India, Italy, South Africa, and the U.S. all seemed to use a broad visual strategy, utilizing all visual types that appeared in more than 10% of the complete sample in their sub sample of 100 tweets: primarily photo, primarily text, a mix of photo and text, and video (for a complete breakdown, see Table 5).

Finally, Mann Whitney U tests showed that tweets including a visual were retweeted more frequently (Mdn=9.00) than tweets lacking a visual (Mdn=1.00); were liked more frequently (Mdn=18.00) than tweets without a visual (Mdn=2.00); and received more frequent replies (Mdn=1.00) than tweets not using a visual (Mdn=0).

Discussion

This content analysis focused on the Twitter use and public engagement of national health departments in twelve countries on six continents. While there was a marginal increase in tweets mentioning cardiovascular disease in this sample compared to the sample analyzed in 2017 by Guidry et al., the issue is still barely mentioned, while it is one of the main causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide (WHO, n.d.). Most tweets that addressed a specific topic focused on infectious diseases, which is not surprising considering the recent Ebola and Zika outbreaks. Each of the 12 countries mentioned infectious diseases in their tweets, but Brazil, and India each dedicate 19% or more of their messages to this issue. Topics such as infectious disease are relevant and should be covered, but the lack of focus on cardiovascular disease and its prevention is still startling and cause for concern, particularly since it is the leading cause of death worldwide (Finegold, Asaria, & Francis, 2013).

Similar to the 2017 study, five of the countries – Chile, Germany, New Zealand, Singapore, and South Africa – did not address a specific health issue or topic in more than 40% of their tweets; instead often posting more general messages about agency activities like meetings, services, and travels. These messages elicited little engagement by digital publics, and while they may seem to make sense from a public relations point of view, they are likely not the most productive type of tweet for public health communication professionals or for the agencies themselves since they mostly do not satisfy local public's information needs (Thackeray et al., 2012).

On social media, connecting with hyperlinks to additional sources often is cause for concern when the associated websites are lacking in trustworthiness. In this case, as in 2017, most hyperlinks pointed to either a health department's own site or other related government sites, which is encouraging since patients tend to trust online information sources operated by reputable organizations such as the government (Silence, Briggs, Harris, & Fishwick, 2007).

As far as engagement with the tweets in this sample, Brazil, India, Italy, and the U.S. elicited the highest engagement as far as median frequency for retweets, likes, and replies. However, engagement was low compared to other Twitter health topic studies (Guidry, Jin, Orr, Messner, & Meganck, 2017), which points to the need for a greater commitment on fostering public engagement and a specific focus on strategic message design for these health departments. Health Belief Model (HBM) constructs were used frequently and, in most cases, increased public engagement in a statistically significant manner, with the exception of perceived susceptibility, which was associated with a decrease in median engagement in the German tweets. In general, like in 2017, perceived benefits and cues to action were most frequently utilized, but unlike in 2017, self-efficacy is now barely present in the sample. Their focus, therefore, seems to be less on perceived threat of health issues (in the form of perceived severity and susceptibility as well as perceived barriers to solutions), and somewhat more on the potential for management of threats in the form of perceived benefits and cues to action. However, severity, susceptibility, and self-efficacy are all equal component of the SBM, and according to the theory, behavior change will only take place once people are both convinced of the threat of a specific health issue as well as have the confidence and understanding on how to deal with the health issue, which may still be lacking in most of this sample.

Again, city-state Singapore, which only incidentally used theory constructs in their tweets, and no variety in their visuals, also did not elicit engagement on Twitter, while countries with a deeper and more balanced approach elicited more engagement.

Finally, use of visuals on Twitter varied wildly among the national health departments in this sample, ranging from 10% (Singapore) to 94% (Italy and Australia). Over the complete sample, tweets including a visual elicited significantly higher levels of median engagement. This confirms what we know from other studies: the use of visuals on Twitter tends to be associated with higher engagement (Guidry, Jin, Orr, Messner, & Meganck, 2017).

Conclusion

This study recommends several best practices for public health communication professionals on Twitter that could be applied, despite the cultural and legal factors impacting public health digital communication strategies across the world. First of all, while different countries and cultures may have different perceptions of which health issues are perceived as a more imminent threat, it is important to increase focus on chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, because of the associated morbidity and mortality in the majority of the

countries included (WHO, n.d.). Particularly concerning in this area is that there appears to have been little increase in mentions of cardiovascular disease since the 2016 sample.

Second, health communication professionals should use and adopt theoretical constructs when defining social media strategies and create tweets in order to make these messages more effective towards digital publics. They should also utilize visuals such as images, videos, or infographics in their public health tweets in order to increase message engagement among citizens with low literacy (Houts et al., 2006). Encouragingly, in the current sample, more tweets included a visual of some kind compared to the 2016 sample.

This study's limitations also point to options for future directions: The study only focused on Twitter while newer, more visual platforms have long overtaken Twitter in terms of popularity and active users. Future studies should consider a similar study on other social media platforms such as Instagram, especially once these platforms are increasingly adopted by public health agencies and departments. In addition, this study only focused on twelve nations, thus the study could be extended to other nations to identify possible commonalities or differences in digital health communication strategies in the different parts of the globe. Moreover, we focused on retweets, likes, and replies as measures of public engagement, which is what Twitter provides on its platform. However, these are a limited form of engagement (Neiger et al., 2013), and other research methods like surveys, digital ethnography, and interviews may provide a broader insight into which posts are most effective in reaching health departments' publics. These methods could help enrich theoretical implications related to publics' engagement specifically related to health communication. Finally, the integration of theoretical frameworks from other disciplines in the study messages seems to hold potential and deserves further consideration.

In closing, social media in general and Twitter in particular have become essential tools for public health communications that allow governments to reach large audiences immediately. While public health departments appear to use Twitter to communicate with their publics in several beneficial ways, too many of their posts were focusing on promoting the internal activities of the agency instead of on educating and engaging with the public about relevant health-related issues. In addition, there appears to have been little change in the nature of public health department tweets between the 2016 and 2019 samples. Therefore, it is essential that further research is conducted both on the use of social media by these public health departments, and on how to improve this crucial platform to inform their publics.

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Table 1
Type of link by country

Country	Other social media	Own blog	Other gov site	Own site	Major news site	Major medical org	Other
Australia (n=98)	4.1% (n=4)		41.8% (n=41)	42.9% (n=42)		11.2% (n=11)	
Brazil (n=70)	2.9% (n=2)	28.5% (n=20)	24.3% (n=17)	42.9% (n=30)		1.4% (n=1)	
Canada (n=91)	1.1% (n=1)		3.3% (n=3)	91.2% (n=83)		3.3% (n=3)	
Chile (n=28)	17.9% (n=5)		7.1% (n=2)	64.3% (n=18)	10.7% (n=3)		
Germany (n=35)	17.1% (n=6)		17.1% (n=6)	11.4% (n=6)	11.4% (n=4)	34.3% (n=12)	5.7% (n=2)
India (n=14)	50.0% (n=7)		7.0% (n=1)	21.4% (n=3)	21.4% (n=3)		
Italy (n=59)	8.5% (n=5)		16.9% (n=10)	72.9% (n=43)		1.7% (n=1)	
New Zealand (n=61)	4.9% (n=3)		9.8% (n=6)	77.0% (n=47)		1.6% (n=1)	6.6% (n=4)
Nigeria (n=6)	33.3% (n=2)				16.7% (n=1)	33.3% (n=2)	16.7% (n=1)
Singapore (n=22)	77.3% (n=17)			18.2% (n=4)			4.5% (n=1)
South Africa (n=10)	20.0% (n=2)		50.0% (n=5)		2.0% (n=5)		10.0% (n=1)
USA (n=74)		1.4% (n=1)	90.5% (n=67)	5.4% (n=4)			2.7% (n=2)

Table 2
Health issues by country

Country	CVD*	Cancer	Diabetes	Infectious diseases	HIV / AIDS	Mental health	Natural disasters	Injuries	Sexual health	Physical activity	Diet obesity	Substance use	Other	None
Australia		6.0% (n=6)	1.0% (n=1)	12.0% (n=12)	1.0% (n=1)	17.0% (n=17)	1.0% (n=1)	1.0% (n=1)		4.0% (n=4)	11.0% (n=11)	3.0% (n=3)	25.0% (n=25)	20.0% (n=20)
Brazil	1.0% (n=1)	2.0% (n=2)	1.0% (n=1)	22.0% (n=22)	8.0% (n=8)			3.0% (n=3)	1.0% (n=1)		4.0% (n=4)	6.0% (n=6)	27.0% (n=27)	34.0% (n=34)
Canada	4.0% (n=4)	3.0% (n=3)	2.0% (n=2)	4.0% (n=4)	1.0% (n=1)	8.0% (n=8)		1.0% (n=1)	2.0% (n=2)	6.0% (n=6)	7.0% (n=7)	23.0% (n=23)	39.0% (n=39)	6% (n=6)
Chile		9.0% (n=9)	2.0% (n=2)	7.0% (n=7)	14.0% (n=14)	10.0% (n=10)		3.0% (n=3)	1.0% (n=1)		3.0% (n=3)	4.0% (n=4)	20.0% (n=20)	65.0% (n=65)
Germany		4.0% (n=4)	3.0% (n=3)	17.0% (n=17.0)	1.0% (n=1)				3.0% (n=3)			3.0% (n=3)	13.0% (n=13)	56.0% (n=56)
India	1.0% (n=1)	1.0% (n=1)	2.0% (n=2)	19.0% (n=19)	2.0% (n=2)				3.0% (n=3)	2.0% (n=2)	8.0% (n=8)	4.0% (n=4)	26.0% (n=26)	33.0% (n=33)
Italy	2.0% (n=2)	6.0% (n=6)	1.0% (n=1)	11.0% (n=11)	14.0% (n=14)	1.0% (n=1)				2.0% (n=2)	3.0% (n=3)	3.0% (n=3)	26.0% (n=26)	31.0% (n=31)
New Zealand		7%0 (n=7)		15.0% (n=15)		8.0% (n=8)	2.0% (n=2)	1.0% (n=1)	1.0% (n=1)	1.0% (n=1)		5.0% (n=5)	61.0% (n=61)	2.0% (n=2)
Nigeria	1.0% (n=1)			11.0% (n=11)	3.0% (n=3)	1.0% (n=1)		1.0% (n=1)				1.0% (n=1)	17.0% (n=17)	57.0% (n=57)

Singapore	1.0% (n=1)		7.0% (n=7)	2.0% (n=2)		3.0% (n=3)				2.0% (n=2)	4.0% (n=4)	12.0% (n=12)	72.0% (n=72)
South Africa	1.0% (n=1)	1.0% (n=1)	1.0% (n=1)	8.0% (n=8)	11.0% (n=11)	2.0% (n=2)		3.0% (n=3)		3.0% (n=3)	4.0% (n=4)	9.0% (n=9)	60.0% (n=60)
USA	6.0% (n=6)	2.0% (n=2)	1.0% (n=1)	9.0% (n=9)	2.0% (n=2)	8.0% (n=8)	3.0% (n=3)	1.0% (n=1)	12.0% (n=12)	4.0% (n=4)	11.0% (n=11)	50.0% (n=50)	10.0% (n=10)

Table 3
Health Belief Model constructs by country

Country	Severity	Susceptibility	Benefits	Barriers	Cues to action	Self-efficacy
Australia	15.0% (n=15)	5.0% (n=5)	27.0% (n=27)	4.0% (n=4)	58.0% (n=58)	4.0% (n=4)
Brazil	14.0% (n=14)	11.0% (n=11)	17.0% (n=17)	4.0% (n=4)	35.0% (n=35)	16.0% (n=16)
Canada	24.0% (n=0)	7.0% (n=7)	24.0% (n=24)	3.0% (n=3)	42.0% (n=42)	1.0% (n=1)
Chile	9.0% (n=9)	8.0% (n=8)	16.0% (n=16)	0.0% (n=0)	26.0% (n=26)	0.0% (n=0)
Germany	12.0% (n=12)	7.0% (n=7)	13.0% (n=13)	1.0% (n=1)	6.0% (n=6)	1.0% (n=1)
India	20.0% (n=20)	12.0% (n=12)	41.0% (n=41)	5.0% (n=5)	36.0% (n=36)	4.0% (n=4)
Italy	14.0% (n=14)	19.0% (n=19)	22.0% (n=22)	9.0% (n=9)	29.0% (n=29)	6.0% (n=6)
New Zealand	16.0% (n=16)	14.0% (n=14)	8.0% (n=8)	3.0% (n=3)	38.0% (n=38)	2.0% (n=2)
Nigeria	7.0% (n=7)	1.0% (n=1)	3.0% (n=3)	3.0% (n=3)	2.0% (n=2)	0.0% (n=0)
Singapore	1.0% (n=1)	2.0% (n=2)	2.0% (n=2)	0.0% (n=0)	1.0% (n=1)	0.0% (n=0)
South Africa	7.0% (n=7)	5.0% (n=5)	11.0% (n=11)	2.0% (n=2)	11.0% (n=11)	0.0% (n=0)
USA	13.0% (n=8)	24.0% (n=24)	14.0% (n=14)	3.0% (n=3)	74.0% (n=74)	6.0% (n=6)

Table 4
Health Belief Model variables and median engagement

Country	Engagement variable	HBM variable	Mdn present	Mdn absent	p-value
Australia	Likes	Benefits	3.00	2.00	.011
	Retweets	Susceptibility	3.00	2.00	.047
Brazil	Retweets	Cues to action	11.00	8.00	.021
Chile	Replies	Benefits	0	1.00	.013
Germany	Likes	Susceptibility	14.00	23.00	.033
	Replies	Susceptibility	0	3.00	.002
Italy	Retweets	Severity	31.00	18.50	.042
	Retweets	Susceptibility	29.00	18.00	.028
	Retweets	Cues to action	28.00	12.00	.021
New Zealand	Retweets	Cues to action	5.00	3.00	.044
USA	Retweets	Severity	33.00	18.00	.032
	Replies	Severity	4.00	1.00	.001
	Retweets	Susceptibility	32.00	16.00	.005
	Likes	Susceptibility	31.50	23.00	.046
	Replies	Susceptibility	3.00	1.00	.043
	Retweets	Benefits	33.50	16.50	.013
	Likes	Benefits	38.50	23.00	.010
	Retweets	Cues to action	27.00	7.50	.001
	Likes	Cues to action	27.00	9.50	.003

[1]Note: No significance for any HBM constructs for Canada, India, Nigeria, Singapore, and South Africa
[2]Note: Only significant results shown, complete results available upon request from the authors

Table 5
Visual type by country

Country	Primarily image	Primarily text	Mixed	Infographic	Drawing	Video	GIF	Other
Australia	29.8% (n=28)	28.7% (n=27)	29.8% (n=28)			10.6% (n=10)	1.1% (n=1)	
Brazil	51.8% (n=44)	15.3% (n=13)	18.8% (n=16)	1.2% (n=1)	1.2% (n=1)	9.4% (n=8)	2.4% (n=2)	
Canada	21.7% (n=15)	17.4% (n=12)	47.8% (n=33)	4.3% (n=3)	2.9% (n=2)		5.8% (n=4)	

Chile	47.3% (n=44)	9.7% (n=9)	20.4% (n=19)	10.8% (n=10)		1.1% (n=1)		1.1% (n=1)
Germany	67.4% (n=60)	4.5% (n=4)	7.9% (n=7)		1.1% (n=1)	18.0% (n=16)	1.1% (n=1)	
India	30.0% (n=27)	7.8% (n=7)	26.7% (n=24)	7.8% (n=7)		25.6% (n=23)	2.2% (n=2)	
Italy	40.4% (n=38)	19.1% (n=18)	18.1% (n=17)	8.5% (n=8)		11.7% (n=11)	1.1% (n=1)	1.1% (n=1)
New Zealand	47.8% (n=34)	11.6% (n=8)	17.4% (n=12)	5.8% (n=4)	2.9% (n=2)	13.0% (n=9)		
Nigeria	77.5% (n=69)	5.6% (n=5)	12.4% (n=11)			4.5% (n=4)		
Singapore	30.0% (n=3)	10.0% (n=1)	60.0% (n=6)					
South Africa	62.5% (n=50)	12.5% (n=10)	6.3% (n=5)	5.0% (n=4)		11.3% (n=9)	1.3% (n=1)	1.3% (n=1)
USA	40.2% (n=35)	14.9% (n=13)	20.7% (n=18)	12.6% (n=11)		2.3% (n=2)	6.9% (n=6)	2.3% (n=2)

What Exactly Causes Distrust in Social Media Influencers?

Miriam Hautala
Hanna Reinikainen
Vilma Luoma-aho
Jyväskylä University, Finland

Abstract

Social media influencers have become a popular partner for brands and organizations in reaching their audiences and stakeholders. As sponsored content gains in popularity, the questions of influencer authenticity and audience trust have become increasingly relevant (DuBois, Golbeck and Srinivasan, 2011). New findings point out that if there are issues with inauthenticity of sponsored influencer content, the influencer is harmed more than the brand (Luoma-aho et al., 2019). On the other hand, many brands and organizations are depending on influencers to improve their relationships with stakeholders, and the way individuals feel about influencers is of central importance (Reinikainen et al., 2020). For the most part, social media influencers have been studied through audience trust and the value the influencers provide for brands and organizations (Enke & Borchers, 2019). Authentic interaction makes consumers not only engage but also trust in brands (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017). Despite this, much of sponsored content causes also negative reactions in audiences, and distrust can be considered to be "at least as critical as trust" in social online communities (Kim & Ahmad, 2002).

We argue that society today is becoming increasingly *a society of distrust*: polarization, division and dispersion into individual media bubbles are making distrust more common than trust (Sloterdijk, 2011). Moreover, social and new media content is often fake and review sites and consumer recommendations often paid. To tap into this distrust, this research looks at why social media influencers may not be trusted by audiences and stakeholders. Building on several different theories of distrust formation online, we look at the audience responses for potential causes for their distrust in social media influencers. We identify factors that cause distrust and analyze the findings of a 2019 survey on 1200 Finns on sponsored content. The respondents ranged from 15-65 years, and we compare findings according to generations.

Introduction

As brands and organizations increasingly borrow the audiences of videobloggers and new media influencers to reach their different stakeholders and publics, the question of trust in the influencers has become important. Trust and credibility are often addressed, but little is known about what steals this trust when it comes to videobloggers. If brands and organizations remain unaware of the factors causing distrust, their efforts of utilizing sponsored content may prove futile.

The purpose of this paper is to explore what causes distrust among the public toward social media influencers. To begin, we address the relationships between brands, influencers and their publics. Second, we explain what is meant by distrust, and examine it with regard to trust. Based on previous studies, we looked at age, gender and social media use, which could correlate with distrust in influencers. Using a theory-guided content analysis of open ended responses of 601 respondents from Finland, we establish 5 main categories of different trust diminishers, that brands and organizations should be aware of.

The most powerful cause of distrust according to our results was excessive commercialism, which remained strong even when testing for generational, frequency of use or gender differences. To conclude, we ponder the implications of these causes of distrust for brands and organizations, and suggest future areas of study related to distrust in influencers.

Social media influencers as borrowed relationships

To help brands and organizations better reach and engage their publics, social media influencers (SMIs) have been introduced as a mediator between brands and publics (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016; De Veirman et al., 2017). Social media influencers cover a vast range of different celebrities and interests ranging from games, music, fashion and fitness (Dhanesh & Duthler 2019). Attempts have been made to categorize influencers according to the platform on which they mostly post: bloggers, vloggers, celebrities and Instagram influencers (Content Agency, 2019). Jin, Muqaddam and Ryu (2019) list three central factors that make up a social media influencer: large number of followers, active engagement and promotion of products and brands.

However, the common factor of social media influencers is that they build and maintain some form of relationship with their followers by personal branding and, in addition, have influence on them (Reinikainen et al., 2020). This relationship may be parasocial in nature, but there is no doubt of its impact on the audience (Munnukka et al., 2019). In fact, these relationships are central for the logic of sponsored content: influencers produce and distribute content that further strengthens their connection with and trust among their publics (Enke & Brochers, 2019). Due to this logic, the relationships that influencers have with publics are often **commercial** in nature (Abidin, 2015): social media influencers are ordinary Internet users that monetize their following by integrating advertising into their social media posts. The most popular social media in-fluencers are well paid by brands and using paid eWOM has been a part of "a process called influencer marketing" (Coursaris, van Osch & Kourganoff 2018).

Social media influencers have been defined as third party individuals with vast social networks of followers, whose attitude the influencer can shape via social media networks (De Veirman et al., 2017; Freberg et al., 2011). These publics are often smaller in size as compared to traditional celebrities, and social media influencers have sometimes been labelled micro-celebrities (Khamis et al., 2017). Micro celebrities are constantly scrutinized by their publics as to whether their communication is authentic, and whether their content is interesting enough to maintain the relationship between the influencer and their followers (Khamis et al., 2017). For brands and organizations, social media influencers represent a potential stakeholder group that can help with

their strategic communication (Enke & Borchers, 2019). If social media influencers are the new mediators and agenda setters of the online environment, then distrust in these influencers will provide a view into the phenomenon of distrust society.

The use of celebrity endorsement is not new, but has been widely used in marketing for decades. Endorsements however, sometimes trigger uncertainty of its authenticity (Coursaris et al. 2018). Then again, social media micro-influencers are said to be more relatable and close to ordinary people, and hence perceived as more authentic. In fact, consumers are "less able to recognize posts as advertisements when authored by micro-influencers than celebrities". (Coursaris et al. 2018.) Lack of transparency has become a major challenge for sponsored influencer content, and hence for the sponsoring brands and organizations as well (Taiminen, Tolvanen & Luoma-aho, 2014). In fact, trust has become a central question as sponsored content becomes a more popular mode for brands and organizations to reach publics. As sponsored content includes transfer of not just content, but builds on borrowed publics and social relationships of the influencers and their publics, trust is central for its effectiveness (Kim & Ahmad 2012).

Distrust in social media influencers

Scholars still disagree whether distrust and trust can be understood as opposites of one phenomenon, or as two distinct concepts without correlation. Some scholars argue, that trust and distrust are at the opposite ends of one continuum and, thus, considered exclusive substitutes (Lumineau 2014, 1556). In this case, increasing trust would diminish distrust. Trust has been defined as "confident positive expectations regarding another's conduct and distrust in terms of confident negative expectations regarding another's conduct" (Lumineau 2014, 1555).

For those who do not view the concepts as opposites, no such easy transfer exists. Trust in the context of influencers has been defined as "a subject's degree of belief in a content provider's task competence, based on the expectation that the content provider generally and consistently delivers satisfactory and high-quality content. The content consumer is willing to take user-generated content provided by the content provider even with the possibility of **risk.** This action is accompanied by feelings of security and strong positive emotions." (Kim & Ahmad 2012.)

Distrust has been defined as a negative feeling about another individual's conduct (Ahmad and Sun, 2017). This is a simplified view, as trust is experienced and defined differently across cultures (Almerri 2017, 94). Distrust is formed when an individual has a disposition to assume that others are not honest, benevolent, competent and predictable (McKnight & Chervany 2001). McKnight and Chervany (2001) note that distrust may be more beneficial than trust in certain conditions, and some have suggested it would displace trust as a social mechanism for dealing with risk (McKnight & Chervany 2001). According to Deutsch, distrust is a choice to avoid a path that likely has more negative than positive consequences (McKnight & Chervany 2001).

To understand the formation of distrust, the Distrust Construct Model (McKnight and Chervany, 2001) suggests distrust to originate from a combination of factors. Each individual starts with their own disposition to distrust. As for experiences, institution-based distrust refers to fears concerning the situation or circumstances, for example seeing an entity or an institution as something to distrust, eg. the Internet as a dangerous environment (McKnight & Chervany 2001). When it comes to distrust towards social media influencers, both disposition and institituion-based distrust formation are especially interesting, as individuals' previous experiences and stance can shape distrust in influencers even before their actual experiences. Distrust in the things that social media influencers represent (such as sponsored content, product promotion) may add up to distrust even before an influencer has personally given the individual reason for distrust.

Disposition and institution based distrust may lead to distrusting beliefs (cognitive perspectives about other's attributes) and, as a result, a feeling that the other party does not have any characteristics that one might benefit from. These in turn (disposition, institution and beliefs) may lead directly or indirectly to distrusting intentions, the unwillingness to depend on others. Distrusting intentions may lead to distrust related behaviors, where individual's actions are shaped by distrust. In practice this often manifests as lack of engagement and cooperation.

Kim and Ahmad (2012) note that distrust is more personal than related to the brand or organization toward which it is felt. It is hence a "subjective degree of suspension that the content provider's values, motives, intentions and behaviors are harmful to the content consumer's interests. With distrust, the content consumer is not willing to take user-generated content provided by the content provider, fearing that the content provider is to engage spam, deception, dissemination of misinformation or low-quality content. It is accompanied by the feelings of worry, fear, concern, and other strong negative emotions."

Illustrative example: What causes distrust according to Finns?

The data was gathered by a Finnish survey company online by the agency PING Helsinki in April 2019 part of a survey on Finns' opinions on social media influencers and social media in general. All answers were given anonymously, and the respondents were told the data would be given for further research purposes. The sample was nationally representative, answers to the open-ended question totaling at 601 between ages of 15-65. Part of a larger survey, the question analyzed in this paper asked: "In your opinion, what reduces trustworthiness of a social media influencer?". A theory guided content analysis was applied, and coding was based on previous theory as well as insights arising from the data.

The previous studies guided the tests ran in the study. It was hypothesized that age, gender and social media use have something to do with the causes of distrust since content receiver's own background and experiences affect the level of trust or distrust aroused by social media influencer. Previous studies suggest that younger audiences, women (Cohen, 2003) and those using social media more are more sensitive to influencer content and causes of distrust.

Table 1 shows examples of the coding as well as lists some sources from previous literature based on which the codes were formed. Intercoder reliability was originally 70%, and after revisions and discussions, we reached 84% which reaches the acceptable level.

Table 1 Examples of coding related to the category "commercialism"

Code	**Examples of answers (category: commercialism)**
Money and commercialism (Evans et al. 2017; Kapitan & Silvera 2015)	"Advertisements." "Money." "Commercial collaborations." "Sponsorship."
Excessive commercialism (arising from the data)	"Continuous advertising." "Too many collaborations." "If all content is commercial."
Non-transparent commercialism (Coursaris et al. 2018)	"Commercial collaborations that are not clearly marked." "Subliminal advertising." "Non-disclosure of commercial collaborations."

Dubious collaboration or collaborator (arising from the data)	"If influencer collaborates with brands with which values are contradictory." "If collaborators are doubtful, e.g. online casinos." "Commercial collaborations with unethical brands."

Preliminary Results

According to the data, the most significant reason for distrust towards social media influencers was commercialism (see Table 1). Altogether 42 % of the respondents mentioned excessive commercialism as a factor that reduces trustworthiness of a social media influencer. Then again, when respondents were asked if commercial collaboration reduces trustworthiness or not (the answer options being 0 = I can't say, 1 = I totally disagree, 5 = I totally agree), respondents were more likely to answer something between 2 and 4. Respondents agree that money is part of the influencers' world, but they still think the way it is handled causes distrust. As for the second strong distrust causing category, content quality was mentioned by 40,8%. This included statements related to poor quality, defective language, factual errors and lack of critical thinking.

Code or category	**Frequency %**
Influencer's characteristics	**32.3**
Characteristics (Kapitan & Silvera 2015; Riedl & von Luckwald 2019; Almerri 2017, 213, 221)	4.7
Inauthenticity	8.8
Low level of popularity or celebrity (Kapitan & Silvera 2015)	0.8
Young age and little life experience	3.0
Non-personality	0.8
Motive, ideology, political background	2.5
Low level of education (Almerri 2017, 221), lack of expertise	4.2
Egocentricity and attention-seeking behavior	5.7
Excessive perfection	1.8
Influencer's action	**25.2**
Anonymity (Riedl & von Luckwald 2019)	0.5
Lying (Boes & Tripp 1996; Riedl & von Luckwald 2019; Almerri 2017, 213)	6.2
Previous experiences (Kim & Ahmad 2012; Darke & Ritchie 2007)	0.5
Public reputation (Kim & Ahmad 2012; Kapitan & Silvera 2015)	3.7
Bad or inappropriate behavior	7.0
Contradiction or inconsistency	7.3

Commercialism	**42**
Money and commercialism (Evans et al. 2017; Kapitan & Silvera 2015)	15.3
Excessive commercialism	9.7
Non-transparent commercialism (Coursaris et al. 2018)	6.5
Dubious collaboration or collaborator	10.5
Content	**40.8**
Low quality of content	14.8
Defective language and grammatical incorrectness, misspelling	6.0
Factual errors and lack of references	10.6
Clickbait	1.7
Overoptimism and lack of criticism (Hara 2015)	7.7
Other	**17.5**
Previous negative attitude towards social media influencers	2.5
Value conflict	0.5
Other	14.5

In general, the oldest respondent group over 56 year olds had the most negative attitude toward social media in general. Age's impact on distrust toward social media influencers was that the older the respondent, the more likely commercialism was seen as a reason for distrust. Then again, the younger the respondents, the more likely they mentioned dubious collaboration, inconsistency, excessive commercialism or lack of transparency as causes of distrust.

Further, social media use was suggested to shape distrust toward social media influencers. According to the results, the more active the individual, the more likely they were to mention several different causes for distrust in social media influencers. Similarly, the heavier users of social media were able to detect more nuanced reasons for distrust, and the rare users just mentioned general comments such as "commercialism". In fact, the results followed a U-curve, where respondent who used certain social media platforms very seldom or very often more likely mentioned simply "commercialism". (As this is a work in progress, further analyses and test are needed to complete the study.)

Discussion and limitations

This paper addressed the gap of understanding the causes for distrust in social media influencers, as the online environment is increasingly defined by distrust. In general, the oldest respondent group over 56 year olds had the most negative attitude toward social media in general. Distrust in influencers proved to be age related, where older respondents were against commercialism in general, and younger respondents mentioned more nuanced variations of such. This may be explained by the amount of experience: with less experience of social media influencers, the older respondents may see advertising and commercialism untrustworthy in general. Meanwhile, the young are more familiar with the different forms of commercialism. As a

result, younger respondents have more detailed reports of what causes distrust, and can distinguish the line between commercialism and excessive commercialism or dubious collaborations.

Social media use played a role in the formation of distrust. It could be explained by the amount of experience with social media influencers. Being able to recognize specific reasons for distrust needs reoccurring following of influencers on social media, while the more general factors, such as commercialism or grammatical incorrectness are easy to recognize even if content was not seen that frequently. These results are in line with previous research on Persuasion knowledge (Friestad and Wright, 1994): individuals learn from their experience and create coping strategies and it, as a result, may make them skeptical or resistant when encountering persuasive content (Evans et al. 2017). Consequently, the history of social media usage affects the way content receiver evaluate distrust.

This study was a first of its kind in looking at distrust in social media influencers. These findings have several limitations, which should be noted. First, the population included only Finns, so no direct transfer of results to other cultural contexts can be made. However, Finns represent a very tech savvy and future oriented culture making Finns a forerunner in technological development. Hence, these results could indicate some similar trends elsewhere. Second, the question was framed directly asking about distrust, though sometimes distrust could be better studied in action or through lack of trust. Further, “distrust” can mean different things to the respondents, so no clear image can be made of the real impact of what exactly is at stake if distrust is present: will those complaining about commercialism actually stop following this influencer they distrust? Or will the brand that influencer represents be harmed? Previous studies seem to point in the direction of influencers suffering more than brands if trust is lost, but what if distrust is gained- who suffers more from distrust, influencers or brands? Future studies are called for to answer these and other unknown aspects of the phenomenon of distrust online.

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A Retrospective of Crisis Communication Advice from Patrick Jackson:

How Theory and Research Unknowingly Echo the Practice

Sherry J. Holladay
Elina Tachakova
Timothy Coombs
Texas A&M University

Abstract

When we think of connecting theory and research with public relations practice the first instinct is to think about how what we are researching today can complement the practice. However, we may overlook the historical aspect of how the public relations practice has provided a platform for theory and research. Public relations research is applied by its nature, seeking to address problems encountered by professionals. However, professionals were solving problems long before there was public relations theory and research. In most cases, public relations theory and research evolved from the early writing of rofessionals. Professionals wrote about what they had done to manage problems, resulting in advice on what to do or not to do in particular situations. This year's theme provides an opportunity to reflect on how the practice provides a foundation for current theory and research. We will focus on crisis communication and how current crisis communication theory and research reflects the work of Patrick Jackson.

The first part of the paper explains what we mean by a retrospective analysis. The second section of the paper identifies the conventional crisis communication wisdom provided by Jackson was The second part of the paper surveys the academic crisis communication research to identify the research-based advice being offered to crisis managers. The third section of the paper examines how the current crisis communication advice provided by academic crisis communication researchers reflects the conventional crisis communication wisdom provided by Jackson and others. We also consider the degree to which crisis communication researchers recognize this early advice as an influence on their work. The conclusion emphasizes the need for academic crisis communication researchers to revisit the conventional crisis communication wisdom provided by Jackson and others. This revisiting will help crisis researchers to recognize the roots of their ideas in the practice and suggest new ideas awaiting validation through empirical research that can contribute to crisis communication theory, research, and practice.

Public relations is an applied field of research with strong ties to the professional community. An applied field seeks to improve the practice. Theory is developed as a way to improve problem solving and enhancing the profession. Typically, the professions lead the development of new areas of research in public relations. Practitioners must cope with problems and new develops before researchers become interested in and address the concern. The integration of social media platforms in public relations is prime example of the professions being the vanguard for the field. Crisis communication is a relatively new field of study related to public relations. Serious, sustained crisis communication research begins to emerge in the late 1980s, flourishes in the 1990s, and develops into to a vibrant field in the 2000s through today.

Professionals were managing crises long before any researchers developed the early crisis communication theories. Moreover, professionals were writing about crisis communication before researchers. These early crisis communication writing represent the conventional wisdom about crisis communication. Conventional wisdom represents the ideas and opinions about a specific topic that are generally accepted as "true" by a group about a specific topic and includes expert opinions. Conventional wisdom can be accurate, can change overtime, and can be a source of inspiration for researchers and theorists. Too often the academic crisis communication research neglects to consider its professional roots. Some reviewers of academic research have even been known to be dismissive of references to the work of professionals. This paper is a what we have termed a retrospective look at crisis communication writings. Retrospective is when you look back on the works created in the past. The purpose of this retrospective analysis is a reinterpretation of the early professional writings on crisis communication by Patrick Jackson that gives proper due to these early insights and their continued relevance to crisis communication.

Our focal point is Patrick Jackson's anticipatory model of issues management because it articulates an early strategic approach to crisis communication. The anticipatory model draws a direction connection between issues and crisis management. Unlike of early modes of crisis management that just identify a crisis as process or life cycle, such as Fink (1986), the anticipatory model provides specific recommendations about crisis communication. The lack of citation of the anticipatory model indicates it has been overlooked by crisis communication researchers. However, a retrospective examination reveals how the ideas articulated in the anticipatory are present in many of the prominent lines of crisis communication research. There is a need for modern crisis communication researchers to be cognizant of this overlook conventional wisdom that remains relevant and central to crisis communication research. Moreover, the retrospective analysis reveals additional ideas that warrant attention from crisis communication researchers and theorists.

A Retrospective Research Approach

As Frandsen and Johansen (2019) observed, "Crisis management did not originate as an academic discipline in business schools and universities. It began as a simple practice" (p. 2). They studied the crisis communication books written by crisis professionals. One of the rationales offered for the study was the opportunity to gain insights from those who have been managing crises. We believe there is value in examining the writings of professionals about crisis communication beyond the books. A retrospective approach looks back on the develop of crisis communication by examining its roots in professional writings. This retrospection yields insights into how the early professional writings identified ideas that remain salient today. It is important to recognize pioneering yet overlooked pieces in the history of crisis communication research.

Two primary criteria drove the selection of materials for the retrospective analysis. First, as with Frandsen and Johansen (2019), the work had to be created by professionals. Second, the material needed to appear prior to 1995. The year 1995 was chosen because that marks the emergence of the two dominant theories in crisis communication research, image restoration theory (IRT) (Benoit, 1995) and situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 1995). We choose to capture the prelude to the clear establishment of the academic study of crisis communication. It is during this prelude that professionals were the primary source of crisis communication writings.

A two-pronged approach was used in the retrospective analysis. The focus is on Jackson's issue anticipation model as it applies to crisis management. Jackson articulated an advanced analysis of crises and crisis communication within the model. The model represents Jackson's expert opinion which is a form of conventional wisdom. The step in the analysis is to detail the issue anticipation/crisis management concept Jackson developed. The second step is to identify the threads from Jackson's crisis ideas that are woven into the academic crisis communication writings. We look for connections between the ideas Jackson developed and those published by crisis communication researchers. We look to see how the research has validated Jackson's crisis ideas and used theory to elaborate upon them. Finally, we review the academic crisis communication writings to determine whether or no Jackson in cited.

The retrospective analysis qualitative and driven by three research questions:

RQ1. How does the academic crisis communication research reflect and validate key crisis ideas advanced by Jackson?

RQ2. How is Jackson's crisis communication ideas recognized in the academic crisis communication literature?

Issue Anticipation/Crisis Management

Jackson treated crisis management as a part of issues management. He defined a crisis as "an issue that has gotten out of hand" (Jackson & Peters, nd, p.1). Issues management is utilized to discover an emerging issue in order to act early to prevent the issue from becoming a crisis. The emphasis is on the ability of issues management to detect potential crises. Managers can act upon the information gathering through scanning with the intention of preventing a crisis. However, Jackson was realistic that not crises can be prevented, hence, he articulated advice for those needing to manage crises (Jackson & Peters, nd). Jackson's crisis management advice is more than the typical list of things to do and things no to do during a crisis. He develops a much more nuanced way to approach crises and crisis communication. While drawn primarily from the document Jackson wrote with Peters, Jackson referenced that these ideas were articulated as early as 1987 (Jackson, 1996 smoldering).

Jackson's crisis communication advice is built around five causes of crises and how to address each of these crises. Table 1 present an overview of five causes of crises and communicative advice. *Organizational failure* is when a crisis is caused by actions taken by someone in the organization. Examples might include a disruption in production or a product harm situation caused by employee errors. The response is for management to announce the failure and to establish a plan to prevent a repeat of the failure. The focus is on management acknowledging the crisis. *Bedfellow* is a form of guilt by association. Either someone or some organization you are affiliated with or an employee does something awful. Examples might be an employee embezzling funds, an organizational spokesperson engaging in immoral behavior, or an organization you sponsor experiencing ethical misconduct by its leadership. The response calls for management to distance itself from the problem entity. The goal is to establish that the

entity, not your organization as a whole, is responsible for the misconduct (Jackson & Peters, nd).

Table 1:

Causes of Crises and Communicative Advice

1. Organizational Failure: "Someone in the organization did something to cause the issue"
   Advice:"Acknowledge the goof, announce your organizational failure and plan to see that it won't happen again. Communicate this to the public"
2. Bedfellow: "Someone who is your ally or employee does something awful and you are guilty by association"
   Advice: "Distance yourself from the bedfellow"
3. Scandal: "Your organization has broken the law or the moral/ethical codes"
   Advice: Distance yourself from the scandal—make sure the public understands the scandal is not within the organization, but rather, has been committed by an individual"
4. Accident: "A disaster has occurred and your organization is responsible; even if no one was at fault"
   Advice: "Express extreme sympathy for an victims first. Then, if it was a failure on your part, admit it. Show plans designed so the accident doesn't happen again"
5. Honest Disagreement: "There is an honest disagreement between two opposing side—or possibly the organization and the public"
   Advice: "Make it understood that although you feel your opponents are wrong, they do have a right to their opinion & you respect them for it. This way you take the starch out of the opposition rather than stiffening their resistance with 'I'm right, you're wrong, and that's the end of it'"

Scandal is when people in the organization violate moral codes, laws, or regulations. A scandal implies a knowing violation of accepted standards of conduct. Examples might be racial discrimination or sexual harassment by managers. The response to a scandal also centers on distancing the organization from the crisis. The goal is to convince stakeholders that the scandal was a result of the actions of individuals and is not a function of the nature of the organization. The scandal is framed as a choice by individuals and not a result of organizational policies or culture. *Accident* is when the organization is responsible for a disaster even if the organization is not at fault for the situation. Examples might be industrial accidents or transportation incidents that result in injuries or people being displaced by evacuations. The response to the accident centers on the victims. Management must express sympathy, accept responsibility (if the organization is responsible), and establish a plan to prevent a repeat of the failure (Jackson & Peters, nd). The scale and the creation of victims helps to separate accident from organizational failure. Moreover, an accident may or may not be a result of organizational actions while organizational failure is always the result of actions taken by people in the organization.

Honest disagreement reflects the issues management element of Jackson's crisis approach. An honest disagreement arises when two groups simply disagree. This can even be when stakeholders disagree with the organization. Examples would be when stakeholders question if the organization is acting socially responsible or when some subset of stakeholders feel an organizational behavior is offensive to them. For instance, organizations and stakeholders might disagree over the sourcing of the use of certain material in the supply chain or

over support or opposition to same sex marriage. The response is to recognize the right for the opposing group to hold their opinions and to explain why your organization feels those opinions are wrong (Jackson & Peters, nd).

The discussion of crisis communication posits that overall, crisis communication relies upon three pieces of advice from public relations. First, managers must admit when they have errored. This reflects the desire to be open with stakeholders. Second, managers should apologize when errors are made. Third, managers must explain the steps they are taking to prevent a repeat of the crisis. Finally, Jackson recognizes the emotional dimensions on crises and how that can impact crisis communication. "Equally important to information flow is the emotional effects on various people. Giving out the facts won't deal with this—so you have to be a psychological counselor, too. The emotional or 'feelings' content is more important than the factual data, and communication (whether one-on-one or to large publics) must give this priority" (Jackson & Peters, nd, p. 7). This quotation reflects the need to consider how emotions affect the way people react in crises and to crisis communication.

Current Crisis Communication Theory: The Connecting Threads

The second part of the retrospective analysis is to identify threads in the crisis work of Patrick Jackson that connect it with current crisis communication theory and research. There are actually a number of points identified by Jackson that appear in the academic crisis communication research. We have identified six specific threads that connect Jackson's crisis communication writing to academic crisis communication research: (1) connecting issues and crisis management, (2) disclosure of a crisis, (3) importance of sympathy and corrective action, (4) efforts to distance an organization from problematic entities, (5) concern with spillover in a crisis, and (6) the need to recognize emotions during crises.

Issues and Crisis Management

Jackson clearly saw a close relationship between issues management and crisis management. Three researchers have focused on the connections between issues and crisis management: Gonzáles-Herrero, Heath, and Jaques. Gonzáles-Herrero (along with Pratt) developed a four-phase model of crisis communication constructed around the life cycle created by Fink (1986). The model focuses on "human provoked, organizationally induced crises" (Gonzáles-Herrero & Pratt, 1995, p, 25). The first step in the model is issues management. During the first step, managers identify and influence the develop of an issue. The idea is to identify a threat (issue) early on and take actions designed to kill the crisis (Gonzáles-Herrero & Pratt, 1996; Gonzáles-Herrero & Smith 2008). Heath (1997; 2006) views issues and crisis management as closely linked. Heath (2006) notes issues "either result from a crisis/risk combination or lead to such occurrence" (p. 245).

Jaques (2007; 2009; 2010) has been a strong advocate for connecting issues and crisis management in the academic crisis communication literature. Jaques (2007) noted, "the best way to manage crises is to understand and manage issues" (p. 151). Jaques (2007) created the issues and crisis management relational model that essentially fuses issues and crisis management around the crisis life cycle advanced by Fink (1986). Jaques' model begins with issues management and ends with the post-crisis phase which he argues involves issues management as well (Jaques, 2010). It is fairly well established within crisis communication that issues management is a key element e.g., (Coombs, 2010; 2019; Frandsen & Johansen, 2016).

Disclosure of a Crisis: Stealing Thunder

Jackson recognized the need for an organization to announce their failures. This can be translated into an early advocation for stealing thunder. Stealing thunder is when the

organization is the first source to disclose the existence of a crisis before this becomes known or announced by another party (Arpan & Pompper, 2003). Furthermore, organizations can choose to steal thunder by coming forward with the news of the crisis instead of waiting for this to be discovered by the media or the public. The stealing thunder strategy is an ethical public relations practice and is likely to reduce the possibility of journalists using common journalistic frames of conflict when reporting the crisis. Furthermore, stealing thunder can help organizations enhance their credibility and reduce perceptions about the severity of the crisis.

The alternative to stealing thunder is remining quiet until stakeholders find out of the crisis themselves, most often through the media. Research examining the effects of stealing thunder (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012) shows that organizations that have been proactive with their crisis management efforts and have decided to self-disclose are often viewed as more trustworthy by stakeholders. Moreover, when organizations choose to steal thunder, the crisis are often viewed as less severe by the public, draw less attention and ultimately cause less reputational damage compared to situations when an organization in the same crisis has decided not to steal thunder.

Sympathy and Preventing a Repeat

Jackson urged crisis managers to express sympathy for crisis victims and argued for taking steps to prevent the repeat of a crisis. These two points fit well with Sturges' (1994) ideas of instructing information and adjusting information. Instructing information helps stakeholders to protect themselves physically from a crisis. Examples of instructing information include recall notifications warning people not to eat a food product that might be contaminated or warnings to shelter-in-place during a chemical release. Crisis managers must make stakeholder safety a priority during a crisis and requires warning people how a crisis might harm them physically and what to do to prevent such harm. Adjusting information helps stakeholders to cope psychologically with a crisis. Crises can create stress and anxiety for stakeholders. Examples of adjusting information include details about what is happening with the crisis, expressions of concern for crisis victims and potential victims, actions being taken to prevent a repeat of the crisis (curative actions), and counseling services for victims. There can be overlap between instructing and adjusting information resulting in the two frequently being used in tandem (Holladay, 2009).

SCCT, following the advice of Sturges (1994), argues that the initial crisis response must focus on adjusting and instructing information. "Ethics recommend that the physical and psychological needs of the stakeholders be the top priority in a crisis" (Coombs, 2007, p. 173). The ethical aspect is derived from the ethic of care. In the ethic of care, the organization as the stronger entity in the relationship, needs to protect the stakeholders during a crisis. The general goal is to preserve the stakeholder-organization relationship through caring for the other (Simola, 2003). Eventually, SCCT refers to this combination of instructing and adjusting information as the ethical base response for short (e.g., Coombs, 2016).

Expressing sympathy for crisis victims and taking steps to prevent a repeat of the crisis (curative action) are essential elements of the ethical base response and can be categorized as adjusting information. [We are using the term curative action because the more commonly used corrective action has two meanings. Corrective action refers both to restoring the situation to its pre-crisis state and actions to prevent a repeat of the crisis. Curative denotes only actions designed to prevent a repeat of the crisis]. Expressions of sympathy acknowledge that people have suffered as a result of the crisis. Victims want to be validated and have their concerns be recognized by the organization that is accountable for the crisis. Curative action helps to reduce

anxiety by indicating actions are being taken to lessen the likelihood of a repeat of the crisis. After an airplane crash, potential customers want to what steps are being taken to prevent a similar crash from occurring in the future. The possibility of a crash creates anxiety and steps to reduce the likelihood of a crash serves to reduce that anxiety.

Research has demonstrated that both sympathy and curative actions produce positive crisis outcomes for the organization. Expressions of sympathy can lessen reputational damage from a crisis and the anger associated with the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Pace, Fediuk & Botero, 2010). Curative actions have been shown to lessen reputational damage and enhance post-crisis purchase intentions (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000; Dutta & Pullig, 2010, Wu & Cui, 2019). Experimental research has validated Jackson's position that expressing sympathy and announcing steps to reduce the repeat of a crisis were effective crisis responses in most crisis situations.

Crisis response should be considered in conjunction with the crisis type. Jackson identified five different crisis types and provided specific crisis response for each crisis type. SCCT is premised on the idea that an optimal response (one that maximizes benefits to stakeholders and organizations), varies by the crisis type. SCCT treats crisis types as frames used to interpret the crisis situation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Bundy and Pfarrer (2015) noted crisis types are a "heuristic simplification process in which evaluators intuitively combine past experiences and expectations to reduce the complex nature of a crisis into easier-to-understand cognitive schemas" (p. 351). SCCT identifies crisis responsibility as a primary factor used to identify different crisis types. More recently, moral outrage has been used as an additional factor in the construction of the various crisis types. Victim crisis cluster (weak attributions of crisis responsibility) includes workplace violence, natural disasters and product tampering ("external attacks"). Accidental crisis cluster (minimal attributions of crisis responsibility) includes technical-error accident and technical-error product harm. Preventable crisis cluster (strong attributions of crisis responsibility) includes the human-error sub-cluster (weak moral outrage) of human-error accident and human-error product harm, the management misconduct sub-cluster (moderate moral outrage), and Scansis sub-cluster (strong moral outrage) (Coombs & Tachkova, 2019).

A number of research studies have found that the crisis types do vary by crisis responsibility as described in SCCT (Coombs, 2016; Ma & Zhan, 2016). The different crisis types represent varying threats to organizations and stakeholders, hence the need for different optimal crisis responses (Coombs, 1995). A number of experimental studies have found support for many of the optimal crisis response strategies prescribed for the victim and accidental crises in SCCT (Claeys, Cauberghe & Vyncke, 2010; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Kim, Kim & Cameron, 2009; Utz, Schutz & Glocka, 2013). The research does validate Jackson's contingency view of crisis communication where the crisis response is specific to the crisis type.

Distancing from Problematic Entities: Dissociations

Jackson recommends the organization seek to distance the organization from problematic entities for scandal crises. This idea of distancing is consistent with the idea of dissociation from corporate apologia. Dissociation involves splitting a concept into two parts. Hearit (1994; 2006) argues that dissociations could be used in crisis communication. More specifically, the distancing advocated by Jackson is a for an individual-group dissociation. The individual-group dissociation argues that only a subset of the organization (one or a few people) are responsible for the crisis. The larger organization is not to blame for the crisis, just the subset of the

organization is to blame. The individual-group dissociation helps during a crisis because it should serve to reduce attributions of organizational responsibility for the crisis (Hearit, 2006). Jackson articulated and recommended use of the individual-group dissociation before it was introduced into crisis communication research through corporate apologia. Research is still speculative about the utility and limits to using the individual-group dissociation.

Guilt by Association and Spillover

Jackson posited that an organization must distance itself from any *ally* that does something awful—engages in negative or undesirable activities. Many academics continue to use the concept of crisis or guilt by association in crisis communication (Coombs, 2019; Frandsen & Johansen, 2017; Johansen, Johansen & Weckesser, 2016). The dynamic is that when some entity associated with the organization has a crisis, the negative effects of that crisis can harm the affiliated organization (the ally). Allies can include celebrity endorsers and sponsorship properties. Organizations frequently employee celebrity endorsers. Research demonstrates that when a celebrity endorser is involved in an undesirable situation, the negativity of that situation is transferred to the organization (Akturan, 2011). Similarly, an organizational sponsor suffers reputational damage when a sponsorship property is involved in a negative event (Uhirch & Flöter, 2014). The recommended course of action in both situations is to cut ties with the problematic entity—distance the organization from the celebrity endorser or sponsorship property. Research has documented the positive effects of distancing (strategic exiting) an organization from a problematic ally (e.g., Messner & Reihard, 2012).

Frandsen and Johansen (2017) argue that crisis by association is a form of crisis spillover. Crisis spillover refers to situations where a crisis in one organization affects an entire industry or other products and services offered by the organization in crisis (Bundy et al., 2017). A crisis spillover is a result of reputational interdependence that organizations in the same industry share (Barnett & Hoffman, 2008). Research has demonstrated that negative spillover can occur during a crisis (Desai, 2011, Jonsson, Greve & Fujiwara-Greve, 2009; Zavyalova, Pfarrer, Reger & Shapiro, 2012). Moreover, research has demonstrated that distancing is an effective crisis communication response to negative crisis spillover (Veil, Dillingham & Sloan, 2016). Crisis communication research has demonstrated the negative effects of the bedfellow crisis and validated Jackson's advice to use communication to distance an organization from the bedfellow.

Importance of Emotions during Crises

Though not offering specific advice, Jackson did identify the importance of emotions during a crisis and their effects on crisis communication. Emotions (affect) are recognized as a critical concern during crisis communication. Academic crisis communication researchers followed attribution theory and began by exploring the emotions of anger, sympathy, and schadenfreude (Coombs & Holladay, 2005; McDonald, Sparks & Glendon, 2010). This early research found anger to be a motivator for people to engage in negative word-of-mouth about an organization in crisis and that crisis response strategies can serve to lessen anger from a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). As noted earlier, the ethical base response in SCCT is designed in part to address the negative emotions generated by a crisis and should be the first communicative consideration during a crisis (Coombs, 2019). This reflects the idea of psychological counseling that is part of Jackson's view of crisis communication.

Yan Jin and her colleagues expanded the variety of emotions being explored and integrated cognitive appraisal theory into crisis communication research (e.g., Jin, 2009; Jin & Pang, 2010). The research on the integrated crisis mapping found that anxiety was often an

important emotion in crisis situations. The crisis researchers also explored sadness and fright in crises (Jin, Pang & Cameron, 2007; 2012). The emergence of anxiety during crises reinforces the importance of curative action because actions to prevent a repeat of a crisis can reduce anxiety. Cognitive appraisal theory was used to explain how emotions can shape reactions to a crisis and effectiveness of crisis response strategies validating Jackson's belief that emotions affect crisis communication (Jin, 2010).

Moral outrage is another emotion linked to crisis communication through cognitive appraisal theory. Moral outrage is a combination of a sense of injustice combined with exploitation of stakeholders (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016). Research has shown moral outrage is a powerful factor in crisis communication. It serves as a boundary condition for SCCT. Research has shown that high moral outrage blunts the typical positive effects of crisis communication (Coombs & Tachkova, 2019). Crisis communication does recognize the importance of emotion during crises and has documented the effects of various emotions on perceptions of crises and responses to crisis communication thereby validating Jackson's concern with emotions crises.

Summary

To validate something is to demonstrate its value. The review of the academic crisis communication publications provides two forms of validation for Patrick Jackson's crisis communication writings. First, the academic crisis communication research reflects many of the ideas articulated by Jackson and have integrated those ideas into current crisis communication. We see Jacksons crisis idea in stealing thunder, corporate apologia, and SCCT. Second, experimental studies have established cause and effect relations for many of the crisis communication interventions posited by Jackson. The experimental studies have established the positive effects of stealing thunder, expressions of sympathy, and announcing plans to prevent a repeat of the crisis; the need to distance the organization from the negative effects of a problematic ally (guilt by association and spillover) and how the emotions do affect how people react to crises and crisis communication. The answer to **RQ1** is yes, the academic crisis communication research does heavily reflect and validate Patrick Jacksons thinking about crisis communication.

Citations of Jackson's Crisis Ideas

Though crisis research does reflect many points articulated by Jackson, there is very little reference to his works in the academic crisis literature. Robert Heath is the only crisis researcher in our retrospective analysis that cites the work of Patrick Jackson (Health & Nelson, 1986). We would argue this omission is more a function of oversight rather than a purposeful disregard. The answer to **RQ 2** is no, the academic crisis communication research does not cite Patrick Jackson's works. The early academic crisis communication research in the 1990s and early 2000s pre-dates the online access to the archive of Patrick Jacksons writings. Most academic crisis research would not have had access to the *pr reporter* and would have been unaware of Jackson's relevant crisis writings. However, now that academic researchers can access the archive of Patrick Jackson's writings, it is time to reinterpret his contributions to crisis communication through the study of there writings.

Conclusion

We now return to Frandsen and Johansen's (2019) point that crisis communication began in the practice and that we can learn from the writings of crisis communicators. Patrick Jackson wrote on a number of topics in public relations including crisis communication. This retrospective analysis of Jackson's piece about issue anticipation/crisis management is a first step

in highlighting Jackson's insights about crisis communication. Patrick Jackson's made observations about crisis communication that academic crisis communication researchers drawn upon with out realizing the early presentation of the ideas. The crisis communication threads created by Jackson that are woven into academic crisis communication writings include linking issues and crisis management, stealing thunder, the value of sympathy and curative action, distancing as a crisis response, the dangers of problematic allies, and the relevance of emotion in crisis communication. It is important that academic researchers reflect upon and cited the earlier professional writings to give proper due to the origins of crisis communication insights.

This paper is just a first step because we have yet to explore the various points Patrick Jackson made about crisis communication in *pr reporter*. We have collected over 60 articles from *pr reporter* prior to 1995 that include advice on crisis communication. Initially we planned to included an analysis of these writings in this paper but the amount of ideas derived from the issue anticipation//crisis management piece was so large, there was not space to include both. However, a cursory review of the *pr reporter* articles reveals a strong emphasis on internal crisis communication, crisis planning, and crisis training. These are three topics that remain central to discussions of crisis communication and management. Our analysis reaffirms Frandsen and Johansen's (2019) claim that academic research can learn a great deal from the writings of crisis professionals. Patrick Jackson's insights into crisis communication permeate academic communication research yet remains uncited. We need to move to include citations of the earlier practitioner writings on crisis communication and review those writings for addition ideas that can be validated through research.

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An Emerging Trend on Fortune 500's Instagram: An Empirical Evidence of Using Conversational Human Voice in Corporate Instagram Posts

Seoyeon Hong
Bokyung Kim
Rowan University

Hyunmin Lee
Drexel University

Abstract

This study explored the actual use of Conversational Human Voice (CHV) and tested its impact on user engagement using Fortune 500 companies' Instagram posts (*N*=7,545). Findings show that Fortune 500's Instagram accounts differently adopted CHV features across various company types while some of features significantly enhanced user engagement through more number of "Likes."

Keywords: Conversational Human Voice, Fortune 500 brands, Instagram, Brand Engagement, Consumer-Brand Relationship

Conversational Human Voice (CHV) is a natural style of organizational communication that mirrors interpersonal, human-like interactions between an organization and its external publics (Kelleher, 2009). Simply put, CHV at its core represents the perception that you are interacting with a person rather than a lifeless organization in an online environment. The use of CHV can facilitate positive responses towards an organization, as it generates perceptions of transparency and openness in organizational communication efforts with its publics. Literature in this line of research have well-demonstrated the positive effects of CHV, ranging from successful OPR management to crisis communication (Hong & Kim, 2019; Park & Cameron, 2014; Park & Lee, 2013). More recent studies have further concluded that CHV is an effective two-way communication strategy to increase user engagement, such as increasing the number of likes (Plowman & Wilson, 2018).

Interestingly, these studies have predominantly centered around controlled experiments, testing the causal effect of CHV on desirable outcomes, particularly in social media platforms. For example, Park & Lee's study (2013) tested whether the use of avatars for Twitter corporate communication would increase CHV perceptions, while Hong and Kim (2019) examined whether using CHV in Facebook posts about university crises would alter perceptions of crisis severity, crisis responsibility, and attitudes towards the university. While controlled experiments are superior in testing theorized relationships and establishing the causal chain, no research to date has empirically examined the actual prevalence of and authentic reaction towards such CHV among corporate communication efforts on social media. Furthermore, CHV has multiple dimensions (e.g., two-way communication, using humor, use of first-person narrative, etc.), yet it is unclear whether one is more effective than the other for generating public relations engagement (e.g., "Likes.".

The current study seeks to fill in this gap by analyzing actual corporate-generated content on Instagram. We focus on Instagram, considering its prevalence as a public relations and marketing tool for corporations, where a recent report found that its popularity has surpassed Facebook for the first time since both platforms have launched (Stelzner, 2019). In addition, we examined Fortune 500 companies, given that companies on the list represent the most recognized brands in the US and internationally. Taken together, the empirical findings from this study can provide concrete practical recommendations for curating Instagram posts to generate perceptions of CHV and increase publics' engagement.

Literature Review

Conversational Human Voice and Public Relations Outcomes

Given that people address strangers more formally than friends, and the use of formal language indicates a certain distance (Brown, Levinson & Levinson, 1987), informal and conversational languages are thought to yield more familiarity among people (Schewe, 1973). As such, an organization's humanized and "conversational" languages have been regarded as desirable communication practices in a public relations research stream (Kelleher, 2009; Yang et al., 2010). Conversational human voice refers to "an engaging and natural style of organizational communication as perceived by an organization's publics based on interactions between individuals in the organization and individuals in publics" (Kelleher, 2009, p. 177).

By communicating with its publics directly in a human voice, an organization can cultivate stronger relationships with its existing stakeholders (Kelleher, 2009). Presumably, CHV generates perceptions of transparency and openness in organizational communication efforts with its publics, which in turn, leads to favorable organization-public relationships (Park &

Cameron, 2014; Park & Lee, 2013). From a study of H&M as a brand, Kerkhof and colleagues (2011) also supported the positive effects of CHV on OPR management: the brand's use of a personal tone engendered higher communicated relational commitment than a corporate voice (Kerkhof, Beugels, Utz, & Beukeboom, 2011).

CHV can further elicit publics' positive responses and more supportive behaviors towards an organization (Hong & Kim, 2019; Oh & Ki, 2019). Communication in a human (as opposed to organizational) voice increases one's perceived social presence and interactivity (Park & Cameron 2014). In turn, publics are more willing to talk positively about an organization, if they encounter its use of CHV (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001; Woisetschläger et al., 2011). Noteworthy, positive WOM behaviors prompted by CHV can serve as free advertising, and reduce promotion and advertising costs for companies. For example, a brand's use of human voice appearing on its Facebook posts not only gained viral attention, but also increased purchase intentions of hotel bookings (Barcelos, Dantas, & Sénécal, 2018). Thus, practitioners are recommended to well-verse their online communications to fulfill users' needs for two-way communication with organizations (Smith, 2010).

To recap, past work has well-conceptualized CHV as a favorable communication style that personifies an organization, enhances its perceived interactivity and openness to publics, and creates positive outcomes. One thing to note, CHV is rather a "perceived" style of organizational communication, which can restrict the term to precise its operationalization (Kelleher 2009). Yet, previous CHV studies mostly used controlled experiments, particularly from manipulating and comparing the human versus organizational voice. Conversely, "companies can use a tone of voice with any degree of humanness, and not only a voice that is either completely corporate or human" (Barcelos et al., 2018, p. 62). Thus, the use of conversational human voice calls for a new direction in public relations research, focusing more on its sophisticated operational guidelines to provide effective and practical recommendations.

Operationalizing Conversational Human Voice

Early studies introduced some common CHV dimensions such as sentences attempting to make communication enjoyable, admitting an organization's mistake, providing prompt feedback addressing criticism with a direct but uncritical manner, and treating readers as human (Kelleher, 2009; Kelleher & Miller, 2006). Since then, scholars have operationalized the concept of CHV, and developed the six measurement items: using a sense of humor in communication; providing connections to competitors; making communication enjoyable and positive; admitting mistakes; providing prompt and uncritical feedback when addressing criticism; and positively addressing complaints or queries (Sweetser, & Kelleher, 2016). However, those CHV aspects are not fully applicable to public relations practice in social media, presumably due to the qualitative nature of its operational definitions and unclear directions. In other words, organizations and practitioners surely acknowledge all of merits using the humanized communication styles, but they are not yet convinced of how to employ such humorous, enjoyable, and positive online contents. Furthermore, some traditional CHV features still require more thorough clarification.

Emerging Conversational Human Voice Markers in Social Media

As public expects humanized responses from organizations in social media (Veil et al., 2011), scholars have constantly visited the concept of CHV by exploring its multi-dimensions to practice and revamp the conversational voice strategies in social media platforms (Guillory & Sundar, 2008; Hong & Kim, 2019). We reviewed current literature and identified the following six features that were commonly evidenced with clear examples (Barcelos, Dantas, & Sénécal, 2018; Hong & Kim, 2019; Jahng & Hong 2017; Kim, Novak, & Johnson, 2018; Kerkhof et al., 2011; Oh

& Ki 2019; Park & Cameron 2014; Park & Lee, 2013): 1) organizational use of humor; 2) making communication emotional and engaging through a certain word choice; 3) treating online publics as real people through personal acknowledgement and informal reactions (e.g., emojis); 4) positively addressing queries; 5) invitation to ongoing organization-public communications by using hashtags for a promotion/event/campaign; and 6) using first person narratives.

First, a humorous content is easily found in organizations' social media posts. For example, a content and discourse analysis of Hispanic targeted promoted tweets (*N*= 7,181) revealed that the use of humor appeals was the most frequently observed CHV aspect in the corporate promotional tweets (Kim et al., 2018). Second, organizations seem to pursue enjoyable and humanized communication through their language choices being positive, encouraging, and emotional (Beukeboom, Kerkhof, & de Vries, 2015). The concept of conversational human voice is associated with the choice of words (Gretry et al. 2017); and organizational social media posts often used informal language and express more often emotions like happiness or sadness (Barcelos, Dantas, & Sénécal, 2018). Certain emotional and encouraging words were also frequently chosen by ten corporations in Twitter as the following: "like/likes," "thanks," "love/loves/loving," "support/supports/supporting," and "concerns/concerned" (Kim et al., 2018). As the third CHV feature, organizations try to communicate with individual users by tagging them, or express informal reactions, all of which seem to treat online publics as real persons (Barcelos et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2018; Park & Cameron, 2014). For instance, organizations exemplify their human face through extensive use of emojis (Barcelos et al., 2018). They further personally acknowledge their followers by tagging a particular person's hashtag, ID, or picture (Kim et al., 2018); or share a blogger's personal experiences (Park & Cameron, 2014). Organizations also *positively addresses public complaints or queries* in a social media platform, thanks to its two-way communication capability. The organization's common language adoption such as "assist/assistance," "reach," "service," "contacts/contacted," and "help/helpful/helped," confirms this CHV marker as present, meaningful and valid (Kim et al., 2018). Next redefined CHV item is an *organization's invitation for ongoing conversation* (Kelleher, 2009). This CHV feature was frequently displayed in posts that address a company's needs for spurring follower discussions through a hashtag promotion or contest (Kim et al., 2018).

Finally, the first-person narrative, received extensive scholarly attention when operationalizing CHV (e.g., "we," or "I"; Barcelos et al., 2018; Oh & Ki 2019; Park & Cameron 2014). For example, organizations often wrote in a first-person narrative with informal greetings such as "hi" along with their personal contact information (Oh & Ki 2019). Human voice tweets were also written in the first person with a name of an agent (e.g., I understand your situation. By Pam ; Jahng & Hong 2017; Kerkhof et al., 2011); and a company's spokespersons addressed consumers by their first names, while referring to the brand mostly in the first person ("I" or "we") and signing with his/her own name (Barcelos et al., 2018).

While a plethora of studies tested the effects of traditional CHV dimensions on social media and they were found to be successful and significant strategies to generate positive PR outcomes (Barcelos et al., 2018; Beukeboom, Kerkhof & de Vries, 2015; Hong & Kim, 2019; Kim et al., 2018; Park & Lee, 2013), there is no single study that actually investigated the use of CHV on existing corporates' social media accounts. Concerning the aforementioned arguments, the current study aims to test whether the redefined six CHV features on social media is visible for Instagram:

> **RQ1**: To what extent are features of conversational human voice strategies present in Fortune 500 companies on Instagram?

The Effects of Conversational Human Voice Features on Consumer-Brand Engagement

While the present research extends the limited literature on CHV by exploring the corporate use of emerging human voice strategies on Instagram, whether these contents make a difference in *real-life* engagement remains another important inquiry: the amount of "Likes" it generates.

Scholars and practitioners studied consumer engagement as a critical outcome of corporate social media communications (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012; Pentina, Guilloux, & Micu, 2018; Peters, Chen, Kaplan, Ognibeni, & Pauwels, 2013; Schultz & Peltier, 2013; Swani, Milne, & Brown, 2013), and especially, *social media engagement* received by far the most scholarly attention in the context of public relations (Jelen-Sanchez, 2017).

Brand engagement in social media refers to ''an expression of consumers' cognitive and emotional attitudes via their brand-related engagement behaviors in social media" (p. 57; Pentina et al., 2018) which further reflects the commonly accepted social media engagement metrics used by brands such as likes, shares, comments, and retweets. One might argue that the number of overall "Likes" on a social media brand page is a numerical representation of the number of impressions that the brand has on the site, and thus assume that button as a mere metric for assessing one-way information diffusion (Devin & Lane, 2014).

On the contrary, a brand page with a high number of "Likes" can be seen as being popular and *engaging* among its followers (Swani, Milne, & Brown, 2013). When an online consumer likes a brand message, he or she not only diffuses the corporate post, but also, expresses one's brand engagement within a unique network by adding value and meaning to the message. According to in-person interviews with luxury brand shoppers, consumers engaged in the brands mainly through liking and tagging the corporate posts with one's encounters to share their excitement and emotions with the brands, as well as to express their desires for the advertised products (Pentina et al., 2018). Clicking the "Like" button also equally means consumers would voluntarily promote the brand messages, and act like personal referrals or endorsers throughout their networks of friends (Peters et al., 2013). What follows, conversations and exchanges of consumer attitudes via "Likes" in social media can co-create brand meaning, which in turn, further influence their brand trust and brand loyalty (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012; Tsai & Men, 2013).

In other words, "liking" a brand message creates consumer-brand engagement in social media where individuals are more likely to make brand purchases and WOM about their experiences, emotional attachment, and loyalty with the brand (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). Thus, brands should pay greater attention to utilizing the interactive "Like" button, that is "likely to stimulate brand-related discourse, potentially leading to renegotiating the brand's meaning." (Pentina et al., 2018, p.65).

Our primary focus is on identifying specific CHV dimensions and testing individual *effects* of each CHV features on consumer-brand engagement. To do so, we adopt this conceptualization of "Likes" as a brand engagement indicator on Instagram where individuals engage by *liking* the brand posts, and consumer engagement can be maximized by sharing the contents with other users. We found one study that supports the potential impact of humanized and emotional brand messages on consumer likes. Specifically, Swani and colleagues (2013) examined the effectiveness of message strategies (e.g., the use of brand names/emotional content/direct calls to purchase), as determined by the number of likes generated, from a content analysis of 1,143 brand messages posted by 193 Fortune 500 companies. Their findings suggest that humanized corporate posts having emotional sentiments obtained more likes than those

including explicitly commercial statements, while the study is only limited to *Facebook* corporate content (Swani et al., 2013).

Taken all together, we propose that a corporate post that practices Instagram-based conversational human voice features would elicit higher number of "Likes" from its followers than those without the CHV items.

H1-6: Fortune 500 companies' Instagram posts employing conversational human voice markers of (1) humor appeals, (2) emotional/engaging word choices, (3) reactions/tagging followers, (4) positively addressing queries, (5) invitation to a hashtag event/conversation, and (6) the first-person narrative would generate more likes than posts without those markers.

Methods

A content analysis of Fortune 500 companies' Instagram posts was conducted, focusing on six CHV characteristics: the use of humor, positive/emotional word choices, treating online followers as real people through personal compliment and informal emojis, positively addressing queries and assisting followers, invitation to ongoing organization-public communications through a hashtag(s), and the use of the first-person narrative. Real posts from corporate Instagram accounts as well as real reactions from Instagram users were sampled.

Sampling Procedure

The researchers first identified companies from the Fortune 500 company list to include in the sample. Companies' official Instagram accounts were primarily located and linked from the official company website. If more than one verified account existed (or if none was verified), the leading brand account was chosen. Then, Fortune 500 companies' recent (2018-2019) Instagram posts were screenshotted and stored for the main coding process. A one year period was suggested by previous literature to allow enough time to represent companies' activities on instagram (Liu et al., 2017). Then, the researchers retrieved the most current 50 posts from 165 companies with verified Instagram accounts. If a brand did not have 50 posts within that time frame, only posts published until 2019 were collected. This process yielded a total of 7,545 Instagram posts for the main analysis.

Coding Procedure

Two coders received two training sessions with the researchers. A pretest was conducted on 500 posts from a random selection to check intercoder reliability. Disagreements among coders were resolved through further discussions and clarifications. Intercoder reliability scores were calculated using Krippendorf's alpha for humor (a = .80); positive/emotional word choices (a = .86); treating users as real persons (a = .85); positively helping publics and addressing their inquiries (a = .90); inviting followers to a hashtag event (a = .92); and the first-person narrative (a = .95). Also, coders identified the type of industry as well as the number of "likes."

Variables

Industry Sectors. Each corporate Instagram post was matched and coded according to the Fortune 500 industry sectors of 10 industry types based on the Department of Labor statistics: Natural resources and mining (e.g., *Shell*), Construction (e.g, *AECOM*), Manufacturing (e.g., *GM*), Retail/Trade (e.g., *Costco*), Information and Telecommunication (e.g., *AT&T*), Financial Activities (e.g., *MasterCard*), Professional and Business Services, Health and Education (e.g., *Johnson & Johnson*), Leisure and hospitality (e.g,, *Marriott*) and others.

Conversational Human Voice features. Coders were asked to read each post (N=7,454) carefully and identified the presence (or absence) of six CHV features, respectively. Operationalization and examples are available at Table 1.

Table 1. Examples for six CHV features

CHV features	Operationalization	Example	Brand	Reference
Use of Humor	Using a sense of humor in communication	"If you're pizza, Amazon, or a dog walker, we're home," "Who wants to volunteer to walk these two cuties?"	Amazon	Kelleher, 2009; Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016
Positive/Emotional Word Choices	Using positive and encouraging word choices such as "love/like/thank/support/concerned."	"This time of year, Mother Nature may throw more than just snowballs your way! We're *deeply concerned* about your safety."	State Farm	Barcelos, Dantas, & Sénécal, 2018; Hong & Kim, 2019; Park & Lee, 2013
Treating Users as Real People	Treating followers as real people (by tagging a follower's name or offering individualized praise.)	"BurlingtonStyle. The perfect way to brighten winter grey days! Credits to #xxxxx (the user's Instagram ID)."	Burlington Store	Jahng & Hong, 2017; Kelleher, 2009
Positively Addressing Queries	Addressing complaints or helping any consumer issues.	"@heydiortiz, your store will be participating in some Halloween events with our favorite pumpkin products."	Publix Supermarket Store	Kim et al., 2018; Kelleher 2009; Kerkhof et al., 2011
Inviting Followers	Promoting a company's needs for obtaining consumer opinions and spurring follower discussions using a hashtag.	"Calling all baking innovators! Think you can make the best cereal-infused holiday dessert? Last day to register is today to enter our Holiday Baking	Kellogg	Barcelos et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2018; Park &

		Challenge!#KelloggChallenge."		Cameron, 2014
First person narrative	Using the first person state such as "we/I/our/my" instead of the third person.	"We wish you good luck and all the best in the new year!"	American Airlines	Jahng & Hong 2017; Oh & Ki 2019; Park & Cameron, 2014

Brand Engagement. Consumer-brand engagement was coded as the number of likes an Instagram post received (Pentina et al., 2018; Swani et al., 2013). As the standard deviation of the number of likes was very high due to its varying degrees of brands' Instagram activities, the number of likes used in the analysis was standardized in a way to change raw data with high standard variation into notionally common scale. The unit of analysis remained the same.

Results

Our data showed that Fortune 500 companies adopt CHV for their Instagram accounts: 65% used positive tone (n = 4888); 43% used first-person narrative (n=3199); 26% used invited followers to communication (n = 1952), 26% treated users as real people (n = 1962) while only 6% used humor as its content strategy (n = 418) and 2% (n=112) addressed queries from users.

Specifically, the use of six items of CHV are significantly different across industry types. As shown in table 2, manufacturing (67%), retail (63%), health (77%), information and telecommunication (62%), leisure and hospitality (79%), and financial service sectors (68%) heavily used '*positive/engaging words*.' *Inviting users to conversation using hashtags* was also frequently used by construction (43%), health (32%), manufacturing (29%), retail (26%), and financial services (27%), yet only 4% of posts by professional business used it. Posts with *first person* were mostly favored by health (73%), natural resources and mining (55%), manufacturing (45%), financial activities (46%) while only 29% were used for professional business sector. *Treating users as real people* was popularly used by information and telecommunication (34%) and manufacturing (35%) as well as health (30%).

Humor turned out to be adapted less frequently by all sectors except for retail (9%). Natural resource (1%), manufacturing (2%), and health (2%) sectors merely utilized posts with humor while professional business did not use it at all (0%). This pattern is similar with *addressing queries*. Besides health (5%), sectors hardly used this technique for their instagram usage (e.g., 0% for professional, leisure and hospitality, 1% for financial services, telecommunication, construction).

Table 2.

Cross-tabulation of Conversational Human Voice from Fortune 500 Instagram by industry type

Industry type	Humor	First person	Positive/engaging words	Inviting to conversation	Real people	Addressing queries
Natural resources (n=300)	5 1.6%	164 54.67%	207 69%	65 21.67%	56 18.67%	4 1.33%
Construction (n=300)	13 4.33%	104 34.67%	165 55%	130 43.33%	51 17%	3 1%
Manufacturing (n=899)	20 2.22%	407 45.27%	603 67.07%	264 29.37%	311 34.59%	14 1.56%
Retail and trading (n=2670)	242 9.06%	974 36.48%	1687 63.18%	701 26.25%	601 22.51%	45 1.69%
Information and telecommunication (n=1061)	52 4.9%	473 44.58%	657 61.92%	204 19.23%	362 34.12%	10 0.9%
Financial service (n=1567)	70 4.47%	721 46.01%	1061 67.71%	422 26.93%	382 24.38%	16 1.0%
Professional business (n=92)	0 0%	27 29.34%	47 51.09%	4 4.3%	21 22.83%	0 0%
Health and education (n=396)	8 2.0%	290 73.23%	304 76.76%	127 32.07%	120 30.3%	20 5.05%
Leisure and hospitality (n=200)	8 4%	39 19.5%	157 78.5%	35 17.5%	58 29%	0 0%
Chi-square results	113.944***	282.429***	78.308***	124.286***	127.042***	47.267***

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

To test hypotheses 1-6, six independent t-tests were conducted. As a result, H1, H2, H6 were statistically supported. H1 assumed that Instagram posts using Humor would have higher number of likes. An independent t-test showed that posts with humor appeals generated higher likes (M = 6.60, SD = 45.06) than other posts without humor (M = 3.73, SD = 32.52),

t(5543)=1.440, *p* = .006. For H2, Instagram posts that included emotional and engaging words obtained higher number of likes (*M* = 4.25, *SD* = 37.50) than other posts (*M* = 3.15, *SD* = 22.69). This result significantly supports H2 [t(5540)=1.153, *p* = .048]. Additionally, H6 was supported as Instagram posts that were written in the first person sentences received higher number of likes (M = 4.50, SD = 34.09) than other posts (*M* = 3.39, *SD* = 32.68), *t*(5544) = 1.331, *p* = .04.

On the contrary, H3, H4, H5 were not supported. Instagram posts treating Instagram users as real people [*t*(5540) = .004, *p* = .89], posts positively addressing queries [*t*(5541) = .479, *p* = .382], posts inviting users to hashtag conversations [*t*(5545)=.239, *p* = .620] did not significantly elicit more number of "likes" than those without such CHV dimensions.

Table 3.

Results for Hypotheses 1-6 using Independent t-tests

	Hypothesis	M	SD	P value
1	Humor appeals	6.60	45.06	.006
	Other posts	3.73	32.52	
2	Positive/emotional word choices	4.25	37.50	.048
	Other posts	3.15	22.69	
3	Treating followers as real people	3.88	34.83	.894
	Other posts	3.89	32.69	
4	Positively addressing queries	2.17	5.07	.382
	Other posts	3.91	33.57	
5	Inviting to conversations	4.07	30.26	.62
	Other posts	3.82	24.28	
6	First person narrative	4.51	34.09	.04
	Other posts	3.39	32.68	

Discussion

For public relations practice, managing social media accounts effectively has become one of the most important tasks these days. To do so, scholars have investigated that CHV offers an excellent strategy for organizations to build relationships and increase engagement with their publics via social media (Barcelos, Dantas, & Sénécal, 2018; Beukeboom, Kerkhof & de Vries, 2015; Hong & Kim, 2019; Kerkhof et al., 2011; Oh & Ki 2019; Park & Cameron 2014). This study is the first to empirically examine the prevalence of CHV utilized by Fortune 500 companies on Instagram. In doing so, specific markers of CHV were parsed out, and mean differences were compared to see if each marker made significant differences in generating user engagement. Such findings are significant for three reasons. First, they highlight the extent to which leading organizations use social media as a platform for public relations practice, and provide insights to

improve the effectiveness of social media management regarding how to better communicate with publics on social media to obtain more positive engagement. Second, understanding effective and proper usage of Instagram will provide insights for practitioners, managers, stakeholders, and scholars who are concerned with the conceptual development of CHV. Finally, the fact that Fortune 500 companies are front runners of the industry indicates a broader practical impact of the study. Our findings can be extrapolated to inform future strategies in social media for public relations efforts conducted by other companies.

In line with the research question 1, more than 60% of companies Instagram posts used CHV to some extent, from actively utilizing emotional and engaging words to passively addressing queries from users. Using first-person narratives and inviting to use hashtags were also popular, however, using humor was the least frequently utilized CHV strategy by Fortune 500's Instagram posts. This is an interesting departure from Kelleher's original definition of CHV (2006, 2009), where he emphasized that using humor is a communication characteristic that "otherwise might not be associated with traditional corporate communication." (2006, p. 399).

Most interesting, and in line with the aforementioned hypotheses, our findings show that CHV markers significantly increased brand engagement. While only three CHV features (e.g., use of humor, use of the first-person narrative, and using encouraging and emotional words) out of six enhanced user engagement through more "Likes," treating users as real people, inviting conversation, and positively addressing queries had no significant impacts. To further dissect these findings, while humor was utilized the least frequently among corporations, it had the most significant impact on engagement, while dialogic features such as responding to queries or inviting users to participate in hashtag events had no meaningful impact on engagement. There are several implications from these findings.

First, not all CHV is "created equally." Kelleher's original scale for CHV includes various items to measure for a single construct that range from dialogic communication (e.g, … invites people to conversation; is open to dialogue) to using humor (e.g., uses a sense of humor) to personify organizations. Yet, corporations are currently underutilizing a successful strategy and taking a somewhat cocktail and shotgun approach for creating their social media content. It is important to consider CHV as a multifaceted concept and further dissect its dimensions. To this end, public relations scholarship needs to take a step back and critically examine the effectiveness of CHV. From our review conducted an experiment using CHV, not a single study has reported that CHV is ineffective. CHV is rooted in interpersonal theories and narrative persuasion (Hong & Kim, 2019; Kelleher & Miller 2006), and these theories stipulate that the power of narratives and interpersonal connections are context driven. In other words, CHV is not the holy grail for public relations online communication, and it needs to be tested and examined in a wider range of contexts, using methods beyond controlled experiments.

Finally, this paper suggests that routine social media practices needs to be reevaluated, particularly if they are proposed as an engagement strategy. For example, an invitation to use hashtags is one of the most commonly utilized social media tactics to generate traffic and participation to a brand's social media page, however, findings from our study suggests that this does nothing to increase engagement. This is not to say that corporations should omit using hashtags altogether, rather they need to take a more systematic approach. DeMasi, Mason, & Ma (2016) explained that hashtags can be categorized into four different clusters based on posting frequency and periodic frames. Their findings revealed that event-based hashtags (e.g., #SuperBowl) ironically generate the least amount of engagement, while consistent daily chatter like hashtags (e.g., #Spreadlove) and periodically recurring hashtags (e.g., #TacoTuesdays)

generate the most amount of engagement. From a practical standpoint, corporations would need to be cognizant that multiple hashtags reflecting various timeframes and occasions needs to be incorporated, even if the purpose is to generate traffic for *an* event.

Limitations and future research directions

As with any type of research, the present study also comes with some limitations. First, a content analysis was only based on the official Instagram for the Fortune 500 company list (as of 2019). As a function of selection, some consumer friendly brands that are actively engaging with Instagram users (e.g., *Zara, Lego*, etc.) were not included from the analysis. Future research can benefit from diversifying the inclusion criteria and perhaps conduct a comparative analysis to examine whether CHV were utilized differently from Fortune 500 companies.

Future research may also take a qualitative approach and interview account managers to understand when and how they curate content that is conversational and human-like to engage followers. Further questions as to what makes them partake a particular dimension of CHV over the other could be examined as well.

Conclusion

Findings from this study stress the effectiveness and prevalence of CHV utilized in social media content on Fortune 500 companies. At the same time, it suggests that a revised understanding of CHV is necessary: Some aspects of human voice did not generate meaningful differences in terms of engagement, while others did. This shows that human voice can fulfill or impede public relations efforts as messaging activities are distributed to the public with little or no stake in organizational success. By suggesting much clearer human voice features in a social media context and testing their *effects* on follower engagement, we hope to offer better guidance on how communication practitioners can best compose their online messages to be human-like and engaging to publics.

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Nonprofit crisis communication: An examination of U.S. nonprofit strategies

Callie Jackson
Jensen Moore
University of Oklahoma

Abstract

We surveyed communication professionals working in nonprofits across the United States. Professionals were asked about crisis strategies outlined in Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Results showed which strategies nonprofits are most likely to use, depending on the type of crisis the nonprofit experienced, and how trust and stakeholder importance were perceived in relation to crisis response.

Keywords: Crisis communication, Situational Crisis Communication, trust, stakeholder importance, nonprofit organizations

Each year in the United States alone, nonprofits produce $1.98 trillion in revenue (McKeever, 2018). In 2015, there were 1.56 million nonprofits registered with the IRS (McKeever, 2018). Nonprofits make up a large part of the country's income, yet they differ greatly from business organizations in the U.S. The key difference between the business sector and the nonprofit sector is that while businesses earn their money through products and/or services, nonprofits are dependent on charitable donations (Foster, Fine, Foster 2007). As a result of this dependency, nonprofits are required to be much more transparent in communications with their key publics in order to maintain their trust, especially during times of crisis (MacGillavry, 2015). As noted by Sisco (2012), more than other organizations, nonprofits have to think of stakeholders as their number one priority during times of crisis because stakeholders can determine the organization's survival. Nonprofits are especially susceptible to this because people need to romanticize nonprofits in order to perceive them as honorable and worthwhile (Sisco, 2012).

Thus, understanding the most used and successful crisis communication strategies used by nonprofits is important to study. This will not only provide public relations professionals with information on nonprofit crisis communications, but it can also outline best practices for nonprofits to successfully manage future crises. This study utilized a survey to ask nonprofit communication professionals about: 1) the type of crisis they recently faced (Smith, 2017), 2) the form their crisis response took (Huang, 2008), 3) the crisis communication strategies used (Huang 2008; Smith, 2017), 4) perceptions of trust (Huang, 2008), and 5) perceptions of relational commitment (Huang, 2008). Variables from both Huang (2008) and Smith (2017), originally developed to examine for-profit organizations, were adapted to examine nonprofit organizations.

Each of these variables were examined within the framework of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 2007), which suggests crisis responses should vary depending on if the nonprofit is the victim, the crisis is accidental, or the crisis is preventable. Coombs (2017) suggests using deny (victim), diminish (accidental), or rebuild (preventable) strategies for crisis responses. Smith (2017) outlines 10 crisis types that fit into the victim, accidental, or preventable clusters including: nonviolent mismanagement, nonviolent ethical/moral failing, nonviolent opposition, nonviolent disaster, nonviolent accident, nonviolent crime, violent disaster, violent accident, violent opposition, and violent crime. Smith (2017) goes on to present several strategies that fit into Coombs' categories (as noted by Moore, Baker, Huffling and Washington, 2018): deny (offensive, defensive), diminish (diversionary, deliberate inaction, nonapology), and rebuild (pre-emptive action, vocal commiseration, rectifying behavior). In the current study we examine each of these strategies by asking the following: RQ 1: *Which crisis types result in different crisis communicative strategies?*

In addition, we use findings presented by Huang (2008) to examine how crisis response form, trust and relational commitment influence crisis communication strategies. Huang's (2018) work is important in understanding how timely responses, consistent responses, and active responses influence crisis strategies. Furthermore, Huang (2008) posits trust and relational commitment influence how communication professionals interact with publics during crisis situations. Thus, this research examines several additional variables that could influence how a nonprofit communication professional chooses to communicate during crisis situations. Understanding each of these variables is important in developing best practices for nonprofits to use during crisis situations, as the needs of nonprofit publics (and the types of crises faced by nonprofits) differs greatly from for-profit organizations.

Literature Review

Situational Crisis Communication Theory

This study utilizes Situational Crisis Communication Theory to examine different crisis communication strategies as they apply to nonprofits. Developed by Coombs (2007), SCCT describes three clusters of crises, each one with different crisis responses. The first cluster is the victim cluster which exemplifies a scenario where the organization holds the least amount of responsibility for the crisis (Coombs 2007). The second cluster is the accident cluster, meaning that the crisis was a result of something that was not intentionally caused, though it may still be the organization's fault (Coombs 2007). The third cluster is the preventable cluster, meaning that the crisis was created by intentional human errors and misdeeds within the organization (Coombs 2007). According to SCCT each of these crises have different responses. In the victim cluster, the organization should deny the crisis, absolving the organization of any involvement or fault (Coombs 2007). In the accident cluster, the organization should aim to diminish the crisis in any way possible (Coombs 2007). In the preventable cluster, the organization should move forward, rebuilding after the crisis (Coombs, 2007).

Coombs applied SCCT further by examining the correlation between past crises and current communication. His findings revealed a weak correlation between the perceptions of crisis responsibility and crisis history (Coombs 2004). This means that even if an organization has a history with a certain type of crisis, the public does not necessarily perceive them to be more or less responsible for the current crisis. His findings also found that there was a strong correlation between the organization's reputation and their history with crisis (Coombs 2004). This means that if an organization has a history with a certain type of crisis, the reoccurrence of that crisis will impact their reputation with the public. This is important because when nonprofits are determining their crisis response, they may need to alter their response to protect their reputation if they have a history of crisis. These alterations and considerations, however, remain in the direction of the SCCT's crisis clusters and crisis responses.

MacGillavry (2015) used SCCT to examine nonprofit crisis types, responses, and spokespersons by manipulating crisis type, crisis response and spokesperson type on the stakeholders. Specifically, this study examined how the elements of the crisis would impact the "anger, sympathy, willingness to forgive, trust in the organization, trust in the charitable sector, intention to donate to the organizations, and intention to donate to charitable organizations in general" (MacGillavry, 2015). In this study, SCCT proved to hold true for all elements of the stakeholders' perspective except trust (MacGillavry, 2015). MacGillavry (2015) found that levels of trust did not fluctuate based on crisis type. These findings are important because it explains that stakeholders can maintain or lose trust in a nonprofit independent of the crisis type, therefore fully dependent on the crisis response. This provides nonprofits with an opportunity to retain their stakeholders' trust during any crisis if they respond with corrective action, and the acceptance of responsibility rather than minimization response types (MacGillavry, 2015).

Ham and Kim (2017) also used SCCT to examine the level of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in relation to crisis response types. This study found no significant correlation between CSR and crisis response types. Diminishing and rebuilding strategies had no effect on CSR (Ham & Kim, 2007). The only crisis response that diminished CSR was the denial response strategy (Ham & Kim, 2007). Conversely, the findings indicated that the main factor impacting CSR is crisis type, though situational factors including industry history, can be important. These findings are important for our study as they indicate the value of crisis types in relation to CSR, a key factor in the success of the business industry of which nonprofits are a part. They also indicate a lack of influence of crisis response types outlined in the SCCT on CSR (Ham & Kim, 2007). Though crisis response and crisis types prove to be important in other studies, these findings suggest that they are not equally important in relation to CSR (Ham & Kim, 2007).

Sisco (2012) successfully outlined SCCT as the foundation for determining responsibility in a crisis situation. The clusters of crises determine whose responsibility the crisis is, and therefore determines how the public perceives the organization once they deploy crisis communication responses (Sisco, 2012). This research is important to this study because it validates the use of SCCT as an indicator of crisis type, organization responsibility and provides the framework for nonprofit response types. Finally, Fussell Sisco, Collins & Zoch (2010) examined the practical use of SCCT in the nonprofit world. The findings of this study indicated that the Red Cross followed the SCCT recommended crisis response strategies one third of the time (Fussell Sisco, Collins & Zoch, 2010). As a result, the Red Cross overused the 'diminish' strategies, most likely to fulfill their perceived need for quick response in a crisis. The conclusion from these findings was that sometimes the real industry follows public relations theory. It also found that in the instances when the industry did not follow theory, the theory approach may have been more appropriate and/or successful than the actual response. This is important to this study because it validates the practicality of applying this research to real world crisis response practices.

Crisis Types

Smith (2013) outlines 10 crisis types, made up of four that are violent and six that are nonviolent (p. 458). These types are determined by the nature of the crises and determine how the organization will respond to the crisis. Within the nonviolent categories, the first crisis type is nonviolent mismanagement, which is when an employee's poor judgement hurts the organization with immediate or delayed impact (Smith 2013). Next is nonviolent ethical/moral failing, which is when a member of the organization acts unethically, causing immediate or delayed impact on the organization (Smith 2013). Nonviolent opposition occurs when an external or internal force negatively impacts the organization, typically with protests, competition, lawsuits, etc. (Smith 2013). Next is nonviolent disaster, which occurs when a natural disaster occurs that either impacts the organization or the organization's key public in a delayed manner (Smith 2013). Nonviolent accident occurs when there is an accident that involves people and/or equipment in the organization that causes immediate damage (Smith 2013). The next crisis type is nonviolent crime, which occurs when an employee violates the law and causes delayed damage (Smith 2013). Within the violent categories, the first crisis type is violent disaster which occurs when there is a natural disaster that causes immediate damage (Smith 2013). The next type is a violent accident, which occurs when there is an accident with people and/or equipment in the organization that causes immediate injury or death (Smith 2013). Violent opposition occurs when external or internal forces negatively impact the organization, typically with riots or

terrorism, causing immediate damage (Smith 2013). The last type is violent crime, which occurs when a member of the organization commits a legal crime that results in immediate injury or death (Smith 2013).

We suggest each of these crisis types fit within the clusters outlined by SCCT (victim, accidental, and preventable) and should, thus determine how the organization will respond to the public. Within the victim cluster are: nonviolent opposition and violent opposition. Within the accidental cluster are: nonviolent disaster, violent disaster, nonviolent accident, and violent accident. Finally, within the preventable cluster are: nonviolent mismanagement, nonviolent ethical/moral failing, nonviolent crime, and violent crime.

Crisis Communicative Strategy

Huang (2008, p. 301-303) defined crisis communicative strategies as the "actual verbal and nonverbal responses and organization uses to address a crisis" (p. 301). Smith (2013) identified seven crisis communication strategies. The first is pre-emptive action, meaning the organization attacks the opponent or competitor before the crisis is launched (Smith 2013). This is when an organization chooses to openly blame or confront an outside organization before a crisis has reached the public. Second is offensive response, which can include an attack, shock, embarrassment or threat when responding to criticism (Smith 2013). Offensive response is a controversial response that openly defies another organization or criticism itself. Third is defensive response which consists of denial, excuse or justification, meaning any response the organization can use to act without aggression against criticism (Smith 2013). Defensive response is when an organization does not accept responsibility for the crisis but explains it independently from the organization's actions. The fourth strategy is diversionary response, which is a tactic used to shift the public's attention away from the problem, which can include a concession, ingratiation, disassociation, and relabeling (Smith 2013). Diversionary responses are used to lessen the attention on the crisis, or on the organization resulting from the crisis. The fifth strategy is vocal commiseration, where the organization will express their profound understanding of the effects of the crisis in their communications to the public. Vocal commiseration can include concern, condolence, regret and apology (Smith 2013). Vocal commiseration is an open response to the public in which the organization addresses the crisis in a communicative way. Sixth is a non-apology, which is an insincere apology that blames the victim of the crisis (defined by Moore, Baker, Huffling and Washington, 2018). Seventh is rectifying behavior where the organization demonstrates their action to repair the damage done to their audience, which includes investigation, corrective action, restitution and repentance (Smith 2013). This is when the organization acts to amend the crisis and move forward with the repercussions of the crisis as directions for future guidance. The eighth crisis communicative strategy is deliberate inaction, where the organization remains silent and/or vague following a crisis (Smith 2013). Deliberate inaction is the purposeful lack of response or lack of significant response on behalf of the organization.

Moore, Baker, Huffling and Washington (2018, p. 224) broke down Smith's (2013) strategies to align with Coombs' SCCT (2007). They suggested the following strategies under the *deny* cluster: offensive response and defensive response. Under *diminish strategies*, they suggested the following: diversionary response, deliberate inaction, nonapology. Finally, within the *rebuild strategies*, they suggested: pre-emptive action, vocal commiseration and rectifying behavior. Utilizing both Smith's (2017) crisis communicative strategy and SCCT will allow this study to measure the specific types of crises and their responses as they relate to nonprofit crisis communication. This led to this study's first research question and hypothesis: *RQ 1: Which*

crisis types result in different crisis communicative strategies? HYP 1: These crisis types often drive the crisis communicative strategy used by the organization, with crises that include violence often requiring increased rebuilding strategies.

Crisis Response Form & Crisis Communicative Strategy

Huang (2008) defined response form as the way that verbal and nonverbal crisis responses are presented to the public and/or stakeholders. The first response form type that Huang describes is a timely response. This is when an organization responds quickly after a crisis, not leaving time for a gap in information or making their stakeholders wait to know the extent of the crisis. According to Huang (2008), this response also fosters trust among stakeholders in the event of an organizational crisis. The next response form that Huang (2008) described is a consistent response, or a contradiction-free response. This maintains credibility with stakeholders following a crisis. This is important because if an organization responds consistently without contradicting themselves, their stakeholders and/or the public will trust the information they are receiving. The information seems more transparent and there is nothing for the public to suspect is ingenuine or false. The third and final response form described by Huang (2008) is active response, which occurs when members of an organization 'actively' respond in wake of a crisis, as opposed to being inactive or passive. Active response demonstrates to the public that the organization is fully aware of the crisis and fully acting to respond to said crisis. As opposed to passive responses, active responses are direct and demonstrate that the organization prioritizes its stakeholders. All of these forms carry their own merit and purpose, but the best crisis responses contain sufficient elements of each form: timeliness, consistency, and activeness. This study will mimic Huang's hypotheses and assume that combining CCS and these response forms can predict trust in the event of a crisis.

Trust and Crisis Communicative Strategy

Huang (2008) outlined trust as a necessary component of an interpersonal relationship. Huang defines trust as an important component in situations of risk, willingness, confidence. The operating definition of trust within our study is the confidence and willingness of one party to open up to another party (Huang, 2008). Huang (2008) linked trust and crisis communicative strategy, indicating that the way an organization chooses to respond to a crisis situation is a direct indicator of the level of trust between the organization and the public. We believe this is important because trust is an even greater necessity in the nonprofit sector than within for-profit organizations (Sisco, 2012), as nonprofits especially rely on the willingness of their public to support their efforts through donations and/or extensive resource commitments. Therefore, we propose the following: *HYP 2: Organizations that respond immediately to the needs of the public (i.e., crisis response form) will perceive trust to be more important than those that do not. HYP 3: Organizations that use rebuilding crisis communicative strategies will perceive trust to be more important than those that use deny or diminish strategies.*

Relational Commitment and Crisis Communicative Strategy

Furthermore, like Huang (2008), we posit relational commitment is a necessary component for a service relationship. This can be interpreted as loyalty and/or commitment, especially to a specific brand or organization. Huang (2008) split relational commitment into two types. The first is affective commitment. Affective commitment is defined as the public showing belief in the organization's goals and values, action taken by an individual on behalf of the organization, as well as a willingness to maintain a relationship with the organization (Huang, 2008). The second is continuance commitment. Continuance commitment focuses on the organizational environment, meaning that it is defined by how committed employees feel to the

organization in contrast to their cons for leaving that organization (Huang, 2008). This research does not require a specific distinction between affective and continuance commitment, but it is important to understand the facets of each type. In the current study we examine relational commitment as the perception of the communication professional that the stakeholder relationship is worth the effort to maintain and promote the organization. We suggest that during crises, it is important that stakeholders feel elements of both affective and continuance commitment in their attitudes toward the organization. This led to our final hypotheses: *HYP 4: Organizations that respond immediately to the needs of the public (i.e., crisis response form) will perceive stakeholders to be important to develop and maintain relationships with. HYP 5: Organizations that use rebuilding crisis communicative strategies will perceive stakeholders to be more important to develop and maintain relationships with than those that use deny or diminish strategies.*

Method

Design

An online survey was conducted in order to understand nonprofit relationships among crisis type, crisis response, trust and relationship commitment. Online surveys are a low-cost, efficient, non-geographically constrained, investigation of real-world problems and/or behaviors that allow for the gathering of large amounts of data in a short amount of time (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014; Stacks, 2017). In addition, survey results, if taken from a representative sample, can be generalized to the larger population (Stacks, 2017). A list of email addresses for U.S. nonprofit public relations and/or communications professionals was first compiled from several sources. Email messages were sent out with the survey URL so that only those invited could participate in the online survey, adding to the validity of the method (Luthor, 2011). In addition, the survey was kept short to improve completion (Luthor, 2011). Finally, multiple emails asking for participation were sent out in the hopes of increasing response rates (Luthor, 2011; Stacks, 2017).

Participants

A total of 405 nonprofit public relations and/or communication professionals across the United States were contacted via email, as well as through online forums and listservs, with 119 choosing to participate in the survey (29% response rate). Of these, 57 responses were dropped for failure to complete at least 75% of the survey. All hypotheses were analyzed based on the remaining 62 participants' data. Demographic questions indicated participants in this study were: 1) 26% male, 52% female, 2) average 12 of years in current position, 3) majority (35%) had a Bachelor's degree, 4) majority (23%) earned a communications degree. Participants noted the majority (77%) of the nonprofit organizations had more than one location in the U.S., the majority (26%) had 500-999 employees at these locations, the majority (32%) were not government-funded, and the primary nonprofit categories were health (9.7%), medical (6.5%), and education (6.5%).

Procedures, Setting and Apparatus

Data were collected during the month of January via Qualtrics online survey software. This was the second time the survey was run. The 85 questions (including demographics) took approximately 15 minutes to complete. This included an online informed consent process that took part prior to participation. Participants were then asked to envision a crisis that they experienced and handled (i.e., crisis type). All questions that followed asked them to recall how they responded (i.e., crisis response) and what they thought their stakeholders would perceive

their crisis responses to be (i.e., truthful, committed to relationship). Demographics (gender, time at current position, education level, degree earned, more than one location in the U.S., number of employees in the U.S., organization's government-funding, and nonprofit category) were asked at the end of the survey, and the survey concluded with a thank you message.

Independent Variables

Crisis Type. The 10 items for the crisis type were taken from Smith (2017). These included: 1) nonviolent mismanagement, 2) nonviolent ethical/moral failing, 3) nonviolent opposition, 4) nonviolent disaster, 5) nonviolent accident, 6) nonviolent crime, 7) violent disaster, 8) violent accident, 9) violent opposition, and 10) violent crime. This was asked as a nominal question wherein participants were instructed to choose the category that best fit the crisis they experienced. ***Crisis Response Form.*** The three items for crisis response form were taken from Huang (2008). Her scale included: 1) actively/initially responded to crisis verbally/behaviorally, 2) updated the public with the newest information, and 3) issued consistent responses/actions. These were measured on a five-point scale (never, seldom, sometimes, often, always). Huang reported a reliability coefficient of .81 for this scale, whereas we had a Cronbach's Alpha of .82. ***Crisis Communicative Strategies.*** The crisis communicative strategy items were taken from Huang (2008) and Smith (2017). The following crisis communicative strategies were used: 1) pre-emptive action, 2) defensive response, 3) offensive response, 4) vocal commiseration, 5) non-apology, 6) diversionary response, 7) rectifying behavior, and 8) deliberate inaction. These were measured on a five-point scale (never, seldom, sometimes, often, always). Participants were asked to indicate the statements that best described the forms their crisis responses took in the crisis event they envisioned previously. ***Pre-emptive action.*** Defined as getting information out about the crisis before a third party (i.e., prebuttal or controlling the narrative) (Smith, 2017, p. 162). Operationalized as seven items: 1) openly admitted accused act, 2) provided public with instructive information, 3) provided public with adaptive information, 4) admitted guilt, 5) demonstrated it was aware of what was going on, 6) took full responsibility, and 7) chose to reveal specifics of situation. Reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .85 for this scale. ***Defensive response.*** Defined as reacting to criticism through denial, excuse, justification or reversal (Smith, 2017, p. 162). Operationalized as seven items: 1) issued a denial, 2) refuted the accusations, 3) had no ability to prevent event, 4) event stemmed from good intentions, 5) not as serious as outsiders viewed it, 6) organization was the victim, and 7) event stemmed from organization's good works. Reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .72 for this scale. ***Offensive response.*** Defined as combatting opposition through attack, embarrassment, shock, standing firm, or threat (Smith, 2017, p. 162). Operationalized as eight items: 1) attacked the accuser, 2) built new issue to disperse focus, 3) exposed shortcomings of accuser, 4) compared this to past accuser events, 5) responded with offensive language, 6) responded with deliberate agitation, 7) responded with lawsuit, and 8) responded with defamation threats. Reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .72 for this scale. ***Vocal commiseration.*** Defined as expressions of empathy/understanding through apology, concern, condolence, and regret (Smith, 2017, p. 162). Operationalized as nine items: 1) apologized, 2) showed regard and/or distress, 3) expressed concern, 4) not indifferent to incident, 5) offered sympathy, 6) expressed grief, 7) expressed sorrow/remorse, 8) wish incident did not happen, and 9) asked for forgiveness. Reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .89 for this scale. ***Non-apology.*** Defined as expressing regret over public offense, but not admitting wrongdoing (Smith, 2017, p. 184). Operationalized as three items: 1) apologized for effect, not wrongdoing, 2) general apology, with no specific mention of crisis, and 3) acknowledged

offense, but did not take responsibility. Reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .78 for this scale. ***Diversionary response.*** Defined as focusing public on other issues/items than crisis through concession, disassociation, ingratiation, and relabeling (Smith, 2017, p. 162). Operationalized as nine items: 1) emphasizing former positive records, 2) took back previous statements, 3) offered different explanation, 4) complimented public actions, 5) promised charitable partnership, 6) spotlighted facets of organization instead of crisis, 7) built a new issue, 8) reframed the facets of event, and 9) asked for leniency. Factor Analysis revealed four items did not load properly (items 1, 4, 5, and 9 above), and these were dropped from the final scale. Reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .72 for the final five-item version of the scale. ***Rectifying behavior.*** Defined as positively responding to criticism through corrective action, investigation, repentance, and restitution (Smith, 2017, p. 162). Operationalized as nine items: 1) promised to right the wrong, 2) promised to compensate victims, 3) promised to examine situation, 4) promised steps were being taken, 5) assured situation would be investigated, 6) promised to change organization policy, 7) promised to make proactive actions, 8) promised to prevent recurrence, and 9) promised to promote goodwill of society. Reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .91 for this scale. ***Deliberate inaction.*** Defined as vague or deliberate non-responses to crisis. Operationalized as seven items: 1) failed to address wrongdoing, 2) refused to acknowledge crisis, 3) chose not to release a statement, 4) made no comment, 5) responded vaguely and indistinctly, 6) did not respond publicly, and 7) chose to let the crisis blow over. Reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .87 for this scale.

Dependent Variables

Trust. The four items for trust were taken from Huang (2008). Her scale included: 1) think we are truthful, 2) think we treat them fairly, 3) think we are trustworthy, and 4) think we keep our promises. These were measured on a seven-point scale (strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree). Huang reported a reliability coefficient of .84 for this scale, whereas we had a Cronbach's Alpha of .76. ***Relational Commitment.*** The four items for relational commitment were taken from Huang (2008). Her scale included: 1) not wish to discontinue relationship, 2) worthwhile to maintain relationship, 3) keep a long-lasting relationship, and 4) not wish they had never entered a relationship. These were measured on a seven-point scale (strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree). Huang reported a reliability coefficient of .83 for this scale, whereas we had a Cronbach's Alpha of .94.

Results

Data were initially examined to see what types of crises the nonprofit communicators experienced and what type of crisis responses the communicators had used. Participants reported experiencing the following: 1) nonviolent ethical/moral failing (22.6%), 2) nonviolent opposition (19.4%), 3) violent disaster (19.4%), 4) violent accident (12.9%), 5) nonviolent accident (6.5%), 6) nonviolent mismanagement (6.5%), 7) violent opposition (3.2%), and 8) nonviolent disaster (3.2%). In regard to their crisis responses, participants reported using the following: 1) preemptive action (M=4.75, SD=2.13), 2) offensive response (M=4.08, SD=1.753), 3) vocal commiseration (M=4.02, SD=1.47), 4) rectifying behavior (M=3.75, SD=1.48), 5) diversionary response (M=3.19, SD=1.17), 6) defensive response (M=3.11, SD=1.24), 7) deliberate inaction (M=2.70, SD=1.40), and 8) nonapology (M=2.66, SD=1.47).

To test hypothesis one, suggesting that crisis types with violence require a rebuilding strategy (pre-emptive, vocal commiseration, rectifying behavior), a one-way analysis of variance

(ANOVA) was conducted on crisis communicative strategy with crisis type (nonviolent mismanagement, nonviolent ethical/moral failing, nonviolent opposition, nonviolent disaster, nonviolent accident, nonviolent crime, violent disaster, violent accident, violent opposition) as the independent variable. H1: The effect of crisis type on rebuilding crisis communicative strategies was statistically significant for defensive strategy, F (7,50) = 3.29, p < .01; diversionary strategy, F (7,50) = 5.72, p < .001; and inaction strategy, F (7,50) = 3.94, p < .01. There was no difference in rebuilding strategies based on crisis type. Thus, hypothesis 1 was not supported. In order to address our research question and see how crisis type influenced crisis communicative strategy, post-hoc tests were performed. Due to the homogeneity of variance assumptions being violated, comparisons of means were performed using the Games-Howell approach.

RQ1: The comparisons indicated that *defensive strategy* was used significantly less for nonviolent ethical/moral (M=24, SD=8.68) vs. nonviolent disaster (M=35, SD = .00, p<.01) and violent opposition (M=37, SD=.00, p<.001). Defensive strategy was used significantly less for nonviolent opposition (M=19.33, SD=5.55) vs. nonviolent disaster (M=35, SD = .00, p<.001) and violent opposition (M=37, SD=.00, p<.001). Defensive strategy was used significantly less for violent accident (M=14.5, SD=10.86) vs. nonviolent disaster (M=35, SD = .00, p<.01) and violent opposition (M=37, SD=.00, p<.01). Finally, defensive strategy was used significantly less for violent disaster (M=22.83, SD=7.75) vs. violent opposition (M=37, SD=.00, p<.001). Comparisons indicated that *diversionary strategy* was used significantly less for nonviolent mismanagement (M=12.5, SD=.58) vs. nonviolent opposition (M=20.5, SD=5.28, p<.01), nonviolent disaster (M=22, SD=.00, p<.001), nonviolent accident (M=22.5, SD=1.73, p<.01), and violent opposition (M=17, SD=.00, p<.01). Diversionary strategy was used significantly less for nonviolent ethical/moral (M=14.71, SD=5.57) vs. nonviolent disaster (M=22, SD=.00, p<.01), and nonviolent accident (M=22.5, SD=1.73, p<.01). Diversionary strategy was used significantly less for violent accident (M=9.25, SD=4.37) vs. nonviolent opposition (M=20.5, SD=5.28, p<.01), nonviolent disaster (M=22, SD=.00, p<.001), and violent opposition (M=17, SD=.00, p<.05). Diversionary strategy was used significantly more for nonviolent accident (M=22.5, SD=1.73) vs. violent disaster (M=15.17, SD=5.30, p<.05), violent accident (M=9.25, SD=4.37, p<.001) and violent opposition (M=17, SD=.00, p<.05). Finally, diversionary strategy was used significantly more for nonviolent disaster (M=22, SD=.00) vs. violent disaster (M=15.17, SD=5.30, p<.05). Comparisons also indicated that an *inaction strategy* was used significantly less for nonviolent mismanagement (M=14.5, SD=.58) vs. nonviolent disaster (M=32, SD=.00, p<.001), and violent opposition (M=32, SD=.00, p<.001). Inaction strategy was used significantly less for nonviolent ethical/moral (M=20.71, SD=10.51) vs. nonviolent disaster (M=32, SD=.00, p<.05), and violent opposition (M=32, SD=.00, p<.05). Inaction strategy was used significantly more for nonviolent disaster (M=32, SD=.00) than violent disaster (M=14, SD=5.46, p<.001), and violent accident (M=10.5, SD=4.03, p<.001). Inaction strategy was used significantly more for violent opposition (M=32, SD=.00) vs. violent disaster (M=14, SD=5.46, p<.001), and violent accident (M=10.5, SD=4.03, p<.001). Finally, inaction strategy was used significantly more for nonviolent opposition (M=24.5, SD=12.25) vs. violent accident (M=10.5, SD=4.03, p<.05).

H2: To examine hypotheses 2 that predicts that organizations that respond immediately to the needs of the public will perceive trust to be more important, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. Crisis response form is a significant predictor of perception of trust, t(60) = 4.26, p<.001, accounting for 22 percent **(Adjusted R^2)** of the variance. The analysis

indicated that as crisis response form increases by 1, the overall perception of trust is estimated to increase by 1.75 (95% CI: .93, 2.57; Beta = .48).

H3: To examine hypotheses 3 that predicts that organizations that use rebuilding strategies (preemptive, vocal commiseration, rectifying) will perceive trust to be more important, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. Preemptive action is a significant predictor of perception of trust, $t(53) = 4.89$, $p<.001$. The analysis indicated that as preemptive action increases by 1, the overall perception of trust is estimated to increase by .62 (95% CI: .37, 1.88; Beta = .69). Vocal commiseration is a significant predictor of perception of trust, $t(53) = 2.07$, $p<.05$. The analysis indicated that as vocal commiseration increases by 1, the overall perception of trust is estimated to increase by .29 (95% CI: .00, .58; Beta = .15). However, rectifying behavior is not a significant predictor of perception of trust so hypotheses 3 is only partially supported. Additionally, defensive strategies $t(53) = -2.45$, $p<.05$; -.47 (95% CI: -.86, -.09; Beta = -.31), offensive strategies $t(53) = 2.55$, $p<.05$; .27 (95% CI: .06, .48; Beta = .28), non-apology $t(53) = -2.24$, $p<.05$; -.72 (95% CI: -1.36, -.07; Beta = -.24), and inaction $t(53) = 3.02$, $p<.01$; .39 (95% CI: .13, .65; Beta = .28) were significant predictors of perception of trust. Overall, defensive strategies and nonapology negatively affected perceptions, while preemptive action, vocal commiseration, offensive strategies, and inaction positively affected perceptions of trust.

H4: To examine hypotheses 4 that predicts that organizations that respond immediately to the needs of the public will perceive stakeholders to be more important, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. Crisis response form is a significant predictor of perception of stakeholder importance, $t(60) = 4.74$, $p<.001$, accounting for 26 percent **(Adjusted R^2)** of the variance. The analysis indicated that as crisis response form increases by 1, the overall perception of stakeholder importance is estimated to increase by 1.02 (95% CI: .59, 1.46; Beta = .52).

H5: To examine hypotheses 5 that predicts that organizations that use rebuilding strategies (preemptive, vocal commiseration, rectifying) will perceive stakeholders to be more important, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. Preemptive action is a significant predictor of perception of stakeholder importance, $t(53) = 4.33$, $p<.001$. The analysis indicated that as preemptive action increases by 1, the overall perception of stakeholder importance is estimated to increase by .34 (95% CI: .18, .49; Beta = .69). However, vocal commiseration and rectifying behavior are not significant predictors of perception of trust so hypotheses 5 is only partially supported. Additionally, defensive strategies $t(53) = -2.31$, $p<.05$; -.27 (95% CI: -.51, -.04; Beta = -.33), and inaction $t(53) = 2.84$, $p<.01$; .22 (95% CI: .07, .38; Beta = .30) were significant predictors of perception of stakeholder importance. Overall, defensive strategies negatively affected perceptions and preemptive action and inaction positively affected perceptions of stakeholder importance.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study provides insight into the crisis response strategies used by nonprofit organizations in the United States. During this study, nonprofits reported experiencing a mixture of both violent and nonviolent crises. The crisis types reported the most were: nonviolent ethical/moral failing, nonviolent opposition, and violent disaster. Of these varied crisis types, nonprofits reported the different response types that they used. The most used strategies used by nonprofits were the “rebuild” strategies: preemptive action vocal commiseration, and rectifying behavior. The “deny” strategies, made up of offensive response and defensive response, followed closely behind. The “diminish” strategies -- diversionary response, deliberate inaction, and

nonapology -- were used the least. This means nonprofits use strategies that will help them rebuild a stronger reputation with their stakeholders instead of attempting to minimize the crisis. By choosing rebuilding strategies, the nonprofits can use their crisis as an opportunity to build more trust in their organization by acknowledging the crisis and moving forward. This can influence volunteers and/or donors to maintain or gain faith in the organization. These stakeholders will maintain involvement in the organization knowing that they have voiced commiseration and taken corrective action following a crisis.

Furthermore, we found that defensive strategies were used less for nonviolent ethical/moral crises, violent accident crises, and violent disasters. This means nonprofit communication professionals prefer these types of crises need to be addressed with strategies that acknowledge the crisis. They would not use defensive strategies in these situations as those crises do not require that nonprofits accept responsibility. By not using defensive strategies, the stakeholders and the public can see that the organization accepts no fault in the disaster, but also does not fight against the crisis. The message the public receives is that the crisis exists separate from the organization and requires a response from the organization to the public, without any fault of the nonprofit itself.

The results also demonstrated that diversionary strategies from the diminish cluster were used less in situations categorized as nonviolent mismanagement, nonviolent ethical/moral, and violent accidents. Conversely, diversionary strategies were used more for nonviolent accidents and nonviolent disasters. This means nonprofits were less likely to diminish the crisis when nonviolent accidents/disasters occurred. Instead, the organization is more likely to direct the public's attention away from the crisis when nonviolent accidents/disasters occur. Nonprofits are uniquely able to use these strategies because they are not highly liquid like a regular business entity. For example, when disaster strikes, for profit organizations are expected to help the cause or donate funds in some way. Though nonprofits may be largely successful, their funds are already allocated to charitable causes. This means the public is not skeptical by their use of diversionary strategies.

Deliberate inaction strategies were used less for nonviolent mismanagement crises and nonviolent ethical/moral crises. Instead, deliberate inaction strategies were used more for situations described as nonviolent disaster, violent opposition, and nonviolent opposition. The latter is of interest here, as nonprofits do not seem to address opposition to their causes. Instead, they refrain from engaging detractors. This is likely due to their need for a highly moral reputation. Nonprofits are less likely to engage in opposition so that the public views them taking the moral highroad. Instead of arguing their cause, their organization exists to aid the cause. This shows the public they are more focused on their actions than proving a point to opposers and likely instills trust in the public and/or their stakeholders.

Our research also found that trust and relational commitment were significant predictors of the type of responses used. When the nonprofit communication professionals perceived trust to be important, they followed three steps: First, they actively responded to crisis verbally/behaviorally. Second, they updated the public with the newest information. Third, they issued consistent responses/actions. This is important in crisis situations because a key component of trust is the public's confidence in an organization to be open and consistent in their communications (Huang, 2008). Fulfilling the communication side of trust ensures that an organization's stakeholders feel confident in said organization. Trust also increased the use of two rebuilding strategies: preemptive action and vocal commiseration. Trust is important because it increases the crisis form response on behalf of an organization. Coombs (2007) does not

include trust in his SCCT model, however, this study found it to be an important indicator of response. This means that without including trust in the SCCT model, one cannot accurately indicate an organization's response to crisis type.

Finally, when nonprofit communication professionals perceived relational commitment to stakeholders as important, it significantly increased crisis response form, including timely and recurring communication with stakeholders. The presence of relational commitment also increased the use of preemptive action as a rebuilding strategy during a nonprofit crisis. When the organizations are committed to their stakeholder relationships, they are much likelier to respond in a timely manner, and continue to update their stakeholders in response to a crisis. This is relevant to SCCT because though it does not include relational commitment in the model, relational commitment is an indicator of the use of rebuilding strategies. Thus, an update of the SCCT could include relational commitment because it is likely an indicator of crisis response type used by an organization.

Limitations

While surveys have many strengths, Luthor (2011) noted that online surveys such as the one used in this study have several issues: 1) lack of internet access makes the sample not representative of the larger population, 2) individuals with lower education levels are less likely to respond, and 3) lengthy surveys might not be completed. The limitations of the design include the inability to reach anyone who qualifies to participate. Reaching participants via email means that the participation was exclusive to other nonprofits for whom we could not find the contact information. The biggest limitation that might have hindered data collection would be the low response rate, as it was not representative of the large population in the United States.

In terms of education level and understanding the survey, the text in the survey was worded using the terms described in several previous research studies on crisis communication among public relations professionals. However, only 23 percent of our participants noted earning a communications degree. This means, there may have been “jargon” or terminology they might not have understood. In addition, while the survey only required 10-15 minutes of time, this is still a large amount of time to ask strangers to participate in online research, and likely limited the response rate.

Another limitation of this method is that we cannot confirm the information reported by participants. Therefore, if a participant chooses to lie or exaggerate their organization’s response to a crisis, then the results could be affected. In this sense, a focus group or interviews with the same participants might have been able to better determine the accuracy of the findings, as well as receive more elaboration on each crisis and response.

Conclusion

Overall, based on our findings we suggest the following best practices for nonprofit communication professionals during crisis situations: First, we suggest building trust as a practice for nonprofit communication professionals. This should be done in order to establish a relationship between the organization and the stakeholders. Huang (2001) found trust to be an important component for the effectiveness of public relations crisis response. Therefore, building trust should be used to ensure the success of nonprofit communication tactics, especially following a crisis. Second, we recommend that nonprofit communication professionals focus on relational commitment because it is an indicator of brand loyalty (Huang, 2008). Focusing on relational commitment can increase the public’s loyalty to the nonprofit, furthering the

organization's success. Third, we recommend that nonprofit communication professionals use crisis response forms that show trust and relational commitment. These forms include timely responses, consistent responses, and active responses. These demonstrate to stakeholders that the organization is acting honestly, quickly and that they value the relationship they have with them. Fourth, we recommend that nonprofits use rebuild strategies in the event of a crisis when possible. Rebuild strategies are especially important when attempting to retain volunteers and donors because it demonstrates a level of responsibility and a promising future. Rebuild strategies reaffirm to stakeholders that the organization will not only survive the crisis, but move forward stronger as a result. Finally, we recommend that nonprofit public relations professionals understand when to use deny or diminish strategies. Our research demonstrated that in situations involving nonviolent disaster, violent opposition and nonviolent opposition, diminish strategies are used more. Diminish strategies are appropriate responses for those situations because they are situations in which the organization is largely not responsible. Thus, in these instances diminish strategies do not hurt the organization and can actually help maintain a positive reputation.

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Uncovering the Effect of Digital Corporate Social Responsibility Communication Strategies: A Path Through Perceived Legitimacy and Perceived Interactivity

Yangzhi Jiang
Seonwoo Kim
Louisiana State University

Abstract:

This study investigated the effects of different CSR communication strategies through a single-factor experiment. Results showed that partnership, proactive, and reactive endorsement increased the perceived interactivity of CSR communication. The reactive endorsement enhanced corporate legitimacy. Proactively pursuing endorsement decreased perceived legitimacy. Both perceived legitimacy and interactivity, subsequently, generated favorable outcomes.

Keywords: CSR communication strategies, corporate legitimacy, stakeholder support, interactivity

Introduction

Legitimacy is an essential element for companies to survive among society (e.g., Du & Vieira, 2012; Palazzo & Scherer, 2006; Yang & Ji, 2019). Generally, a corporation's legal status is confirmed when its performances comply with "social norms, values, and expectations" (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006, p. 71). In other words, corporate legitimacy always "exists in the eye of the beholder" (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002, p. 361). Corporate social responsibility initiatives provide a corporation an opportunity for legitimation (e.g., Castelló, Etter, & Årup Nielsen, 2016; Colleoni, 2013; Du & Vieira, 2012). Repletion evidence supports that CSR helps companies reap benefits such as selling performance, reputation, the organization-public relationship (e.g., Dhanesh, 2014; Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010; Kim, 2019). Thus, CSR performances may strategically legitimize a corporation in the eye of various stakeholders.

As a response toward the growing societal expectations of ethical businesses, companies publicly communicate more about their CSR performances to get a legitimate status (e.g., Bachmann & Ingenhoff, 2016; Golob et al., 2013; Yang & Ji, 2019). A large proportion of CSR communication takes place on digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs (Yang & Ji, 2019). Digital media promotes the interaction between companies and their stakeholders via different communication tools (Etter, 2014). On Twitter, even though posting the same content, users can tweet, mention, retweet, and reply to others via communicating tools. These tools create a network among users and also be a part of communication content (Yang & Ji, 2019).

Grounded in four models of public relations, we argued that these communication functions in social media are becoming new network-based strategies for communication. To our best knowledge, how these network-based CSR communication strategies distinguish a corporate perceived legitimacy was under-investigation. Besides, the existing literature primarily emphasizes the significance of legitimacy. The favorable outcomes of legitimacy, however, remains unclear. This study aimed to examine how different communication strategies on social media influence the perceived corporate legitimacy. Subsequently, we further tested how corporate legitimacy, in turn, generalize relational, financial, short-term, and long-term benefits for a company. The findings would contribute to the digital CSR communication and legitimacy literature. Besides, practical implications were provided for public relations professionals.

Literature Review

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Communication

Carroll's (1991) pyramid model, which suggests that socially responsible companies should take not only economic responsibility but also legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities, still guides CSR research these days (e.g., Jo & Harjoto, 2012; Park & Ghauri, 2015; Schaltegger & Burritt, 2018; Tian, Wang, & Yang, 2011). However, some scholars start arguing that economic dimension, concentrating on product quality, research and development, and customer service, should be excluded from the whole CSR model because it is profit-driven rather than social value-driven (e.g., Cho, Furey, & Mohr, 2017; Kim, Kim, & Sung, 2014). For example, McWilliams and Siegel (2001) suggested that ethics and philanthropy should be the core of CSR activities. The current study also defines CSR activities as "actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law" (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001, p. 117).

To reap benefits from CSR, corporations publicly communicate their CSR performances to raise public awareness and to gain social support among various stakeholders (Colleoni, 2013). Digital media provide an opportunity for companies to reach broad stakeholders. Previous studies have provided evidence that CSR communication on digital media generates favorable outcomes such as legitimation (Colleoni, 2013), reputation (Dutot, Lacalle Galvez, & Versailles, 2016), purchase intention (Uzunoğlu, Türkel, & Akyar, 2017), and the organization-public dialogue (Jeong, Paek, & Lee, 2013).

Corporate Legitimacy

The institutional and legitimacy theories emphasize the significance of corporate legitimacy on business success (Borgstedt, Nienaber, Liesenkötter, & Schewe, 2017; Kim, Ha, & Fong, 2014). Legitimacy refers to "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). As such, corporate legitimacy describes a generalized perception of the appropriateness of corporate actions within society. The appropriateness is measured by the conformance between a company's behaviors and stakeholders' beliefs. As Massey (2001) mentioned, a company could not obtain legitimacy until its actions "are perceived as being consistent with stakeholders' expectations" (p.156).

Suchman (1995) proposed three types of legitimacy, including practical legitimacy, cognitive legitimacy, and moral legitimacy. Practical legitimacy depends on the audience's self-interest and their direct exchange with organizations. Cognitive legitimacy makes sense of corporate behaviors. As Suchman (1995) argued, cognitive legitimacy roots in comprehensibility and taken-for-grantedness. In contrast, moral legitimacy depends on whether corporate behaviors are acceptable in "the audience's socially constructed value system" (p. 579). Scholars argue that CSR is more likely to influence a firm's cognitive and moral legitimacy (Yang & Ji, 2019). Even though the audience's evaluation is the determinant factor, a corporation's legal status could be influenced by organization-public communication (Borgstedt et al., 2017; Colleoni, 2013).

CSR Communication Strategies in Digital Media and Legitimacy

CSR communication strategies, such as one-way and two-way communication, have been discussed (e.g., Abitbol & Lee, 2017; Colleoni, 2013; Etter, 2014; Morsing, 2006). For example, Morsing (2006) proposed two CSR communication strategies – informing strategy and interacting strategy. Inherently, informing strategy is one-way communication, in which information flows from a company to the public. Inherently, informing strategy aims to disseminate a company's CSR initiatives to diverse stakeholders to enhance corporate visibility but not expect feedbacks from stakeholders (Etter, 2014; Morsing, 2006). Interacting strategy, however, requires a company to adopt "a two-way communication process with key stakeholders to develop organizational sensitivity and to build trust among stakeholders" (Morsing, 2006, p. 243). Morsing (2006) further argued that building a corporate-nonprofit partnership and pursuing external endorsements are two practical approaches for companies to enhance the impact of interacting communication. As to obtain endorsements, companies may either proactively seek and display third-parties' confirmation or reactively waiting for external parties' comments (Morsing, 2006).

Digital media promotes the interaction between companies and the public via different communication functions (Etter, 2014; Yang & Ji, 2019). Take Twitter as an example. A user

can "@" another user to be a part of his or her conversation or retweet another user's post for his or her followers (Yang & Ji, 2019). These communication functions on Twitter "form networks of influence and readers' interpretation of a tweet" as both the content and source impact the audience's perception of corporate messages (Yang & Ji, 2019, p. 2). Thus, we argued simply dividing CSR communication strategies into informing and interacting cannot represent today's communication approaches on social media. We extended Morsing's (2006) two communication strategies to informing, partnership, proactive-, and reactive-endorsement strategies. A tweet with the informing strategy merely to disclose CSR information. A corporate tweet using the partnership strategy primarily aims to display its partner rather than invite the partner to join the conversation. Thus, the partnership strategy does not include the @ signal. In this case, the partnership strategy should be treated as a one-way communication because of its primarily informing purpose. However, when a company @ its partner, it aims to promote dialogues between organizations (Lee, Oh, & Kim, 2013). In that case, the corporation actively seeks for its partner's endorsement (i.e., the proactive-endorsement strategy). Also, a corporation may use the retweeting function (RT) to display their partners' messages on their Twitter pages as another type of endorsement (i.e., the reactive endorsement strategy).

Given that corporate legitimacy relies on stakeholders' evaluations (Massey, 2001), corporations should understand what are stakeholders' expectations first. As two-way communication provides an opportunity for companies to hear and understand the audience's needs (Morsing, 2006), we hypothesize that strategies rooted in two-way communication are more effective to leverage corporate legitimacy than one-way communication strategies.

H1: A CSR tweet with the proactive-endorsement strategy is more likely to generate corporate legitimacy than the one with either a) the informing or b) the partnership strategy.

H2: A CSR tweet with the reactive-endorsement strategy is more likely to generate corporate legitimacy than the one with either a) the informing or b) the partnership strategy.

Perceived Interactivity

Interactivity is a key characteristic of social media that can positively influence the organization-public relationship and stakeholders' support (Etter, 2014; Hamilton, Kaltcheva, & Rohm, 2016; Morsing & Schultz, 2006). Park and Cameron (2014) argued that as interactivity is a dynamic process and hard to measure, it is better to measure how stakeholders perceive as being interactive. Likewise, Reeves and Nass (1996) argued that "perceptions are far more influential than reality defined more objectively" (p. 253).

One-way communication tends to give sense to stakeholders about their CSR performances, and the interactive level is low (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007). Conversely, corporate two-way communication listens to what stakeholders respond toward corporate initiatives and makes sense of CSR communication with stakeholders together and (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). Xu, Yao, and Sun (2019) argue that two-way communication always makes stakeholders feel a high level of perceived synchronization and control over the interaction with organizations. So, we hypothesized that two-way communication based strategies leverage a higher level of perceived interactivity than one-way communication strategies.

H3: A CSR tweet with the proactive-endorsement strategy is more likely to generate perceived interactivity than the one with either a) the informing or b) the partnership strategy.

H4: A CSR tweet with the reactive-endorsement strategy is more likely to generate perceived interactivity than the one with either a) the informing or b) the partnership strategy.

Besides, Castelló et al. (2016) argue that "legitimacy, in the … social media emerges from the extent to which the firm participates in public dialogues and considers the worth of its conversational counterpart" (p. 424). In other words, perceived interactivity can help a firm to understand stakeholders' needs through conversation and mutual understanding (Schultz, Castelló, & Morsing, 2013). Thus, we proposed another hypothesis.

H5: Perceived interactivity will enhance the corporate legitimacy.

Stakeholder Support

From a strategic perspective, corporate legitimacy goes beyond meeting the basic social value system to pursue further business goals (Suchman, 1995). Through CSR communication, companies express how their behaviors conform to stakeholders' expectations and attain legitimacy. In turn, corporate legitimacy "drives the business outcomes of CSR as stakeholders willing to offer their support for companies that have achieved legitimacy" (Du & Vieira, 2012, p. 415). There are different types of support an ethical corporation can receive from stakeholders. For example, Hamilton et al. (2016) propose three types of stakeholder support, including lifetime support, influencer support, and knowledge support.

According to Hamilton et al. (2016), stakeholders' lifetime support calculates a stakeholder's accumulated contributions to a corporation through the whole lifetime. Usually, lifetime support is reflected by stakeholders' buying behaviors and support intent (Hamilton et al., 2016; Park & Jiang, 2019). Influencer support denotes a stakeholder's influences on others, and word-of-mouth engagement is such support (Hamilton et al., 2016). Knowledge support comes from stakeholders' kindly feedback to a corporation that helps to improve and support business development (Hamilton et al., 2016). Park and Jiang (2019) argue that stakeholders are showing their knowledge support when they are making a dialogue with a corporation.

Repletion evidence illustrates that the perceived interactivity between an organization and the public enhances the all three types of public support to the organization (e.g., Chen, Griffith, & Shen, 2005; Hamilton et al., 2016; Park & Jiang, 2019; Yang & Coffey, 2014; Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010). However, little research has uncovered whether corporate legitimacy has the same impact on stakeholders' support as the perceived interactivity does. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis and research question.

H6: Perceived interactivity will enhance stakeholder a) purchase intent, b) support intent, c) WOM intent, and d) dialogic intent.

RQ1: How does corporate legitimacy influence stakeholder support intent (i.e., purchase intent, support intent, WOM intent, and dialogic intent)?

Method

This study used a between-subject (communication strategy: informing vs. partnership vs. proactive endorsement vs. reactive endorsement) design to examine the effect of different communication strategies. The researcher used Qualtrics to recruited participants and conducted an online experiment with a sample of 209 undergraduates in the mass communication department at a large university in the Southern United States.

Participants

The age of 209 participants ranged from 18 to 31 (M = 20.50, SD =1.58) while 39 were males (18.7%). The majority of participants (n =167, 79.9%) described themselves as Caucasian. More than half of participants (n = 159, 76.0%) had a bachelor's degree or currently were college students. Most participants had a Twitter account (n = 187, 89.5%) and followed at least one brand on Twitter (n = 156, 74.6%).

Stimuli and Study Procedure

We created a fictitious beverage company, SodaPop company, to avoid any biases from previous experience. As to the NPO, a real NPO – GlobalGiving organization – was adopted as it was one of the top 5 most influential and trustworthy NPO in the United States in 2018 (Top nonprofits, n.d.). The profile pages for SodaPop company and GlobalGiving contained information about the organizations. The corporate profile page was created based on and the GlobalGiving's real bio-page on Twitter. All information on these two bio-pages was identical, except the account picture, a short introduction about each account, and the account name.

All CSR tweet contents were created based on a real CSR tweet. The informing tweet mere included information about corporate CSR performance. The partnership tweet contained a non-profit organization's name (i.e., GlobalGiving) in the contents. The proactive-endorsement tweet addressed to the non-profit organization (i.e., @ GlobalGiving) in its message. The reactive-endorsement tweet retweeted a non-profit organization's tweet (i.e., containing a retweet sign). All other things kept constant across different tweets.

After seeing the stimuli, participants completed a questionnaire asking corporate legitimacy, perceived interactivity, and their support intent toward SodaPop Company. Also, participants' demographics, such as age, gender, educational level, and race, were recorded.

All measurements adopted 7-point Likert scales (1= strongly disagree; 7 =strongly agree). Items for each variable's measurement were adopted from previous studies with excellent inter-scale reliability (see Appendix I).

Results

Manipulation Check

Different communication strategies, manipulated by including "RT," "@," and the NPO "GlobalGiving" in tweets in this study, do not need a manipulation check because these manipulations do not rely on participants' perceptions (O'Keefe, 2003).

Tests of Hypotheses and the Research Question

Corporate legitimacy. To test H1 and H2, a ANOVA analysis was adopted. Results showed that four CSR communication strategies have different impacts on corporate legitimacy, $F(3, 205) = 8.55$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .111$. The proactive-endorsement CSR tweet (M=4.61, SE=.14) generated significantly lower corporate legitimacy than those the partnership strategy (M=5.36, SE=.14) and the reactive-endorsement strategy (M=5.48, SE=.13). Besides, the informing strategy (M=4.92, SE=.13) led to significantly lower legitimacy than the partnership and the reactive strategies. Thus, **H2(a)** was supported whereas **H1(a)**, **H1(b)** and **H2(b)** were not supported.

Perceived interactivity. Another ANOVA analysis was conducted to test H3 and H4. Results showed that four CSR communication strategies have different impacts on perceived interactivity, $F(3, 205) = 8.05$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .105$. The proactive-endorsement CSR tweet (M=4.19, SE=.17) generated significantly higher perceived interactivity than the informing strategy (M=3.71, SE=.16) but lower than the reactive-endorsement strategy (M=4.69, SE=.16). Besides, the informing strategy led to significantly lower legitimacy than the partnership (M=4.60, SE=.17) and the reactive-endorsement strategies. Thus, **H3(a)** and **H4(a)** were supported whereas **H3(b)** and **H4(b)** were not supported.

Path model. To test H5, H6 and to find the answer of RQ1, a path analysis was conducted, using the lavaan package in R. All different communication strategies were dummy coded, and informing communication strategy was treated as the baseline. The path analysis showed a good model fit based on Hu and Bentler's (1999) criteria (see Figure 1).

According to the path analysis results, both proactive- (β = -.167) and reactive-endorsement strategies (β = .153) significantly impact perceived legitimacy. However, the proactive-endorsement strategy negatively influences participants' perception of legitimation. The partnership (β = .312), proactive- (β = .167), reactive-endorsement strategies (β = .354) significantly led to perceived interactivity. Meanwhile, perceived interactivity (β=.238) significantly increased corporate legitimacy. Thus, **H5** was supported. As Figure 1 showed, perceived interactivity significantly affected WOM intent (β = .326), purchase intent (β = .180), support intent (β = .204), and dialogic intent (β = .208). Thus, **H6** was also supported. In addition, results showed that corporate legitimacy significantly generated higher WOM intent (β = .281), purchase intent (β = .451), and support intent (β = .379). However, the impact of corporate legitimacy on dialogic intent was not found.

Discussion and Conclusion

Even though scholars agree that legitimacy is essential for business survival, the knowledge of how strategic communication influences the public's perception of a corporation's legitimate status is limited. As social media becomes a vital communication channel for corporations, this study identified four communication strategies (i.e., informing, partnership, proactive-, and reactive-endorsement strategies), and explored the impact of communication strategies on the public's perception of corporate legitimacy. Besides, we explored how legitimation promotes favorable outcomes of CSR communication for ethical companies. The findings shed light on how communication strategies enhance corporate legitimacy and how companies reap benefits from it.

CSR Communication Strategies, Corporate Legitimacy, and Perceived Interactivity

The results indicate that presenting the partnership with an NPO (i.e., partnership) and retweeting the NPO's endorsement (i.e., reactive-endorsement) are more likely to generate corporate legitimacy. When a corporation does a self-presentation (i.e., informing) or proactively invites its partner to join the conversation about corporate CSR performance (i.e., proactive-endorsement), participants reported lower perception of corporate legitimacy.

Surprisingly, CSR communication using a proactive-endorsement strategy significantly decreased the corporate legitimacy among the public, which is opposite to previous scholar's prediction (Morsing, 2006). One possible reason is that when companies are proactively seeking

endorsement, stakeholders will suspect the motivations of their CSR activities. Inviting others to join CSR conversation may be "too conspicuously …[and] overaccentuating their good deeds" (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 332). Ashforth and Gibbs (1990) argue that the public might think that only those companies with legitimate issues would talk loudly about their moral legitimacy. That is why using a proactive endorsement strategy to communicate CSR will hurt corporate legitimacy. Different from the proactive-endorsement strategy, the reactive-endorsement strategy is more credible because the NPO creates the original tweet. As a third party, the NPO is independent of a corporation, and the public trusts it more (Kim & Ferguson, 2014). Compared to the informing strategy, showing a partnership with another organization generates extra symbolic values for corporate communication (Burton et al., 2017; Shumate, 2012). Yang and Ji (2019) also argued that "building strategic alliances and communicating about such relationships is an important mechanism for organizations to achieve legitimacy-based goals" (p. 3).

For the perceived interactivity, all communication strategies could increase perceived interaction between the public and the company, except the informing strategy. This finding suggests that even though social media provides organizations an opportunity to communicate with stakeholders interactively, different communication strategies differ stakeholders' perceptions of message interactivity. According to Morsing (2006), the strategic CSR communication model from one-way to two-way communication is a continuous process. We argue that even though the partnership strategy in a one-way communication format, it might be the transitional strategy between one-way and two-way communication because it provides a possibility for the NPO to communicate with the corporation. As the proactive- and reactive-endorsement strategies were derived from two-way communication, whereas the informing strategy was rooted in one-way communication, it is reasonable that mutual communicational strategies lead to higher perceived interactivity than one-way communication. Besides, perceived interactivity enhanced the corporate legitimacy. As Castelló et al. (2016) pinpoint, mutual interactions between organizations and the public make organizations understand what the public expects. So, corporations can effectively satisfy public expectations and gain legitimacy.

Stakeholder Support: Paths Through Legitimacy and Perceived Interactivity

Results showed that perceived interactivity generated all types of stakeholder support intent, which is consistent with previous research findings (Eberle et al., 2013; Hamilton et al., 2016; Park & Jiang, 2019). The higher the perceived interactivity a corporate tweet, the more likely the public is willing to buy the company's products or services. Besides, people tend to recommend the company to others and provide feedback to improve the business development.

While corporate legitimacy could only lead to higher purchase intent, support intent, and WOM intent. The impact of corporate legitimacy on stakeholders' willingness to talk with the corporation was not found. As Kent and Taylor (1998) claimed, dialogic communication is a communication product and result rather than a process. Principles such as mutuality, intersubjectivity, and interaction drive individuals to engage in dialogic communication (Wirtz & Zimbres, 2018). Without anyone of these principles, individuals and organizations cannot form dialogic communication (Wirtz & Zimbres, 2018). As perceived legitimacy mainly depends on the external's evaluation of corporations, it does not represent the mutuality principle. As a consequence, it cannot contribute to dialogic intent support.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study extended digital CSR communication by identifying four network-based communication strategies on Twitter. Based on the findings, we argue that one-way communication is also influential in social media. For example, it is helpful for companies to legitimate their social position. Besides, this study provides further evidence to explain why legitimation is essential and what types of stakeholder support corporate legitimacy generates.

We encourage PR professionals to understand different communication functions in social media and the different impacts of those communication strategies. When collaborating with an NPO to gain corporate legitimacy, professionals should be careful to display the partnership and appropriately communicate CSR performance. Proactively seeking a third-party endorsement may damage a corporation's legitimacy. As the reactive-endorsement strategy is hard to control by a company, we suggest PR professionals to either honestly present CSR performance or appropriately display a partnership with another organization. Interaction is another crucial factor in CSR communication. Thus, public relations professionals are encouraged to engage with stakeholders in CSR conversation.

Although this study sheds light on the impact of network-based communication strategies on corporate legitimacy and favorable outcomes of CSR communication, only a single message was created for the experiment. Besides, all the participants were college students. To strength the findings, future research may adopt multiple messages to test the general public's reactions toward network-based CSR communication strategies.

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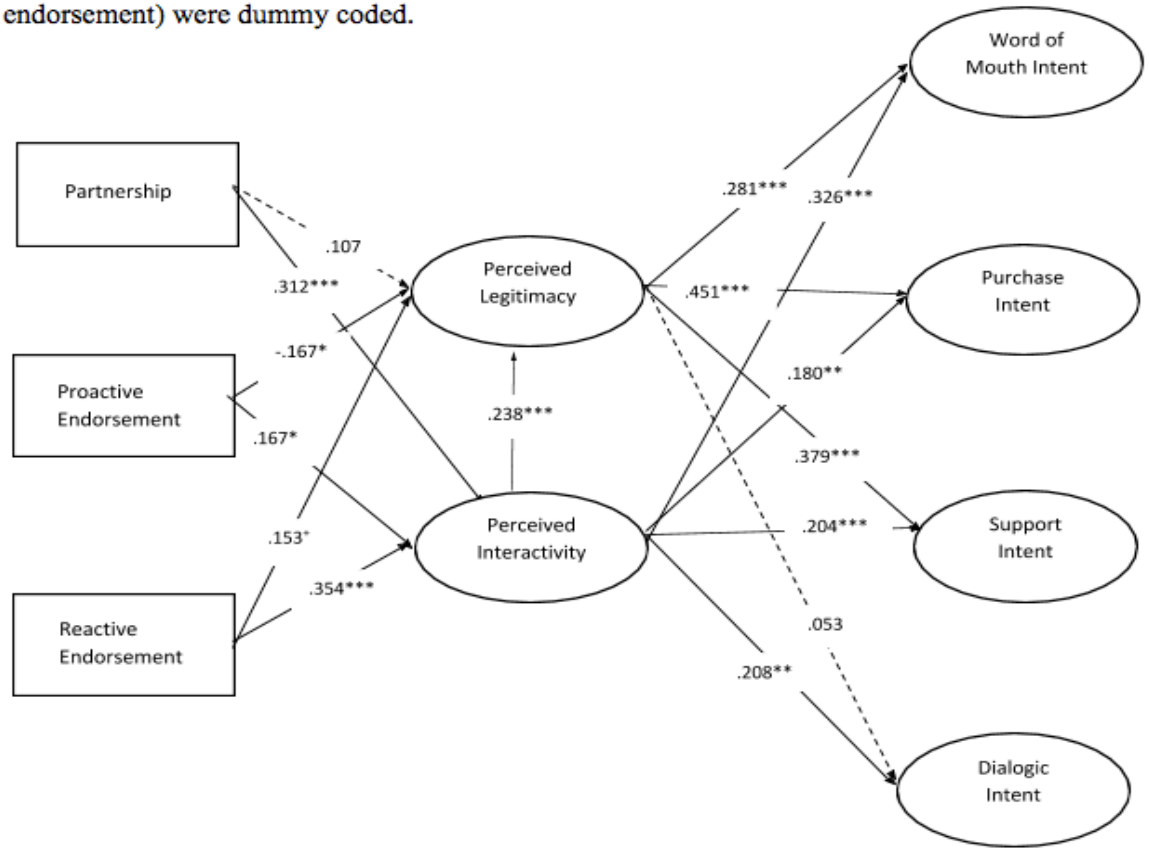
Appendix I. Measurements of variables.

Variables	Measurements	Citations
Corporate legitimacy (α=.85)	It seems to me that SodaPop is consistent with socially accepted norms and values. In my opinion, SodaPop seems to be a legitimate company. I have the impression that SodaPop complies with social and ecological standards.	Bachmann & Ingenhoff, (2016)
Perceived interactivity (α=.81)	The SodaPop's tweet aims to facilitate two-way communication between Twitter users and the company. SodaPop makes me feel it wants to listen to Twitter users. SodaPop does not at all encourage Twitter users to talk back. SodaPop gives Twitter users the opportunity to talk back.	Eberle et al., (2013)
Purchase intent (α=.92)	If you were in the market for products sold by the SodaPop Company, what is the likelihood of you purchasing a product from them… Very unlikely/very likely Improbable/probable Impossible/possible	Groza et al., (2011)
Word-of-mouth intent (α=.88)	I will invite friends to learn more about SodaPop on Twitter. I will recommend SodaPop to my friends. I will talk about SodaPop on blogs and social networking sites. I will talk positively about SodaPop.	Eberle et al., (2013)
Dialogic intent (α=.92)	I will let SodaPop company know of ways that they can better serve the social needs. I will make constructive suggestions to SodaPop on how to improve their CSR activities. If I have a useful idea on how to improve their CSR efforts, I will give it to a representative of SodaPop company. If SodaPop company satisfies my social responsible concerns, I will let them know it.	Bettencourt, 1997; Hamilton et al., 2016; VanMeter et al., 2015

Support intent (α=.90)	I will support SodaPop to see it succeed. I will support SodaPop because I want to. The SodaPop's success will make me happy. I will support SodaPop if it needs help from consumers like me.	Kim & Drumwright, 2016

Figure 1. Obtained path model with standardized regression weights.

Note. CSR communication strategies (i.e., informing, partnership, pro- and re-active endorsement) were dummy coded.



+ $p < .06$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

χ^2 (12) = 14.32, p = .281; χ^2/df = 1.19; CFI = .996; TLI = .987; RMSEA = .03 (90% CI LO = .00, 90% CI HI = .80, PCLOSE = .685)

Corporate Social Advocacy and Perceived Corporate Hypocrisy

Seoyeon Kim
University of Alabama

Lucinda L. Austin
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Barbra Miller Gaither
Elon University

Abstract

This study examined how company-issue fit and corporate stand affect perceived corporate hypocrisy relative to the perceived value orientation of the company. The study found that companies were more likely to be viewed as hypocritical when taking a stand on an issue that was less relevant to the company's business.

Keywords: corporate social advocacy, fit, values, corporate hypocrisy, skepticism

Introduction

A recent trend in corporate communication, known as corporate social advocacy (CSA), involves corporate public statements or actions addressing potentially controversial social issues. For example, recent examples of CSA have included Procter & Gamble's campaign about racial bias, Ben & Jerry's support for the Black Lives Matter movement, and Patagonia's support for climate action. CSA has been defined as a public relations function (Dodd & Supa, 2015); however, limited research has tested the effects of this function, especially related to different CSA characteristics.

Taking a stand on a controversial social issue is a risky endeavor, as it involves the significant risk of losing stakeholders with opposing viewpoints. Moreover, consumers may not believe the CSA is driven by the corporate values, thus raising the question of whether the company is a committed supporter or merely hypocritical. While some companies support relevant issues, others focus on issues less relevant to the company's business objectives.

Given that perceived corporate hypocrisy often serves as a negative indicator of consumer attitudes (e.g., Shim & Yang, 2016), this study examined how CSA activities relative to company-issue fit and corporate stand (whether action is taken or not) affect perceived corporate hypocrisy, in relation to the perceived values orientation of the company.

Literature Review

Corporate Social Advocacy

Corporate social advocacy (CSA) refers to "an organization making a public statement or taking a public stance on social-political issue" (Dodd & Supa, 2014, p. 5). CSA shares some characteristics with corporate social responsibility (CSR) in that, through both, corporate messages or actions communicate the company's willingness to positively contribute to important social issues. CSA differs from CSR, however, in that CSR involves commonly revered issues (e.g., fighting hunger, improving education, reducing harm to the environment), while CSA is often practiced in more socially controversial realms, such as addressing refugee or racial relations issues (Dodd & Supa, 2014). For this reason, strategic advantages are not guaranteed in CSA, as taking a stand on a socially controversial issue can result in losing some consumer support when consumer opinions are divided over controversial issues. For example, when Nike released its advertising featuring Colin Kaepernick, a football player who aimed to raise awareness of racial discrimination and police brutality by kneeling during the national anthem in a NFL game, some consumers with more conservative viewpoints harshly criticized the company for using a spokesperson alleged to disrespect the country. Beyond criticizing, some conservative consumers called for a boycott and featured pictures on social media of destruction of Nike products, such as cutting the "swoosh" off of socks, burning Nike shoes, and more (Abad-Santos, 2018).

Only recently have researchers begun to examine differences in how CSA is being used by companies and how consumers perceive CSA information and actions. While conventional business wisdom suggests corporations should avoid taking sides on potentially divisive issues, consumer expectations for corporate participation in social and political matters is higher than ever before. In fact, recent research found that close to 80% of consumers believe businesses have a purpose beyond profit alone and need to positively affect society, and close to 70% of consumers say they would opt to switch to brands that are purpose driven (Cone & Porter Novelli, 2018). Additionally, employees are expecting corporations to take more vocal stands on issues, including environmental protection (Sustainable Brands, 2017).

These findings are supported by recent research with a nationally representative sample that found that companies are viewed favorably for taking a stand even on politically and socially divided issues (Austin, B. Gaither, & K. Gaither, 2019). Thus, companies abstaining from important issues may be viewed as being selfish or unwilling to fulfill consumer/societal expectations. In fact, a recent study conducted by Korschun and colleagues (2016) suggests that negative consumer outcomes can result not only from what a company does but also does *not* do; that is, consumers expect companies to serve as a voice on social/political issues. Further research is warranted to advance the understanding of boundary conditions of effective CSA communication and provide communication practitioners with the relevant guidelines.

Corporate Hypocrisy

Corporate hypocrisy refers to "the belief that a firm claims to be something that it is not" (Wagner, Lutz, & Weitz, 2009, p. 79). Prior research has suggested that consumers' perceived corporate hypocrisy increases when a discrepancy is felt between what the company says and what the company does (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Wagner et al., 2009). For example, Forehand and Grier (2003) found that a company was more likely to be viewed hypocritically when the company only communicated pure public-serving motives in its CSR statement despite other readily apparent firm-serving motives.

Corporate hypocrisy might be perceived similarly to skepticism in corporate social responsibility; however, there are some important distinctions between these two concepts. Skepticism has been defined as a state of disbelief or distrust in a company's intentions or motives (Elving, 2013; Kim & Rim, 2019). While skepticism and corporate hypocrisy both relate to disbelief or distrust, corporate hypocrisy is specifically concerned with when stakeholders feel that the company's actions do not match the company's stated values or intentions.

Perceived corporate hypocrisy is known as a negative indicator of consumer outcomes. Researchers found that high levels of perceived corporate hypocrisy lead to negative consumer attitudes toward the company (e.g., Shim & Yang, 2016; Wagner et al., 2009). Korschun et al. (2016) also found that corporate hypocrisy perceived among consumers resulted in reduced purchasing behavior.

In the context of CSA, less is known about corporate hypocrisy and its effects. This study will examine the construct of hypocrisy specifically related to advocacy on controversial issues to determine how taking a stand on social issues under a variety of conditions affects perceptions of hypocrisy.

Company-Cause Fit

Company-cause fit is the perceived relevance between a company and a cause that the company supports (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). Company-cause fit has been examined largely in the context of CSR communication. Prior research has suggested that CSR messages are perceived more positively in general when the level of perceived company-cause fit is high (e.g., a food company and a campaign to end hunger) (e.g., Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006; Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006). Consumers understand that companies communicate CSR not only for the social good but also to better promote their businesses and achieve strategic objectives. Thus, high-fit CSR activities are usually not viewed negatively, as long as they are perceived to be sincere (Kim & Lee, 2012; Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, & Schwarz, 2006). On the other hand, when there is a low fit between the company's products and services and the cause being addressed, consumers may be led to elaborate about potential ulterior motives of the cause-supporting action, resulting in negative perceptions of the company (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Du et al., 2010). There may be a few exceptions to this, however. For example, high company-

cause fit in stigmatized industries may call more attention to the company's negative contributions towards society and thus increase skepticism in consumers (Austin & Gaither, 2019). If businesses are promoting action on social issues, but not addressing the issues themselves, corporate hypocrisy is likely to grow (Austin & Gaither, 2016).

In the context of CSA, how company-cause fit relates to CSA communication has not been extensively explored. Several directions can be speculated to explain the relationship between fit and consumer reactions to CSA information. First, a general positive relationship between fit and consumer outcomes shown in CSR communication may still be found in CSA communication, as even stakeholders in support of CSA believe corporations have a dual purpose—to generate profits and to serve a greater social purpose (Cone & Porter Novelli, 2018).

Meanwhile, it is also possible that the effect of company-cause fit effect is not very strong when it comes to CSA communication. Given the controversial nature of issues involved in CSA, the level of individual agreement with the corporate stand on a given issue may be more important than the level of fit in determining consumer reactions to CSA information (e.g., Dodd & Supa, 2014). That is, some consumers may view a company more positively or negatively depending on whether they agree with the company's stand on the given issue, regardless of the company-cause fit.

Other consumers may experience cognitive dissonance which occurs when one is led to change one's initial attitudes or beliefs to reduce discomfort felt in a situation with conflicting attitudes/beliefs (Festinger, 1957). Consumers that are loyal to the company but that might not agree with the company's stand on a given issue, may change their views on the issue in a congruent way with the company's stand and remain positive toward the company. Similarly, consumers with low loyalty to a company may change their attitudes toward the company in a positive way, as they see the company advocating for an issue they strongly support.

Taking a Corporate Stand on Social Issues

Communicating corporate interests or commitment to social issues has been largely studied in the context of CSR. Research has found that consumers view companies taking a stand on CSR issues more positively than those lacking in actions on CSR issues (Klein & Dawar, 2004; Nan & Heo, 2007). Also, as discussed earlier, consumer reactions to CSR have been found to vary depending on company-cause fit: the higher level of fit is likely to result in more positive consumer response. As the fit effect has been more extensively examined, recent research has reported a reversed fit effect found in CSR communication among socially controversial industries (e.g., fast food, tobacco) as mentioned above; controversial companies were more likely to lose consumer support when they communicated high-fit CSR (e.g., tobacco company's support for cancer association), as consumers perceived the company as hypocritical for promoting a social cause to which the company negatively contributes (Austin & Gaither, 2017; Kim & Choi, 2012). In other words, CSR practices on common and neutral issues were found more effective for socially controversial companies.

On the other hand, there has been little attention paid to how companies, neutral or positive in their general reputation, are perceived when they publicly communicate socially controversial issues. According to prior research, corporate actions to positively contribute to society have been viewed favorably in general, as long as the company is in good standing in terms of its prior reputation; whereas, companies with a poor prior reputation have evoked perceptions of corporate hypocrisy (Bae & Cameron, 2006). Also, high-fit issues are more likely to be effective in driving consumer support than low-fit issues. In that sense, the general fit effect

found in non-controversial company's CSR may apply to CSA activities, unless the company belongs to a socially controversial industry or has a poor prior reputation. However, the relationship between company-cause fit and consumer reactions in the context of CSA communication has not been clearly understood yet.

Results- and Values-Orientation

Given that companies are differently perceived by consumers based on the company orientation or the philosophical driving force of the business (e.g., Brown & Dacin, 1997), Korshun and colleagues (2016) classified companies into results-oriented versus values-oriented. Results-oriented companies are described as practicing business based on performance objectives, while values-oriented companies are defined as being driven by stated corporate values. In their experiment, Korschun et al. (2016) manipulated company orientation by presenting a results-oriented company as pursuing market trends, data, and analyses to enhance business performance, while describing a values-oriented company as being guided by a set of values such as long-term health of the company; they found that values-oriented companies were more likely to win consumer support than results-oriented companies when taking a political stand, as values-oriented companies were associated with the lower level of perceived hypocrisy. Given that company-cause fit also plays an important role in determining the level of corporate hypocrisy, this study examines the relationship between CSA actions and perceived corporate hypocrisy in relations to company-cause fit and perceived values orientation of the company.

Research Questions

As an attempt to respond to Korschun and other researchers' calls for more research on the burgeoning topic of CSA communication, we ask the following research questions to incorporate what has been found in CSR research on company-cause fit. Additionally, we aim to extend the understanding of CSA, as current understanding is insufficient to be applied to actual communication practice.

RQ1: How do (a) company-cause fit and (b) corporate stand involved in CSA affect perceived corporate hypocrisy?

RQ2: How does the perceived values orientation of the company affect (a) the relationship between company-cause fit and perceived corporate hypocrisy and (b) the relationship between corporate stand and perceived corporate hypocrisy?

Method

A nationally representative sample of 1,204 U.S. adult consumers participated in a 2 (fit: high v. low) x 2 (corporate stand: stand v. no stand) between-subjects experiment. Participants were recruited through the survey platform Qualtrics for participation in the study. CSA messages of four companies on social issues varied in the presence of corporate stand and the level of company-issue fit (i.e., high versus low fit with the companies' products and services) (see Table 1 for experimental conditions). After each message, items for a fit manipulation check were given, followed by items to measure the perceived values orientation of the company in regard to its decision-making and perceived corporate hypocrisy.

Table 1. Experimental Conditions and Participants Assignment

	Low fit		High fit	
	No stand	Stand	No stand	Stand
Sporting goods	n = 84	n = 77	n = 76	n = 70

Athletic wear	n = 75	n = 71	n = 74	n = 78
Outdoor clothing	n = 76	n = 73	n = 75	n = 70
Ice cream	n = 74	n = 70	n = 82	n = 79
Total	n = 309	n = 291	n = 307	n = 297

Stimulus Materials

Messages regarding a corporate stance on a social issue were created for four different companies on two different issues for each company. These messages were based on actual examples of recent CSA activities with general company descriptions similar to existing companies involved in these types of CSA activities. Company names were not included to control for any potential effects from prior perceptions of a company's specific activities. The CSA issues included: a sporting goods company's CSA on gun control reform (high-fit) and immigrants' rights (low-fit); an athletic wear company's CSA on protest against police brutality and racial discrimination (high-fit) and gun control reform (low-fit); an outdoor clothing company's CSA on climate action (high-fit) and immigrants' rights (low-fit); and an ice cream company's CSA on food transparency (high-fit) and protest against institutionalized racism (low-fit). Each message contained a company description including the company mission and the company's stand on a given issue (stand or no stand).

Measures

Values orientation of the company. Based on measures from Korschun et al. (2016), participants were asked on a seven-point semantic differential scale whether the company made decisions using "facts" or "beliefs"; "data" or "values"; "head" or "heart." The three items were combined to create a scale of values orientation, with higher scores indicating higher perceptions of the values-orientation of the company in its decision-making ($\alpha = .78$).

Corporate hypocrisy. Corporate hypocrisy was measured using items from Shim and Yang (2016) and Wagner et al. (2009). Measures included response to three statements, such as "the company acts hypocritically," "what this company says and does are two different things," and "this company pretends to be something that it's not." The three items were combined to create a scale ($\alpha = .93$).

Results

Manipulation Checks

Company-cause fit manipulation was successful. High-fit CSA issues were perceived as related more to the company's products than low-fit issues, $t(1202) = 5.63$, $p < .001$. Also, high-fit CSA issues were viewed as something the company has more expertise in compared to low-fit issues, $t(1202) = 3.68$, $p < .001$.

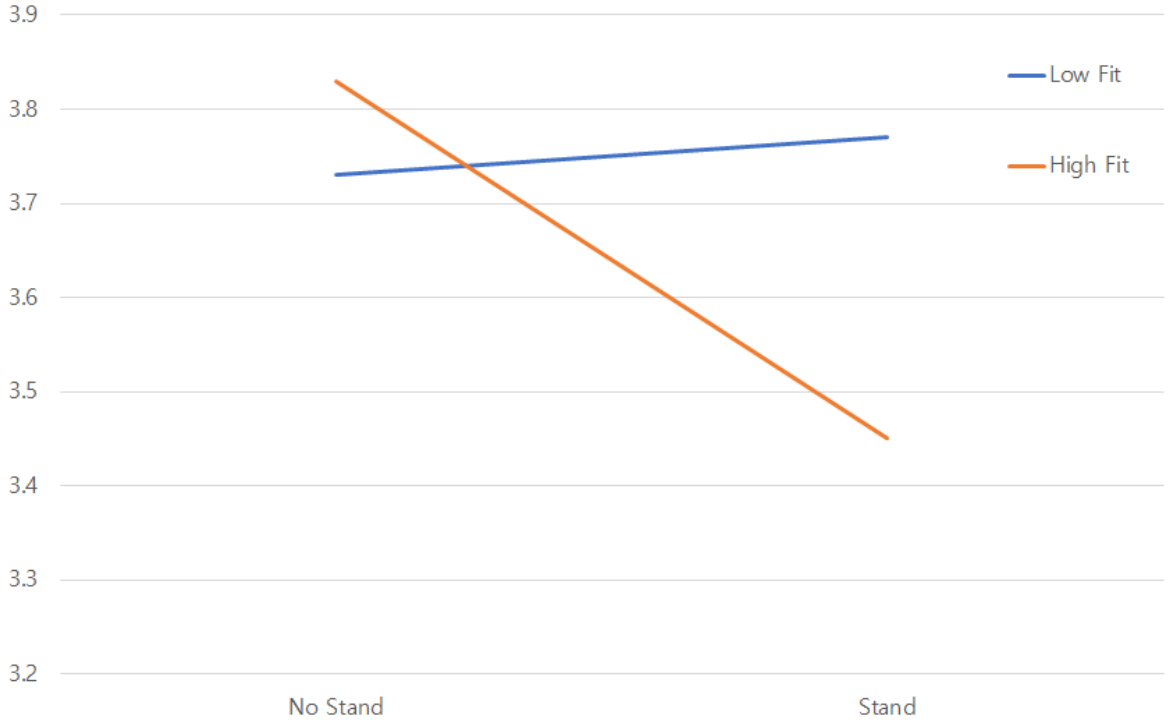
Results on Research Questions

The statistical modeling software Mplus was used to assess if perceived corporate value orientation mediated the relationship between (a) company-cause fit and perceived corporate hypocrisy and (b) corporate stand and perceived corporate hypocrisy.

RQ1 asked how company-cause fit and corporate stand affected perceived corporate hypocrisy. A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted using two levels of fit (high, low) and two levels of stand (stand, no stand). As shown in Figure 1, a significant

interaction effect was found between fit and stand, $F(1,1200) = 3.97$, $p < .05$. No main effects were found. When taking a stand, the level of perceived corporate hypocrisy was significantly higher in the low-fit condition ($M = 3.77$, $SE = .10$) than in the high-fit condition ($M = 3.45$, $SE = .10$), $F(1,1200) = 4.61$, $p = .03$, while no fit difference was found when taking no stand $F(1,1200) = .43$, $p = .51$.

Figure 1. Interaction between Fit and Stand on Perceived Corporate Hypocrisy



RQ2a asked how the perceived values orientation of the company affected the relationship between company-cause fit and perceived corporate hypocrisy. Results revealed that the perceived values orientation of the company fully mediated the relationship between fit and perceived corporate hypocrisy (β = - 0.02, SE = 0.01, p £ 0.05). High-fit CSA resulted in lower levels of perceived corporate hypocrisy through a lowered perceived values orientation of the company. High-fit CSA messages led participants to view the company as less values-oriented, and in turn led participants to view the company less hypocritically.

RQ2b asked how the perceived values orientation mediated the relationship between corporate stand and perceived corporate hypocrisy. Results revealed that the perceived values orientation of the company partially mediated the relationship between corporate stand and perceived corporate hypocrisy (β = 0.03, SE = 0.01, $p < 0.01$) as the direct effect remained significant (β = -0.07, SE = 0.03, $p < 0.01$). The partial mediation suggests that, with the direct effect being still present, corporate actions to take a stand on a controversial social issue were likely to lead to the company being viewed as more values-oriented, and in turn, increase perceptions of corporate hypocrisy among consumers. This result is counterintuitive because companies perceived to be values-pursuing are often viewed as sincere (e.g., Ellen et al., 2006).

Thus, to further understand the results on RQ2b with the effect of fit taken into account, the mediating effect of perceived values orientation in the relationship between corporate stand and perceived hypocrisy was examined in a high-fit-only condition and in a low-fit-only

condition. In the high-fit condition, only a direct effect of corporate stand on perceived corporate hypocrisy was found ($\beta = -0.11$, SE = 0.04, $p < 0.01$); taking a stand on a high-fit issue directly and negatively influenced perceptions of corporate hypocrisy perceptions (i.e., taking a stand led to lower perceived hypocrisy). In low-fit conditions, on the other hand, a full mediation of the perceived values orientation of the company was found ($\beta = 0.04$, SE = 0.01, $p < 0.01$); taking a stand on a low-fit issue increased the level of the perceived values orientation of the company, and, in turn, increased perceptions of corporate hypocrisy.

Discussion

This study examined how company-cause fit and corporate stand on a controversial social issue related to corporate hypocrisy perceptions, in relation to the perceived values orientation of the company. The effect of corporate stand (i.e., taking a stand or not) on perceived corporate hypocrisy was moderated by company-cause fit (i.e., high or low issue-fit with the company's products and services). Also, the perceived values orientation of the company was found to mediate the fit-hypocrisy relationship, as well as the stand-hypocrisy relationship. These findings are discussed in detail below.

The corporate action of taking a stand on a social issue was found to be most effective in reducing corporate hypocrisy perceptions among consumers when the advocated issue was high in regard to company-cause fit. This negative association between fit and perceived corporate hypocrisy resulted from the mediating effect of perceived values orientation of the company. That is, fit did not directly influence corporate hypocrisy perceptions. High-fit CSA actions led to reduced perceptions of the company as being values-oriented, and in turn, decreased the level of perceived corporate hypocrisy. Consumers appeared to view high-fit CSA activities as more strategic-driven (i.e., results-oriented) than values-driven, and these strategic acts may be viewed as more consistent with traditional business goals (i.e., being profitable in addition to addressing social issues), thus leading the company to be viewed as less hypocritical. This finding is supported by prior research which suggests that motives inconsistent to conventional business objectives (e.g., pure other-serving motives) are likely to result in decreased consumer outcomes (Becker-Olsen et al.,, 2006; Forehand & Grier, 2003).

On the other hand, taking a stand on a low-fit CSA issue was found to increase corporate hypocrisy perceptions through the increased level of perceived values orientation of the company. A company's efforts to advocate regarding an important social issue, even when it lacks in relevance to its business, can be seen as values-oriented. However, given the business side assumed in any corporate acts, low-fit CSA with little externally communicated business motives can arouse consumer suspicion about hidden motives behind the CSA. This finding is consistent with Korschun et al.'s (2016) study, which found that the level of perceived hypocrisy was higher when the company was less relevant to the given issue (low fit or high agency).

Practical Implications

The results of this study underscore the need for businesses to carefully consider the decision regarding whether or not to engage in CSA. Just as high-fit between a company and a cause has been shown to improve public response to CSR initiatives (e.g., Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Elving, 2016), this study also demonstrated that high-fit between a company and an advocated issue reduced perceptions of the company as being values-oriented, and more importantly, decreased perceptions of corporate hypocrisy. In an era of "wokewashing" and the commodification of social movements, being viewed as hypocritical regarding an advocated issue is significant cause for concern. When Pepsi's ad featuring imagery borrowed from the

Black Lives Matter movement and officers and protestors uniting over a can of soda offered by Kendall Jenner failed, many argued this was due, at least in part, to Pepsi's lack of connection to or history with the Black Lives Matter movement (Rosenthal, 2019). Having a high-fit between a company and an advocated cause likely raises cognitive associations for consumers, thus helping them to understand the rationale driving the corporate advocacy.

Being perceived as a values-based organization has been touted as an organizational ideal; however, stakeholders are more skeptical of companies that appear to be based on values alone. Results suggest that stakeholders expect businesses to also have strategic goals, and corporate hypocrisy is heightened when perception of these strategic-oriented goals are not present. While many companies are seeking to join the trend of social advocacy, doing so when the fit is not right can result in greater perceptions of hypocrisy for the corporate actions. When companies have a high fit with the issue, the specific type of stand may not matter as much as the simple act of taking some sort of action congruent with the company's purpose.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

This study asked participants to answer a number of questions regarding corporate engagement with social issues by four different companies' scenarios based on actual cases of CSA. While the inclusion of these CSA events likely heightened the plausibility of the experimental conditions, it is possible that participants had some pre-existing knowledge about the types of CSA or types of companies used in this study, thus impacting the outcomes. Future research may consider fictitious cases of CSA to help support this study's findings.

Additionally, this research sought to examine perceived corporate hypocrisy, regardless of individuals' agreement with the controversial issue under consideration. While this approach allowed insight across a variety of issues with a general population, future research might explore individuals' agreement with social issues and the company's stand in connection to corporate hypocrisy. If individuals agree with the corporate stance taken, corporate hypocrisy might be further lessened, regardless of fit (Dodd & Supa, 2014). Examining how corporate hypocrisy drives supportive intentions towards the company and attitudes about the company is also recommended for further study in future research.

Conclusion

The study suggests that companies are viewed as less values-oriented when engaging in social issues more relevant to the company, as the CSA seems strategically motivated rather than altruistic. However, as relevant (high-fit) corporate actions are considered consistent with general business goals (i.e., profit making), individuals do not appear to elaborate as greatly about ulterior motives. This, in turn, lowers perceived hypocrisy. When the CSA issue is high-fit, taking a corporate stand is likely to help the company be viewed as less hypocritical. However, taking a stand on irrelevant issues may increase suspicion about ulterior motives and result in increased perceptions of corporate hypocrisy.

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Workplace Discrimination, Organizational Justice, and Employee–Organization Relationship: The Role of Internal Communication

Yeunjae Lee
Jo-Yun Queenie Li
Wanhsiu Sunny Tsai
University of Miami

Abstract

This study examines the role of public relations and internal communication efforts in influencing racial and ethnic minority employees' perceived workplace discrimination. It tests how different aspects of workplace discrimination—formal versus informal and observed versus experienced—are related to perceived organizational justice and employee-organization relationship (EOR).

Although federal law prohibits discrimination in the workplace based on race and ethnicity, and the need to increase racial/ethnic diversity in the workforce has long been advocated in the United States, creating an inclusive environment for underrepresented employees has been a major challenge for companies and organizations (Jones et al., 2016). The detrimental effect of workplace discrimination on employees' work performance, career satisfaction, and job turnover has been well documented in the literature (Dhanani, Beus & Joseph, 2018). In the field of public relations, interview and survey studies have been conducted to understand the discrimination perception and experiences of PR practitioners of color (e.g., Len-Rios, 1998; Zerbinos & Clanton, 1993). However, important questions regarding the role of public relations, specifically, internal communication, in influencing minority employees' perception of discriminatory acts within a company to achieve workplace inclusivity and equality remain unanswered.

The rich literature has suggested that excellent internal communication practices can facilitate employee engagement and boost their trust, commitment, and satisfaction with their organization (i.e., employee–organization relationship [EOR]; Men & Bowen, 2016). For instance, Mishra et al. (2014) argued that internal communication is imperative for fostering a culture of transparency, which is critical in preventing and reducing perceived unfairness in the workplace, such as in the case of performance appraisal and career advancement. Tao et al. (2018) indicated that an organization's internal communication that involves employees in joint decision making in its CSR program can effectively empower employees by satisfying their self-determination needs, which in turn can heighten their prosocial intentions and the overall quality of their relationship with the organization. However, most studies have focused on the importance of internal communication in engaging employees in their organization's priorities and involving them in their organization's goals (e.g., Welch, 2011). Verčič and Vokić (2017) pointed out that further investigation needs to be conducted on the impact of internal communication satisfaction on employee engagement in diverse settings. In a similar vein, to date, little research has investigated the importance of internal communication in relation to workplace discrimination. To bridge this research gap, this study presents one of the earliest empirical investigations on how public relations, specifically, transparent communication that has been recognized as a key characteristic of excellent internal communication (Men & Stacks, 2014) can help mitigate the workplace discrimination experiences of racial minorities.

Recognizing that workplace discrimination is directly related to the extent to which employees feel they are being treated fairly (Wood, Braeken & Niven, 2013), this study incorporates theory of organizational justice from the organizational behavior and human resource management literature. We aim to understand the connections between transparent internal communication and an organization's perceived distributive, procedural, and interactional justice (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997) in relation to the workplace discrimination experiences of racial minority employees and the downstream effects on EORs. Based on a theory-based strategic framework that incorporates varied forms of workplace discrimination and different dimensions of organizational justice, the findings provide valuable theoretical insights into whether and how internal communication efforts are connected to each justice dimension and different forms of workplace discrimination to influence EORs. Strategic guidelines are also presented to inform corporate leaders and communication practitioners to implement excellent internal communication programs to combat workplace discrimination and foster organizational justice to strengthen EORs.

Literature Review

Internal Relationship Management

Relationship management, or organization–public relationship (OPR), has been the primary focus of public relations scholarship (Ferguson, 2018). OPR is defined as "the state which exists between an organization and its key publics, in which actions of either can impact the economic, social, cultural or political wellbeing of the other" (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62). This concept includes four components (i.e., trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality) that predict key publics' satisfaction toward an organization (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

As a core paradigm of public relations research, OPR has been extensively studied in various public relations domains (Ki & Shin, 2006). In the context of internal public relations, scholars have adopted the main constructs of OPR to explain EOR, defining it as "the degree to which an organization and its employees trust one another, agree on who has the rightful power to influence, experience satisfaction with each other, and commit oneself to the other" (Men & Stacks, 2014, p. 307). EOR has been demonstrated to generate important perceptual and relational outcomes, including increasing employee engagement (Kang & Sung, 2017) and sharing positive word of mouth regarding their company, thereby enhancing corporate image and reputation (Kim & Rhee, 2011).

Workplace Discrimination and EOR

Given the impact of EOR on organizational effectiveness, scholars have investigated various factors that are likely to influence internal relationships in organizations. From organizational structure and leadership style to internal communication, factors that constrain employees' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors within an organization can all be considered as possible antecedents of EOR (e.g., Kim & Rhee, 2011; Men & Stacks, 2014). Adding to this line of research, this study considers workplace discrimination experiences of employees as a potential factor that may negatively impact EOR.

Workplace discrimination is defined as a situation in which an employee perceives that he/she is being treated in an unfriendly manner or receiving negative treatment on the basis of personal attributes that are not relevant to job performance (Sanchez & Brock, 1996). Workplace discrimination has been recognized as a multifaceted variable that has been conceptualized and operationalized in different ways (Triana, Jayasinghe, & Pieper, 2015). In this study, we focus on the formal aspects of workplace discrimination connected to job-related decisions, such as hiring, promotion, or compensation (Hebl, et al., 2002). Moreover, we conceptualize workplace discrimination as "institutional policies or decisions that affect an employee's status of employment (e.g., receiving a promotion), job assignment, or compensation" (Chung, 2001, p. 34). Scholars have suggested that individuals may encounter discrimination differently depending on the specific marginalized group to which they belong (e.g., age, gender, and race/ethnicity; Jones et al., 2013). This study focused on racial and ethnic minorities as a socio-politically disadvantaged group to understand workplace discrimination owing to a certain race and ethnicity or physical/cultural characteristics associated with race/ethnicity (US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2020).

Despite the limited empirical studies on the relationship between workplace discrimination experiences and EOR, indirect evidence suggests a possible link between the two factors. Extensive research has related workplace discrimination to employee engagement, satisfaction, and outcome relationships (Triana et al., 2015). Discrimination has been found to reduce employee commitment to achieve organizational goals, lower loyalty and satisfaction toward an organization, and induce negative citizenship behavior in the workplace (Olori & Dan-

Jumbo, 2017; Welle & Heilman, 2005). Along this line of reasoning, we suggest that workplace discrimination experiences would negatively influence racial minorities' perceived relationship quality with their organizations. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

H1. Racial minority employees' discrimination experiences in the workplace will decrease the perceived quality of their relationship with their organizations (EOR).

Organizational Justice

Scholars across various disciplines, including organizational behavior, human resource management, and industrial/organizational psychology, have extensively studied organizational justice from different perspectives. Organizational justice refers to "individuals' perception of the fairness of treatment received from an organization and their behavioral reaction to such perceptions," (Nadiri & Tanova, 2010, p. 34). The construct has been conceptualized via the dimensions of procedural, distributive, and interactional justice. *Procedural justice*, which is defined as the "fairness of the process and procedures by which allocation decisions are made" (Parker & Kohlmeyer, 2005, p. 358), concerns the fairness and transparency of processes through which decisions are made (e.g., decisions on how resources are allocated) and conflicts are resolved. *Distributive justice* represents fairness in the rights or amount of resources that a person receives (Colquitt, 2001). *Interactional justice*, an interpersonal component of justice (Bies & Moag, 1987), emphasizes the "importance of the quality of the interpersonal treatment people receive when procedures are implemented" (Colquitt et al., 2001, p. 426).

Workplace discrimination and organizational justice. Organizational justice has been applied to explicate the mechanisms of the effect of workplace discrimination on employee outcomes (e.g., Colella et al., 2017). That is, behaviors that comprise workplace discrimination may affect perceptions of distributive justice (e.g., rewards not being allocated equally to minority and majority employees), procedural justice (e.g., bias against certain individuals present in decision-making processes), and interactional justice (e.g., minority employees treated disrespectfully by decision makers), which in turn negatively affect employee outcomes, such as job satisfaction, commitment, and behaviors (e.g., Dhanani et al., 2018). Specifically, employees are likely to attribute responsibility to their organization for any negative behaviors they are exposed to, including discrimination (Wood et al., 2013). Colquitt (2001) suggests that employees' attribution of his/her negative fate to their organization will lead them to question the fairness of organizational procedures. Employees assume that the organization should have effective procedures in place to ensure proper behavior toward its members. Employees may also view acts of discrimination as a reduction in the fair exchange for the effort they expend in a job, which lead them to perceive distributive injustice (Wood et al., 2013). Additionally, according to the group-value model of procedural justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988), racial discrimination in the workplace signals the ascription of a lower status and makes employees believe that they are being treated unequally compared with people of other racial backgrounds (Triana & Garcia, 2009). Similarly, we expect that workplace discrimination can encourage employees to perceive organizational injustice. Consequently, we posit the following hypotheses.

H2. Racial minority employees' discrimination experiences in the workplace will decrease (a) procedural, (b) distributive, and (c) interactional organizational justice.

Organizational justice and EOR. Masterson et al. (2000) stated that "justice perceptions are important inputs into employees' judgments of the quality of their exchange relationships with their supervisors and organizations" (p. 740). Accordingly, individuals' fairness judgment within an organization (i.e., organizational justice) has been associated with positive employee outcomes, such as satisfaction, commitment, and trust (Colquitt, Greenberg & Greenberg, 2003;

Lind & Tyler, 1988; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992). In relation to public relations outcomes, several scholars have demonstrated that organizational justice is a strong predictor of EOR quality (e.g., Kim, 2007; Kim et al., 2017). In the context of racial minority employees, we also expect that those who perceive high levels of organizational justice are likely to have a favorable relationship with their company, which leads us to suggest the following hypotheses.

H3. Organizational justice, namely, (a) procedural, (b) distributive, and (c) interactional justice, will increase the perceived quality of racial/ethnic minority employees' relationship with their organizations (EOR).

The Role of Internal Communication

Public relations scholars have long suggested that the internal communication system of an organization is a crucial function of excellent public relations practices (Grunig, 1992; Men & Bowen, 2017). Specifically, the importance of transparent communication, which is defined as "an organization's communication to make available all legally releasable information to employees whether positive or negative in nature—in a manner that is accurate, timely, balanced and unequivocal, for the purpose of enhancing the reasoning ability of employees, and holding organizations accountable for their actions, policies, and practices," (Men, 2014, p. 260) has been increasingly emphasized. The concept originates from organizational transparency and refers to organizations' action of providing substantial, relevant, complete, and truthful information to their employees about their decisions (Stirton & Lodge, 2001). Transparency also highlights the notion of employees' participation in identifying, seeking, and distributing information (Cotterrell, 2000). Research has consistently suggested the relational benefits of transparent communication, such as fostering employee trust and credibility (Rawlins, 2009), because it encourages employees to believe that their organization is accountable for their practices and policies (Stirton & Lodge, 2001).

Three sub-elements of transparent communication in internal relations have been theorized involving participation, substantiality, and accountability (e.g., Men & Stacks, 2014). *Participation* that refers to employees' active participation in seeking, distributing, and creating information is encouraged within an organization (Cotterrell, 1999). *Substantiality* indicates the extent to which organizations provide their employees truthful, substantial, and useful information (Rawlins, 2009). *Accountability* means that organizations are responsible for disclosing positive and negative information to their employees (Men & Yue, 2019). Based on these three dimensions, this study conceptualizes transparent internal communication as organizations' communication efforts that are characterized by participation, substantiality, and accountability.

The positive influence of transparent communication on employee outcomes has been well documented. Public relations scholars have found that employees working in an organizational environment where transparent communication is practiced are likely to trust their company (Rawlins, 2009), be engaged (Linhart, 2011), and perceive corporate reputation as high (Men, 2014). Transparent communication also encourages employees to actively communicate with their organization in a beneficial way during an organizational crisis (Kim, 2018). Most importantly, transparent communication helps employees build a long-term and satisfactory relationship (i.e., EOR) with their organization (Men & Stacks, 2014; Lee & Li, 2019). That is, companies' efforts to provide their employees substantial and useful information as well as opportunities to participate in decision-making processes can facilitate employee satisfaction, commitment, and mutual influence. Therefore, we posit the following hypothesis, expecting a

positive association between transparent communication and EOR for racial minority employees.

H4. Transparent internal communication will increase the perceived quality of racial/ethnic minority employees' relationship with their organization (EOR).

The value of strategic internal communication is not limited to increasing the quality of the relationship between an organization and its employees. This study argues that an excellent internal communication system can help racial minority employees perceive less discriminatory acts within an organization. Previous research has explored various antecedents of employee workplace discrimination, ranging from individual-level factors, such as demographics (Bergman et al., 2012), to contextual factors, including organizational climate (e.g., policies, leadership, and practices; Bergman et al., 2012; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001) and systems (e.g., organizational structure and HR system; Raver & Schneider, 2004). Much scholarship has focused on what organizational or systematic factors contribute to reducing race-/ethnicity-based discriminatory acts. By contrast, the effects of communication practices on employees' perceived workplace discrimination are relatively underexplored.

Organizations with a transparent internal communication system are likely to exhibit low levels of discrimination. Transparent communication aims to enhance employees' role in decision-making processes by giving them opportunities to participate in identifying and sharing information they need (Cotterrell, 1999). Moreover, the notion of transparency includes internally sharing a substantial amount of information containing both positive and negative aspects of an organization's processes, policies, and issues (Men & Yue, 2019). This corporate communication practice can lead racial minority employees to trust their company's policies and decisions, as they feel informed regardless of their race or ethnicity. Knowing that they have chances to exert their influence in the organization can facilitate employees' satisfaction with their interaction with their company, empower them as important internal members, make them believe that they are not isolated owing to their race/ethnicity, and induce them to perceive the workplace climate as inclusive. In such a climate, discrimination should be lower than when an organization's communication is not transparent. Therefore, this study expects that racial minority employees who perceive a transparent internal communication system within their company are less likely to experience discrimination. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H5. Transparent internal communication will decrease racial/ethnic minority employees' discrimination experiences in the workplace.

An internal communication system can form the organizational context that often influences employees' justice judgments (Kim, 2007). That is, the communication system within an organization plays a critical role in shaping employees' perceptions of justice. For example, the sincerity and trustworthiness of information exchanges cultivate perceived fairness, which is fostered when employees are given opportunities to voice or provide input and receive feedback (Bies & Shapiro, 1987). Chan and Lai (2017) also noted that perceived justice is positively influenced by employees' level of satisfaction with communication in the workplace.

In the public relations literature, Kim (2007) empirically demonstrated that symmetrical internal communication, which takes place by listening, negotiating, dialogue, and mutual understanding, can increase employees' perception of organizational justice. We thus argue that companies' transparent communication practices can foster racial minority employees' perception of organizational justice. Palanski et al. (2011) emphasized that transparency is closely associated with organizational justice, as it provides explanations about organizational

procedures in a thorough, candid, timely, and considerate manner. Transparency is related to morals and ethics, which are important standards of fair policies and procedures of business practices (Yamazaki & Yoon, 2016). Therefore, transparent internal communication can positively influence minority employees' perception of whether they are being treated equally in terms of procedures, distribution, and interactions. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H6. Transparent internal communication will increase (a) procedural, (b) distributive, and (c) interactional organizational justice.

Method

Participants

An online survey was conducted with 453 full-time employees working in various industry sectors in the U.S. Using Qualtrics panels, only employees identified as racial/ethnic minorities were recruited for this study. Specifically, 53.4% of the participants (n = 242) were Black or African American, followed by 28.9% of Hispanic or Latino (n = 131), 10.2% of Asian or Asian American (n = 46), and 3.1% of American Indian or Alaska native (n = 15, 3.1%). 4.4% of the respondents (n = 20) reported that they are mixed. Among the 453 participants, the majority was female (n = 331, 73.1%). The mean age was 35.81 (SD = 11.18) and approximately half of the participants (n = 228, 50.3%) worked in large-sized companies that have more than 500 employees. In terms of education level, 45.7% of the participants (n = 207) had at least a bachelor's degree or higher. Employees participated in the study worked in various industries, including healthcare (n = 93, 20.5%), customer services (n = 59, 13%), educational services (n = 51, 11.3%), retails (n = 40, 8.8%), transportation (n = 28, 6.2%), and finance (n = 24, 5.3%) among others.

Measure

All items used in the current study were adopted from previous literature. 5-point Likert scale was used for all items, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.
First, employee-organization relationship (EOR) was measured with 16 items (α = .980) adopted from Hon and Grunig (1999). It includes four dimensions, trust (6 items, α = .933), control mutuality (3 items α = .920), commitment (3 items, α = .953), and satisfaction (4 items, α = .960). Second, 10 items were used (α = .966) to measure transparent internal communication adopted from Rawlins (2009) and Men and Jiang (2017), including three sub-dimensions (participation: 3 items, α = .926; substantiality: 4 items, α = .958; accountability: 3 items, α = .880). Third, to measure organizational justice, existing items from prior works (Colquitt, 2001; Kim, 2007; Kim & Leung, 2007; Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002) were adopted. Specifically, a total of 15 items were used, including procedural justice (4 items, α = .961), distributive justice (4 items, α = .949), and interactional justice (6 items, α = .956), respectively. Finally, workplace discrimination was measured with five items adapted from Sanchez and Brock (1996) and Shaffer et al. (2000) (e.g., At work, I do not get enough recognition because of race/ethnicity; I have been unfairly treated by my company in terms of compensation because of my race/ethnicity).

Data Analysis

First, the reliability of the measurement items for all constructs used in this study was tested using Cronbach's alpha. Next, to test the hypotheses suggested in this study, this used a two-stage procedure of structural equation modeling (SEM) approach (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), using Mplus program. The two-steps include assessing the measurement model using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), followed by testing the structural model.

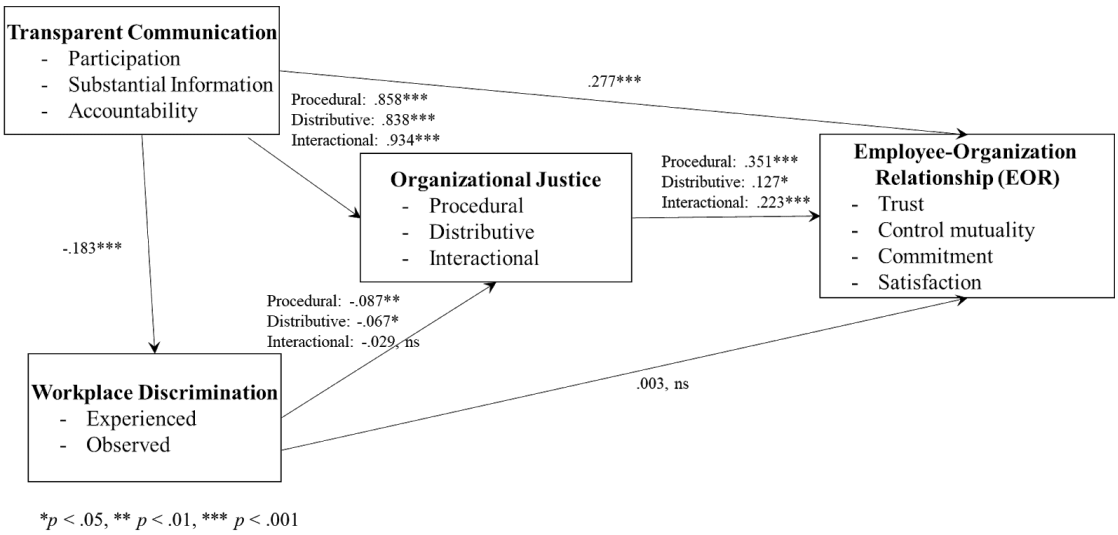
Results

The results of CFA revealed that the measurement model reached satisfactory model fits: $\chi 2(923) = 2423.107$, CFI = .945, RMSEA = .060 [.057, .063], SRMR = .030. All factor loading values were significant and higher than the threshold value of 0.5 ($p < .001$). Then, the structural model was tested and it showed good model fits overall: $\chi 2(924) = 2423.107$, CFI = .945, TLI = .945, RMSEA = .060 [.057, .063], SRMR = .030. As the structural model reached satisfactory model fits, the researchers interpreted the paths.

H1 predicts the negative effect of workplace discrimination on EOR. The path is not significant (.003, $p = .890$), which does not support H1. In H2, this study examines how workplace discrimination negatively influences organizational justice. Results showed that employees' experienced discrimination significantly decreases procedural (-.087, $p = .002$) and distributive (-.067, $p = .027$) justice, while it did not have any significant influences on interactional justice (-.029, $p = .211$). Therefore, H2a, H2b are supported but H2c is not supported. When racial minority employees experience discrimination in the workplace owing to their race/ethnicity, they will likely believe that their company has unfair policies and that they are being rewarded unfairly. The extent to which decisions are enacted by authority figures (interactional justice) is unaffected by discrimination experiences.

H3 investigated the association between organizational justice and employee-organization relationships. As shown in the results, all three elements of justice, procedural (.351, $p < .001$), distributive (.127, $p = .018$), and interactional (.223, $p < .001$) justice, positively and significantly influenced EOR. H3a, H3b, and H3c are thus all supported. H4 through H6 tested the effect of transparent communication on EOR, workplace discrimination, and organizational justice. Transparent communication significantly increased EOR (.277, $p < .001$), which supports H4. Transparent communication also significantly decreased employees' (-.183, $p < .001$) discrimination experiences in the workplace. Therefore, H5 is also supported. Finally, corporate transparent communication had a significant and positive influences on three types of organizational justice, procedural (.858, $p < .001$), distributive (.838, $p < .001$), and interactional (.934, $p < .001$) justice. This supports H6a, H6b, and H6c. That is, transparent internal communication enhances the quality of the relationship between an organization and its employees and organizational justice and reduces workplace discrimination against racial minority employees.

Figure 1. Results of the hypothesized model



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

Discussion

Focusing on racial minority employees in the United States, the study evaluated the role of strategic internal communication (i.e., transparent communication) in influencing perceptions of workplace discrimination and organizational justice and the resulting effect on EORs. This study advances the theoretical understanding of strategic internal communication by revealing the critical role of internal communication in reducing employees' perceived discrimination in the workplace. Specifically, racial minority employees working in an organization with a transparent communication system are less likely to experience discrimination in the workplace. Transparent communication, which is characterized by participation, information substantiality, and accountability, makes racial minority employees feel less isolated and facilitates a sense of belongingness and trust toward a company's actions toward them. Such practices contribute to the formation of diverse and inclusive environments where employees experience less discriminatory acts owing to their racial or ethnic attributes. By suggesting corporate communication practices as possible solutions to workplace discrimination, which is one of the major concerns of businesses, this study demonstrates the importance of internal communication in cultivating an equal and fair workplace environment.

Furthermore, the current study builds a theoretical link between strategic internal communication and organizational justice. Transparent internal communication has a positive impact on employee outcomes, such as positive EORs and employees' advocative actions (e.g., Men & Stacks, 2014). The findings of the current study add another positive outcome of strategic communication by revealing that transparent communication significantly and positively affects organizational justice. Racial minority employees feel that their company is treating them equally and justly when they perceive internal communication systems to be participative, substantial, and accountable. This finding suggests that the perception of being treated fairly is largely affected by employees' communicative experiences within an organization.

Transparent communication also indirectly affects justice via discrimination. That is, a transparent communication system helps racial minority employees feel less discriminated against which in turn increases their perception of organizational justice. Therefore, transparent communication, as an organizational contextual factor, provides an environment where discrimination practices can be decreased to boost perceived organizational justice. Therefore, by incorporating the communication perspective, this study provides empirical evidence on how

organizations' strategic communication practices facilitate the establishment of justice and mitigate workplace discrimination.

Through the lens of public relations, this study also sheds light on the theoretical association between discrimination and organizational justice and the resulting effect on EORs. Specifically, we find that discrimination is significantly related to procedural and distributive injustice but not significantly associated with interactional justice. Employees' discriminatory experiences in terms of performance evaluation, compensation and benefits, and recognition and promotion opportunities induce them to believe that their company's processes and procedures are unfair (i.e., procedural justice) and that they are not rewarded properly owing to their racial background (i.e., distributive justice). One possible explanation for the insignificant association between discrimination and interactional justice may derive from the way "discrimination" is conceptualized. We focused on "formal" discrimination in this study, which refers to career difficulties or barriers owing to an employee's racial/ethnic background. However, racial discrimination can also be experienced informally which involves verbal harassment, inappropriate jokes, and lack of acceptance and respect by supervisors and colleagues (Jones, 2013). According to Dhanani et al. (2018), interpersonal discrimination (e.g., being excluded or derogated), rather than formal discrimination, may be more strongly related to employees' perception of fair interpersonal treatment in the workplace (i.e., interactional justice).

Furthermore, this study expands previous studies that have built a link between organizational justice and EOR (e.g., Kim, 2007). Every type of organizational justice significantly influences positive and long-term positive relationships between an organization and employees, reflecting the value of public relations (Kim, 2007). Similarly, this study demonstrates that minority employees who believe that their company treats employees fairly regardless of their racial identity are likely to trust the organization, are satisfied with and committed to the organization, and feel mutually influenced by one another.

This study also offers practical implications for corporate communication managers and organizational leaders on how they can nurture best communicative practices for racially underrepresented groups in organizations. Organizations' transparent communication plays a key role in reducing racial/ethnic minority employees' discrimination experiences in the workplace. In turn, it helps organizations establish a healthy, long-term relationship with employees by building organizational justice. Therefore, in terms of daily communication activities, organizations and leaders should invite minority employees to participate in determining the key information they need, which can enhance communication clarity to achieve information transparency. Moreover, organizations should inform racial minority employees with timely, substantial, and accurate information, including positive and negative aspects of organizational policies and issues. Such practices can enhance racial minority employees' perceived fair treatment and justice and foster the quality of their perceived relationship with their company, which can potentially lead to their engagement as well as positive behaviors (Kang & Sung, 2017). Additionally, in terms of excellent internal public relations practices, organizations should incorporate adequate information in daily communications and offer diversity training programs to increase awareness and identification of discrimination behaviors. These communicative efforts could demonstrate the importance of climates within organizations that are supportive of diversity, thereby reducing discrimination against race/ethnicity in workplaces, increasing employees' perception of organizational justice, and ultimately reinforcing healthy EORs. Given the effort to provide pro-diversity environments through transparent communication,

organizations could also effectively manage organizational justice issues, proactively solve possible problems, and maintain satisfactory relationships with their employees.

Several study limitations should be considered when interpreting the study findings. First, the correlations in our research may suggest but not confirm any direction of causality. For example, discrimination experiences, as hypothesized, can contribute to a decrease in internal relationships. However, the same correlation can also indicate that workplace discrimination experiences increase as a consequence of unhealthy EORs. Therefore, the possibility of an opposite casual direction should not be ruled out when interpreting our findings. Second, given that both types of discrimination (i.e., formal, interpersonal) can significantly impact racial/ethnic minority employees and their organization, future studies should consider the effect of informal discrimination on EORs and its distinct association with organizational justice.

Although numerous organizations have undertaken initiatives to reduce employee discrimination owing to racial/ethnic backgrounds, racial inequalities in the workplace continue to persist. Providing pro-diversity and open work environments has become an important task for organizations. As one of the few studies that examine the role of internal communication in workplace discrimination, this research shows that transparent communication can reduce incidents of racism and discrimination, enhance perceived organizational justice, and ultimately establish stronger EORs. While workplace discrimination continues to be a considerable challenge to overcome, this study demonstrates the vital communicative actions that organizations can take to create supportive environments that can mitigate and prevent race-based workplace discrimination.

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Framing Climate Change on Instagram and the Effects of Identity and Self-Efficacy on Environmental Communication

Amanda Martinek
Zoe Clemmons
Colorado State University

Abstract

This study measures the framing of environmental activism messages on social media that are used to mobilize global audiences towards environmental action. A qualitative content analysis and follow up pilot experiment explores messaging frames used within Greta Thunberg's Instagram account, a prominent 16-year-old climate activist who has mobilized millions to participate in global youth climate strikes.

Keywords: Framing theory, content analysis, environmental activism, Greta Thunberg

Introduction

The Problem of Communicating Climate Change

The climate crisis faces a wide variety of challenges in terms of communicating unfortunate consequences, generating support for the fight, and the ongoing issue of political polarization. A 2018 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPPC) said that a 1.5 C temperature increase will have negative global effects such as sea level rise, drought, extreme temperature fluctuations, and flooding (IPCC, 2018), which makes communicating climate change both urgent and all-encompassing for populations globally. A 2019 poll conducted by the Yale Climate Change Communication Program found that 69 percent of Americans are "worried" about climate change (Leiserowitz et al., 2019) while almost 70 percent of Americans said they would not contribute $10 each month to climate change (Meyer, 2019). This poses a unique challenge in communicating about a problem of this scale to motivate and mobilize the public to commit to mass change.

The Global Youth Climate Movement. In dealing with wicked problems such as climate change that require mass social change, there is a history of global participation in social movements by young people. In the United States, a wave of youth-led movements began in the 1960s with examples such as anti-war protests, environmental activism and fighting for women's rights. In the past few decades, young adults have received more power and potential to enact change than previous generations, largely due to advances in technology, access to information and increased efforts at inclusion by decision makers (Arnold et al., 2009). Young adults have also been identified as key stakeholders on climate change issues, as the generation whose lives occur within the time period of 2020-2050, which has been specified as they key moment for humans to decarbonize and avoid future environmental catastrophe (Corner et al., 2015).

Greta Thunberg. Recent research on social movements argues that tweens and teens – especially girls – can convince and influence their parents about the reality of climate change, often better than young males, journalists or other adult experts (Lawson et al., 2019). Greta Thunberg is a 16-year-old Swedish climate change activist who rose to worldwide prominence in August 2018 when she began weekly climate strikes from school. Her actions have now inspired global strikes with an estimated 6 million strike participants held in at least 185 countries as of September 2019 (Taylor, Watts & Bartlett, 2019). Although Greta is an example of successful and effective youth-led environmental activism, and climate change research has shown that grassroots organizing and citizen activism are some of the most effective ways to achieve emission reduction and education (Roser-Renouf et al. 2014), this type of environmental activism has been slow to reach mainstream numbers within the general American population.

Social Media. Social media has become an instrumental tool for youth activism movements to mobilize, as it can promote civic engagement, allow people to connect with other activists, become informed about movements and broadcast events and activities (Middaugh, Clark, & Ballard, 2017). While many of these youth led social movements have garnered attention, action and large numbers of supporters, few have a specific individual leading the movement, which can lead to inconsistency in overall message framing.

Literature Review

Social Movement Theory. Social movement theorists emphasize that collective action is necessary to create social change (King, 2008). This theory suggests one of the main factors contribute to collective action include framing processes (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996)

and more recently, identity and efficacy have been shown to be additional factors that facilitate collective action (Taylor and Whittier, 1999; Tabernero & Hernandez, 2011). This research will first focus on the role of message framing in the youth climate movement, and then will consider how identity and efficacy play a role in mobilizing young people to further communicate and participate in climate change action. Social movement theory is a useful framework for considering the main factors of predicting collective action, especially in the context of differing populations, communication channels, for various outcomes and in testing new factors.

Framing. Framing processes are a vital component of collective action. This process involves the "strategic use of shared meanings and definitions to invoke claims on individuals' identity and cultural sense of responsible to a cause" (Snow et al., 1986). Framing has been used in social movement messaging to make sure it resonates with audiences by strategically using shared meanings and definitions to either invoke claims on individual's identities or draw upon the cultural sense of responsibility towards a cause (Benford and Snow, 2000). In doing so, framing processes facilitate collective action by emphasizing collective identity (King, 2008).

Climate Change Frames. Research by O'Neill, Williams, Wiersma, & Boykoff (2015) found ten dominant frames used to discuss the IPCC Fifth Climate Change Assessment report in both legacy and social media coverage. Their study found that the settled science frame (which emphasizes on the broad expert consensus and need for action) as the most prominent, and disaster impacts, political or ideological struggle and the role of science frames also used frequently. The opportunity, economic and morality and ethics frames, which support self-efficacy, were relatively rare. Our Study 1 adapts these ten climate change frames to code for the most common theme within Greta Thunberg's Instagram account.

Emotional Frames. A study looking at the effects of climate change messages on emotion by Feldman & Hart (2018) found that hope is an important motivator of public engagement and activism towards climate change. They also found that messages which focus on actions that can address danger or injustice posed by climate change offer the promise of a desired outcome and are more likely to evoke hope. Between partisan divides, fear motivates opinion moderation and compromise, while hope was positively associated with policy support among all ideological groups. Higher levels of anger were found to produce the greatest polarization. Emotion, especially hope, was also found to be a key mediator between gain-framed messages and desired climate change policy attitudes and advocacy within Nabi, Gustafson and Jensen' (2018) study on framing climate change and the role of emotion in generating advocacy behavior. While know hope can be powerful, there is still a need for more research on emotional processes in environmental communication (Nabi, Gustafson and Jensen, 2018). Based on these findings, our Study 1 uses these frames and coded each Instagram post for emotional appeal: hope, fear or anger.

Social Movement Frames. Social movement is also an important theory that will be used in the context of the study. Work by Benford and Snow (2000) lays out three core framing tasks in social movements: diagnostic framing (problem identification and attribution), prognostic framing (proposed solution, actions) and motivational framing (call to arms and rationale for action). Our Study 1 adopted and coded for these three social movement frames.

Environmental Identity. A personal identity emerges in a social context and is shaped by one's experiences, with experiences in nature shaping an environmental identity (Clayton, 2003). Structural characteristics of an organization, community or movement can help define one's environmental self-identity (Lubell, 2002). People often participate in social movements to strengthen their personal identity through membership in a group and derive meaning from the

movement's ideology (Klandermans, 2014). Research has shown that the identities of a young population can work as important motivations for environmental action (Matsuba et al., 2012). More recent social movements in the United States and Europe organize around common identities instead of due to class-based inequalities which fueled social movements in the past. Within literature on social movements, theorists show that both social networks and identity are important for participation, stating that one's environmental identity can be necessary for collective environmental action to occur.

Self-Efficacy. Self-efficacy is an important part of how behaviors and actions can influence each other. Originally defined and explored by Bandura (1982), he said that there are four areas of information relevant to the study of self-efficacy: performance, observing others, verbal persuasion, social influence, and psychological ways that people evaluate their capabilities are all factors involved. For example, those that are environmentally inclined and are surrounded by individuals who exhibit pro-environmental behaviors such as environmental communication, may be more likely to believe that they have an effect on positively helping the environment. Additionally, the greater amount of self-efficacy a person has, the greater the performance accomplishments that a person can achieve (Bandura, 1982). Adversely, research shows that individuals who feel powerless in the face of climate change feel that their personal actions may not make a difference (Corner et al., 2015). The face of the global climate crisis could have a negative impact with how youth identity and perceive their own actions for change. Furthermore, exposure to efficacy information indirectly increases participation via hope—even, in some cases, among conservatives (Feldman and Hart, 2016). This study seeks to understand the connections between how college-aged students perceive their own capabilities in performing pro-environmental behavior, such as environmental communication.

Research Purpose

This research seeks to understand and analyze how different climate change message frames can increase young adult's engagement on social media with the climate activism social movement, and then how factors such as self-efficacy and collective identity with the youth climate movement can affect engagement with environmental communication. To fulfil this goal, this research employed two studies.

Study 1 is an exploratory qualitative content analysis of Greta Thunberg's Instagram account. As Greta is a prominent and successful climate change communicator and has attracted millions to follow her Instagram account, the researchers want to understand her communication strategy in more depth. To do so, they coded her Instagram posts (N=278) for three prominent latent frames; climate change frame, emotional frame and social movement frame, as well as manifest categories. Methods, data analysis and findings are detailed below.

Based on the most prominent frames found in Study 1, Study 2 is a pilot study that employs an experimental design to test these frames and how additional factors such as one's feelings of self-efficacy and environmental identity shape their attitude toward environmental communication practices. Methods, findings and a discussion are detailed below.

Study 1: Framing the Youth Climate Change Activism Movement: An Analysis of Greta Thunberg's Message

Based on the importance and challenges of communicating and framing climate change, the lack of research surrounding emotional appeals in environmental communication and the case of Greta Thunberg's power to mobilize a youth audience using social media, the first study

is an exploratory qualitative content analysis of Greta Thunberg's Instagram account. This research hopes to discover the more prominent and engaging frames that Greta uses to mobilize her Instagram audience. To understand this, the following research questions are posed:

- **RQ1:** Which of the climate change frames used by Greta Thunberg on Instagram receives the most engagement (likes, views)?
- **RQ2:** Which of the emotion frames used by Greta Thunberg on Instagram receives the most engagement (likes, views)?
- **RQ3:** Which of the social movement frames used by Greta Thunberg on Instagram receives the most engagement (likes, views)?
- **RQ4:** What other characteristics do her Instagram have?

Methods

To answer the research questions of our first study, the researchers used a qualitative content analysis to understand what type of frame is used in three domains: climate change communication, emotional frames and through the lens of social movements.

Sample. The unit of analysis for this study is one Instagram post. This study sampled posts on Thunberg's Instagram account starting from June of 2018 to August of 2019. The total sample coded was N=278 posts, after the researchers removed 64 posts from the sample because they did not relate to environmental or climate change issues.

Content Analysis Criteria. Three major latent category frames were coded in this study, including climate change frame, emotional frame and a social movement frame, discussed in detail below. We also coded for manifest categories, as identifying these post characteristics revealed important information about youth climate change activism. Both the image itself and the caption text were analyzed based on the Codebook.

Codebook Criteria. The second step was determining the codebook. Codes for the three latent framing variables were creating from existing codebooks. Ten climate change frames (O'Neill et al., 2015) represent the various ways that climate change is communicated in both traditional news media and social media. Emotional appeals used will also be considered, including hope, anger and fear (Feldman & Hart, 2016). Lastly, three social movement frames were coded: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational (Benford and Snow, 2000). Several manifest variables are also used in the content analysis, such as: an individual or group image, facial expression, text present, protest sign present, hashtag present, call to action present, and overall post engagement, which include the number of likes, comments and views.

Pre-Test. The researchers performed an initial pre-test to train both coders and make sure they were in agreement on coding procedures. Thirty-five of Leonardo DiCaprio's Instagram posts were examined in June of 2019 to familiarize the researchers with the codebook. After completing the pre-test, it was found that the researchers agreed upon similar themes within the sample examined and had developed agreement about how each individual Instagram post would be analyzed and coded.

Coding Procedures. Following the pre-test, the researchers continued with coding the (N=278) posts on Greta Thunberg's account. Over the course of two weeks, two coders were used in the study to go through each category in the codebook. Two coders were used to ensure that each post was viewed by more than one person in the study and that information was being communicated easily between both researchers. Data was securely stored in a password protected shared Google Drive online. Each post was looked at as objectively as possible to determine both the latent and manifest variables previously mentioned. Following coding these posts, researchers individually analyzed the data and incorporated it into the findings.

Findings

Latent Variable: Climate Change Frames

RQ1: Which of the climate change frames used by Greta Thunberg on Instagram receives the most engagement (likes, views)?

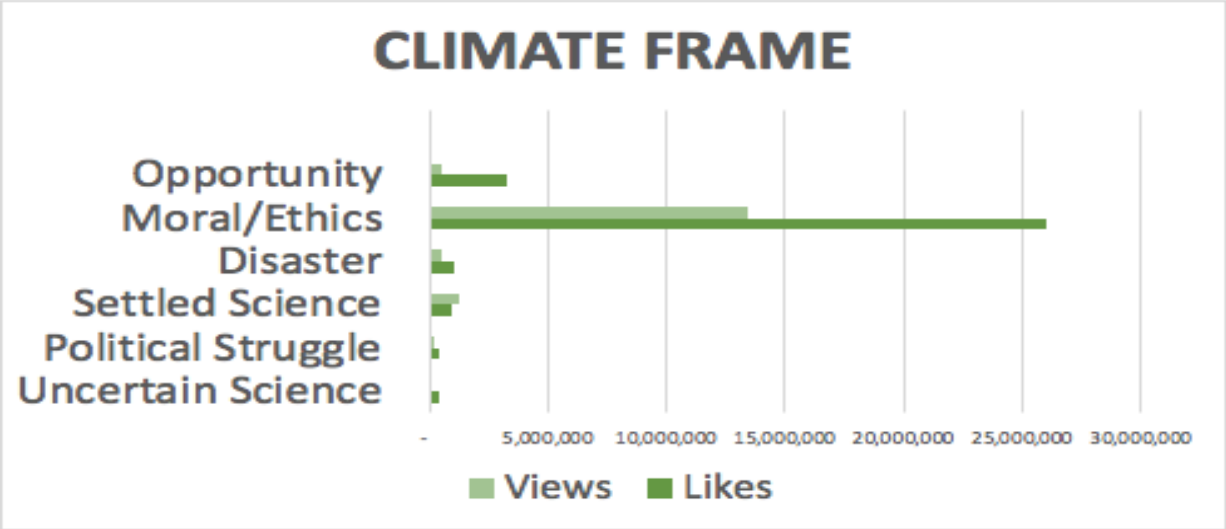

Figure 1: RQ1 Results - Climate Change Frame

The majority of the frames Greta used were a moral/ethics framing of the climate crisis (83%). The majority of her posts were about her weekly climate school strike, where did not attend school on Fridays and sat in front of the Swedish Parliament building with a sign written in Swedish that reads “Skolstrejk for Klimatet” meaning “School Strike for Climate” in English. These were coded as a “moral and ethics” frame because she often also provides additional reasoning behind why she is striking. Injustice, efficacy, identity and moral constructs are often strong predictors of engaging in collective action (Sabucedo, Dono, Alzate, & Seoane, 2018). 8% of her posts were framed as “opportunity”, such as posts that highlighted her speeches at high profile events, where she asked powerful politicians to use this as an opportunity to rethink our society. The other frames used, not as often, were disaster (3%) or settled science (5%). These posts often did not receive the same levels of engagement as her moral/ethics posts.

Latent Variable: Emotion Frames

RQ2: Which of the emotion frames used by Greta Thunberg on Instagram receives the most engagement (likes, views)?

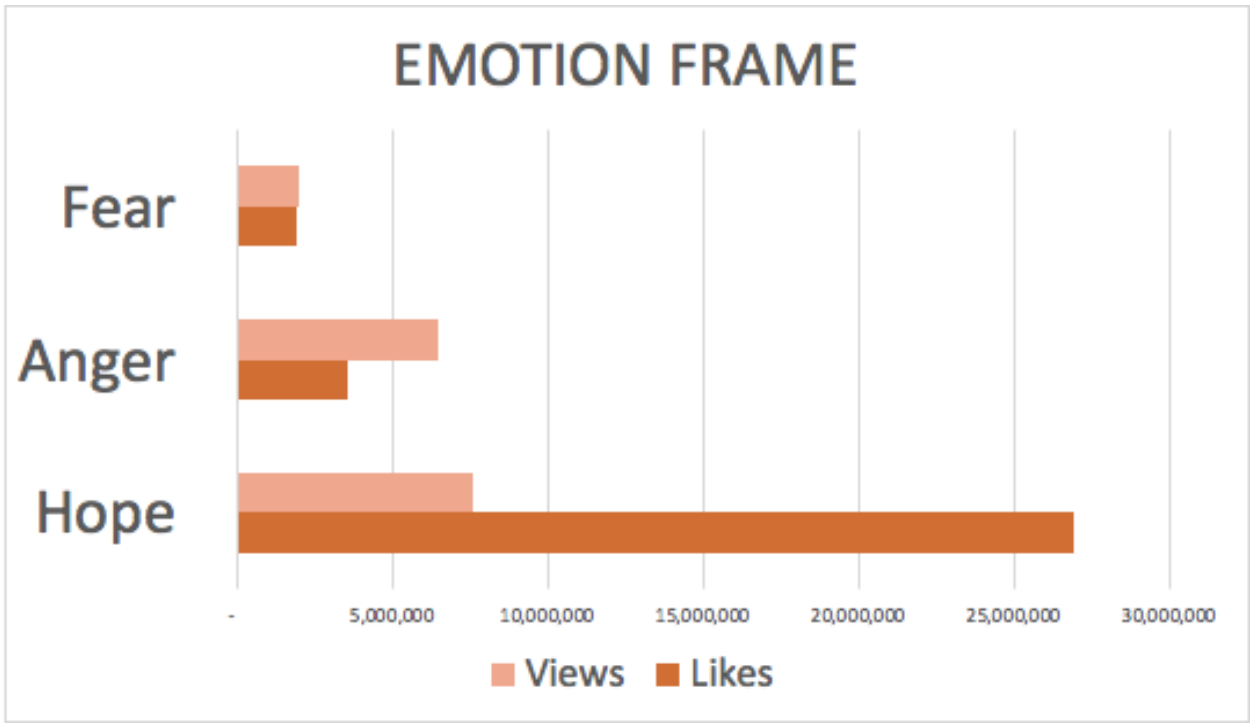

Figure 2: RQ2 Results - Emotion Frame

71% of Greta's posts used a hope frame, as opposed to fear (8%) or anger (21%). Her posts were considered hopeful because they focused on her individual actions and calls for collective action. She has the power to strike every week, so she does, and invites others to join her. When they join her, she celebrates this action directly by citing the number of people joining her, the number of countries and numbers in large crowds at events she is speaking at. She thanks those that support the movement. Her posts were often coded as hopeful because they did not focus on the challenges, effects or negative consequences of climate change, even though it's clear Greta believes that these are all real and serious. She focused on action to prevent climate change from happening, compared to focusing on fear appeals of effects that are already happening beyond one's control. Since she sparingly used fear or anger, they were used in a more impactful way when she did.

Latent Variable: Social Movement Frames

RQ3: Which of the social movement frames used by Greta Thunberg on Instagram receives the most engagement (likes, views)?

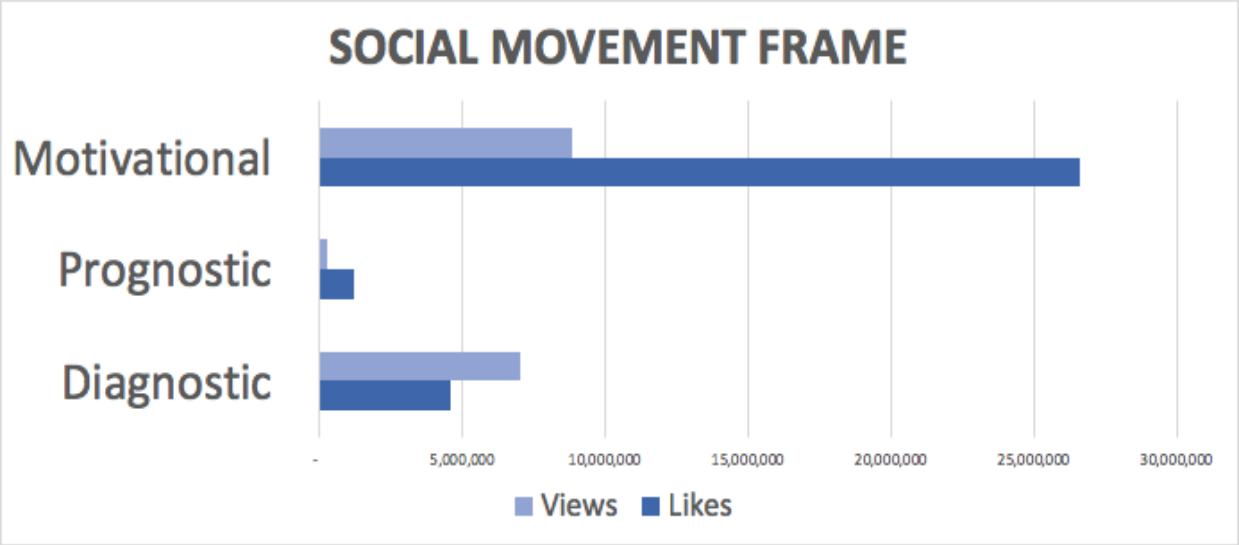

Figure 3: RQ3 Results - Social Movement Frame

The most used social movement frame was "collective" framing (73%), in which she often provides calls to action for people to join her cause. She less often diagnoses the problem (24%) or even directly attribute or blame a certain group/individual on the problem (3%) but instead focuses on the solutions and what others can do it help. When she does attribute the blame to other people, it's mainly adults who she said are the creators of the climate crisis and she follows it up with focusing on how every person needs to take action and make a difference. She consistently encourages others to join her at her protest sites with the phrase "everyone is welcome, everyone is needed." Her consistent, and persistent communication in her captions always includes others.

Manifest Characteristics RQ4: What other characteristics do her Instagram have?

Facial Expressions. The researchers coded for smiling, frowning or neutral facial expressions. Thunberg rarely smiles in her early Instagram posts, instead having a neutral or frowning expression (smiling = 14.8%, neutral = 83.3%, frowning = 1.9%). Thunberg starts to smile more in the second half of the Instagram feed perhaps as she gains more support, makes more friends or gains more media attention. Towards the second half Greta's posts beginning in April of 2019 she smiled much more frequently (around 50% of the time). *Number of people in photos.* Thunberg's posts are a mixture of her alone at certain protest locations, with celebrities (12.2%) or with a group of individuals at large global events. Towards the second half of her posts (in March of 2019) Greta's posts had group images much more frequently (83.3%). You can see this shift as the Fridays For Future movement builds over the course of a year. *Protest Sign.* The majority of Thunberg's posts showcase the weekly school strikes for the climate with her sign that says "Skolstrejk for Klimate." Her strike sign is present in a majority of posts (58%). She is strategic about when she includes her sign in content and when she doesn't. She is very consistent when she does, usually to indicate that she is doing a Friday strike. The strike sign is also usually featured in specific event posters as a symbol of the Friday School strike movement as found within some of the data in this analysis.

Caption. The majority of captions have minimal words. She only had a few reposts but most captions were written in first person, using her own voice. Her early Instagram posts were written in Swedish and as her cause gained momentum, she eventually switched over to solely writing posts in English. She occasionally incorporates humor and sometimes her tone is more

lighthearted. *Hashtags.* Main hashtags that he used used were #climatestrike #fridaysforfuture and #schoolstrike4climate. For her strikes, she uses these three hashtags very consistently. These three hashtags become the most commonly used to understand what Thunberg is advocating for. She never once uses the phrase "climate change" or uses the hashtag #climatechange, instead using phrases like #climatebreakdown or #climatejustice (which we did not code). *Call to Action.* She uses a call to action roughly more than half the time (54 %). She always makes an effort to say that anyone is welcome to join her when she protests on Fridays. Video posts from her speeches captured her call for action to join the movement and to question authority.

Discussion

Initially, Greta's Instagram posts focused on individual activism and her Friday climate strikes in Sweden. As the social movement began to build and her Instagram audience grew, she used her platform to stress the urgency of climate change action based on one's morals and ethics, using a hopeful call to action. She rarely posted personal photos, other than at the very beginning of her Instagram account. Overall, Greta is both persistent and consistent with the way she frames her climate action. She strongly relies on the moral/ethics, hope, and collective action frames to encourage others to join the movement. As her followers grow throughout the course of the posts analyzed for this study, she maintains a clear message of collective action being one's moral imperative and a hopeful event to patriciate in for both youth and adults globally. Based on the overall engagement with her posts and manifest characteristics, a clear narrative appears of how she successfully built a social movement, relying upon message framing, appealing to one's sense of hope, collective identity and action, and moral duty.

Study 2: Effects of Message Framing, Identity and Efficacy on Environmental Communication

Based on the most prominent frames for each category (climate change, emotions and social movements) found in Study 1, our Study 2 employs a pilot study experimental design to test these the most engaging frames in each category and how additional factors such as one's feelings of self-efficacy and environmental identity shape their attitude toward environmental communication practices. Methods, findings and a discussion are detailed below.

Environmental Communication Intention. There are many factors that help determine the environmental communication intention of a person. A person may go through many psychological processes and experiences in order to create both attitudes and behaviors. Measuring the degree to which people engage in these communication actions help scholars understand motivations and intentions to act favorably towards the environment (Kassing et al., 2010). To further understand the communication intention outlined by framing, identity, and self-efficacy, these relationships will be tested as the dependent variable in an experiment to try and understand the complexities of these relationships. The Environmental Communication Scale (Kassing et al., 2010) will be the main scale used to measure this construct.

Theoretical Model

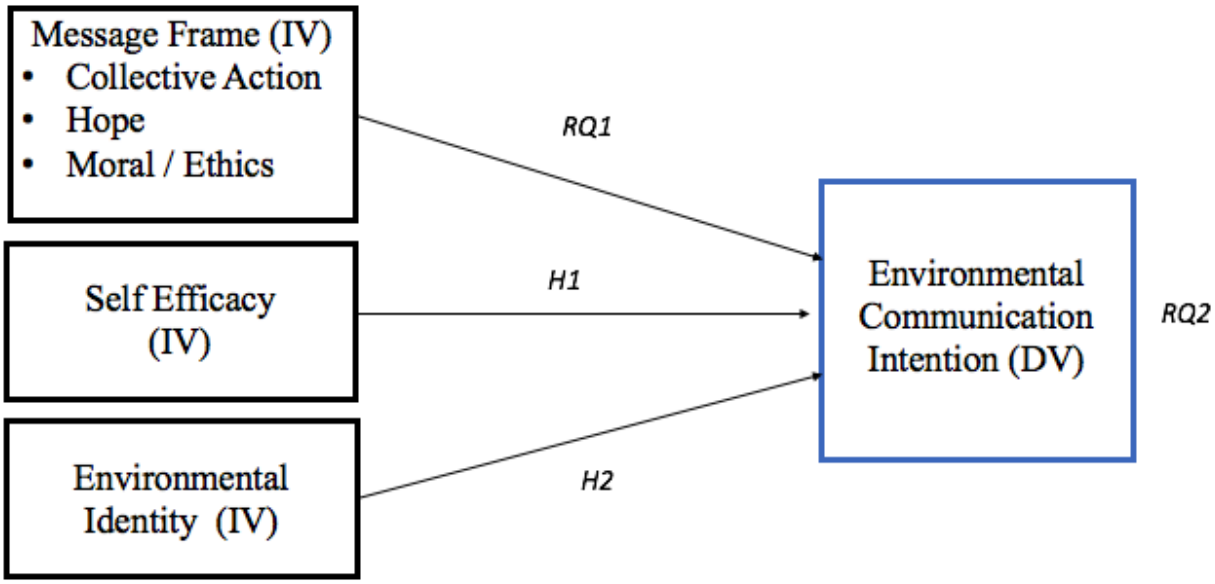

Figure 4: Theoretical Model, Study 2

Based on our research questions, the following research questions and hypotheses are posed:

- **RQ1:** Which of the three frames (collective action, hope, moral and ethics) most strongly predict one's likelihood to engagement in environmental communication?
- **RQ2:** Which of all the factors (message frame, self-efficacy and environmental identity) most strongly predict one's likelihood to engagement in environmental communication?
- **H1:** Those with higher self-efficacy will be more likely to engage in environmental communication.
- **H2:** Those with a stronger environmental identity will be more likely to engage in environmental communication.

Methods

Experimental Design and Procedures. To test the proposed hypotheses, Study 2 conducted a pilot study experiment with an embedded online survey through Qualtrics. The survey link was distributed through SONA with an extra credit incentive. This online experiment manipulated the message of an Instagram-style post to contain three frames; climate change, emotion and social movement frames based on the findings of Study 1. Two sets of questionnaires were administered to measure environmental identity and self-efficacy. Participants were then randomly assigned one of six stimuli. Subjects were then asked to complete an environmental communication questionnaire after viewing the stimuli. The data collection period lasted two weeks.

Participants and Recruitment. A total of 57 undergraduates at a large American Midwestern public university participated in the pilot study for extra credit and were recruited using SONA. Of the participants, the 1 incomplete response was removed from the final data set (N = 56). 60.7% (N = 34) of participants were female and 37.5% were male (N = 21). The average age of respondents was 20 years old and they ranged in age from 18 to 25, with 91% between 19-22. Among them, 76.8% identified as White 16.1% as Asian and 14.3% as Hispanic.

Stimuli Development. The six stimuli consisted of Instagram-style posts that reflected the three most effective frames used by in Study 1. Thunberg's name was removed from the account name as to not prime or create bias within each post. The stimuli used the same image, comments and number of likes. After considering the codebook, the researchers agreed to specific images that best represented the three frames used within the study to test which one would be the most effective.

Manipulation Check. A question was asked within the questionnaire to make sure the stimuli developed had the intended effects and generated significant differences. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statements dependent upon which stimuli they received: "The Instagram post I saw contained a message of [hope] / [collective action] / [moral and ethics]" and indicated using a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree). For each frame, the mean indicates that the majority of participants agreed: collective action (N= 18, *M = 5.89, SD = 1.41)* moral/ethics (N = 19, *M = 5.37, SD = 1.342)* and for hope (N = 20, *M = 5.25, SD = 1.41)*

Measurement

Independent Variables. The General Self Efficacy Scale used for this study was originally developed by Sherer et al. (1982) and treated as the independent variable for this study. This scale has a reliability score of .767. This scale asks general questions about a person's ability to believe that they can accomplish something in a certain area. An example of a question asked is "*If I can't get a job done the first time, I keep trying until I can*." The scale was adapted from 23 points to 5 points to be more concise for this study. Items were asked on a Likert scale from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5) *(M = 3.79, SD = 0.709)***.** The Environmental Identity Scale used for this study was originally created by Clayton (2003). This scale has a reliability score of .864. The scale asks participants questions about their various relationships with nature. An example of a question is "*In general, being a part of a natural environment is an important part of my self-image*". This scale was adapted to 12 points for conciseness. Items were asked on a five-point from "Not true of me at all" (1) to "Very true of me" (5) (*M = 3.56, SD = 0.727)*

Dependent Variable. The Environmental Communication Scale we used originally developed by Kassing et al. (2010). The scale asks questions about various communication actions a person might take to act favorably towards the environment. This 20-item scale asks various questions such as "*conversations about the environment can make a difference*." Items used a Likert scale from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5) *(M = 3.2, SD = .474).*

Data Analysis. All data was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. This study employed ANOVA and multiple regression tests to test the two research questions and two hypotheses, with message frame, environmental identity and self-efficacy as independent variables and environmental communication as the dependent variable.

REsults

RQ1: *Which of the three frames (collective action, hope, moral and ethics) most strongly predict one's likelihood to engagement in environmental communication?*

The collective action frame did not account for any of the variance [$F(1,54) = .000$, $p < 0.987$]. The moral and ethics frame accounted for 2% of the variance, [$F(2,53) = 0.40$, $p < 0.960$]. The hope frame was excluded from the model, as the beta weight was negative. Thus, the moral and ethics most strongly predicted, but the variance was not strong.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis in Predicting Environmental Communication

Variable	*B*	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Prediction of environmental communication				
Collective Action	.004	.002		
Moral and Ethics	.070	.045		
Hope	-.0.45			
R^2			.002	-.036

Note: *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient; β = standardized coefficient

RQ2: *Which of all the factors (message frame, self-efficacy and environmental identity) most strongly predict one's likelihood to engagement in environmental communication?*

All three factors in the model (message frame, self-efficacy and environmental identity) accounted for 29.6% of the variance. Environmental identity accounted for 32.1% of the variance, F (1,54) = 26.995, p < 0.000. The input of self-efficacy into the model decreased the total variance to 30.8%, F (2,53) = 13.250, p < 0.000. Lastly, messaging frames also decreased the model to 29.6% total explained variance, F (3,52) = 8,700, p < 0.000. Thus, environmental identity is the strongest overall predictor towards environmental communication intention.

H1: *Those with higher self-efficacy will be more likely to engage in environmental communication*. A one-way ANOVA found there was not significant effect of self-efficacy on environmental communication at the p < .05 level [*F (23,33) = .522, p= .946*].

H2: *Those with a stronger environmental identity will be more likely to engage in environmental communication.* A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare identity effect on environmental communication. There was a significant effect of identity on environmental communication at the p < .05 level [*F (29,27) = 2.493, p= .010)].* It was also found that environmental communication and environmental identity are significantly correlated *r* (57) = .572, p < .01.

Discussion

While the three frames of Study 2 proved to not be significant indicators of engagement in environmental communication, one's environmental identity did significantly predict environmental communication behaviors. It appears that a single Instagram post will likely not significantly alter behavior, but one's identification with that behavior or identification with the larger social movement, such as climate activism or other environmental causes, may be a stronger predictor of those actions. Based on Greta Thunberg's strong social movement and growing Instagram account, it seems as though part of the reason of her success in mobilizing her audience is that they feel a strong personal connection and identification with the issue of climate change. Surprisingly, self-efficacy was not a strong indicator of environmental communication in this study. Past research on climate and environmental behaviors shows that self-efficacy is an important factor that often predicts engagement in pro-environmental behaviors (Johnson et al., 2012; Roser-Renouf et al., 2014). This result could be due to a variety of factors, from using an older scale to measure this construct to the dependent variable of environmental communication not being strong enough to need efficacy to complete. Four of the five scale items were also written in a negative context which may have affected results.

Conclusion

Limitations. Some of the limitations of the first study are within the methods. Using a qualitative content analysis approach does not provide as strong of results as a quantitative approach with intercoder reliability would have yielded. The researchers coded through August 2019, but more recent events surrounding global youth strikes and Greta Thunberg's speeches at high profile events in the United States may change overall results. There are also limitations in coding for one media channel and with a single individual, making these results unique to Greta Thunberg as an activist and not applicable to the larger youth climate movement. There are still key lessons and communication tactics to be gleaned from her communication and framing strategy. As Study 2 was a pilot study, having a larger sample size in the main study will help researchers understand how the factors work together. While the stimuli had successful manipulation checks, more information is needed to know if each are successfully communicating each specific frame. These results showed that either self-efficacy is not the right construct to measure or that a more reliable and updated scale is needed. Lastly, measuring attitudes as the dependent variable instead of behaviors, especially in an experimental context might yield more significant results.

Future Areas of Study. These two studies provided interesting results on the communication strategies of Greta Thunberg and framing of the youth climate movement, as well as how identity and self-efficacy work towards predicting engagement in environmental communication. Going off of these results, there are many potential follow-up studies. With Greta's communication, comparing the frames of her in-person speeches to her social media content to see if she changes her framing strategy based on the medium would be insightful. Research on how youth and gender affect perceptions of climate activists and leaders in this social movement would also be interesting, as Greta is both young and a female. Comparing Greta's framing to other youth activist leaders or indigenous groups leaders to see if there are common themes or if they widely vary is another option. Within the experimental setting, testing stimuli of different ages and genders within images would add to this body of research. It would be good to integrate other independent variables as well, such as strength of belief in climate change, risk perceptions, attitudes towards activism and activists and prior knowledge to build a more holistic model and show key relationships between these variables and environmental behaviors.

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Enhancing Employee Commitment to Change through Uncertainty Reduction: The Role of Channel Selection and Communication Transparency

Linjuan Rita Men
University of Florida

Marlene Neill
Baylor University

Cen April Yue
University of Florida

Aniisu K Verghese
Sabre Corporation, India

Abstract

Through an online survey of 1,034 employees who have experienced an organizational planned change in the U.S., this study examines how organizations' uses of interpersonal and mediated communication channels are linked to perceived communication transparency during change, which in turn, influences employees' feeling of uncertainty and commitment to change.

Organizations worldwide face volatility and uncertainty as they navigate their businesses in a competitive environment. Global leaders are operating in an increasingly disrupted world. However, in a study by McKinsey, about 70 percent of complex, large-scale change programs fail to reach their stated goals. While multiple and complex factors are attributed to failures of change, one is the lack of effective change communication (Kotter, 1996). During change, effective internal communication acts as a glue which holds the organization together, streamlining and linking strategic and business processes for optimal performance (Goodman & Truss, 2004). The role of communication is to share information and create a sense of community among employees (Elving, 2005). Open communication helps staff express their thoughts on changes, appreciate the rationale for new ideas, and stay updated. Involving employees from the start can embed change sooner. Further, open and transparent change communication is considered critical in reducing uncertainty, which is cognitively and emotionally taxing for employees (Clampitt, Williams & Korenak, 2000).

Despite the diverse studies that explore the role of strategic communication in change management, a review of literature suggests that scholars may have ignored an important antecedent, the role of communication channels (Lewis, 2019). It is also undeniable that employee commitment to change and uncertainty reduction can be significantly impacted by how they perceive organization's communication, especially concerning openness and transparency. As far as the authors know, there is no empirical evidence confirming relationships between communication transparency and channel selection and employee commitment to change through uncertainty reduction.

Drawing on uncertainty reduction and media richness theories and building on prior research on change communication, we argue that employees' feeling of uncertainty at various levels – strategic, implementation and job related--can be influenced by transparent change communication, which is linked to the organizations' use of mediated and interpersonal channels. We also predict that employees' experience of reduced uncertainties during change can lead to their increased commitment to change. Given the paucity of empirical research in literature that indicates the importance of channel selection and transparent change communication, this study will empirically test the linkages among these constructs and address an important research gap in strategic communication and change management.

Literature Review

Organizational change has been defined as a strategic process that enables organizations "to adjust and behave differently to accommodate new contingencies, technologies, values, processes and personnel" (Seeger et al., 2005, p. 80). The success of organizational change initiatives depends on the degree to which employees accept the change (Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011). When employees believe in the merit of the organizational change and are emotionally and psychologically committed to it, they are more likely to engage in supportive behaviors. Recently, there has been a growing interest in change management to examine employees' responses to change (Bouckenooghe, 2010), including cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes such as openness to change (e.g., Yue, Men, & Ferguson, 2019), commitment to change (e.g. Neill, Men, & Yue, 2019), resistance to change (Piderit, 2000), and behavioral support for the change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Among these, commitment to change is arguable one of the key factors that represent employees' support for change initiatives (Armenakis, Harris, & Field, 1999) and has been empirically associated with perceived employee performance and change implementation success (Parish et al, 2007). Lacking

commitment by employees is proposed to be the most prevalent factor that contributes to the failure of change initiative (Conner & Patterson, 1982). Commitment to change is defined as "a force (mind-set) that binds an individual to a course of action deemed necessary for the successful implementation of a change initiative" (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002, p. 475). The study focused particularly on affective commitment to change, which is described as employees' emotional attachment to the change and addresses employees' belief in the value of the proposed change. Affective commitment to change is distinguishable from other types of commitment (e.g., continuance commitment and normative commitment), as it specifically refers to employee's desire to support a change and thus represents the highest level of commitment.

Organization Change and Uncertainty

One of the challenges during organization change is reducing employee uncertainty. Uncertainty is defined as "an individual's inability to predict something accurately" (Milliken, 1987, p. 136). Through a mixed methods study, Allen et al. (2007) identified three types of uncertainty in the context of organizational change: strategic, implementation and job-related. *Strategic* or *goal uncertainty* is related to understanding the reasons behind the change and impact on the future of the organization; *implementation uncertainty* is focused on the timeline and implementation process related to the change initiative; and *job-related uncertainty* is associated with the employee's workload, role and job security (Allen et al., 2007).

Employee feeling of uncertainty during organizational change can be due to a lack of information from senior leadership or information that is ambiguous or contradictory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). This leads to a role conflict, which can result in employee stress, dissatisfaction, and lower performance (Jimmieson & Terry, 1999). Even though prior studies have linked uncertainty to various types of psychological and job-related outcomes, few examined how uncertainty directly affects employees' change-related attitude. We argue that when employees feel uncertain about how the change will affect their job security, future prospects as well as the organizational vision and culture, they experience a lack of personal control over the change. As a result, their intrinsic desire to support the change will likely be low. In addition, researchers have linked internal locus of control to commitment to change. It was found that for employees who perceive high control over the change process, they are more likely to demonstrate affective commitment to change (Elias, 2009). Therefore, hypothesis 1 is proposed:

H1: Employee feeling of uncertainty during change is negatively associated with employee commitment to change.

Transparent Communication and Change Management

Rawlins (2008) defined transparent communication as having three important elements: substantial information, participation, and accountability. In practice, substantial information refers to issues of relevance, clarity, completeness, accuracy, reliability and verifiability of information. Regarding participation, Rawlins (2009) advocated that stakeholders, such as employees "must be invited to participate in identifying the information they need to make accurate decisions" (p. 75). He conceptualized accountability as the organization's willingness to share information that covers more than one side of a controversial issue or that may be damaging to the organization and admitting mistakes.

Uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) suggests that when employees experience uncertainty they seek information to reduce it, a means of coping. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) wrote that coping efforts can be either problem-focused or emotion-focused. *Problem-focused coping* involves addressing the problem at hand by identifying "options to

solve the problem, evaluating pros and cons of different options, and implementing steps to solve the problem"; and *emotion-focused coping* is focused on managing the emotional distress tied to the situation through "denial, venting of emotions, positive interpretation of events, to seeking out social support" (Jin et al., 2014, p. 71). One way that organizations can help employees cope is by communicating quality information about the change to aid employees in coping with the change (Bordia et al., 2004), which addresses the problem-focused coping need of employees.

There is abundant evidence from prior studies to support our hypotheses regarding the relationships between transparent communication, uncertainty, and affective commitment to change. First, it is empirically shown that communication that is timely, credible, and trustworthy facilities uncertainty reduction by providing employees with key information to deal with the change (Bordia et al., 2004a). Other scholars have argued that caring, supportive, and compassionate communication from direct managers as well as visionary communication from top leadership play a critical role in increasing employees' understanding of the change, reducing change-related uncertainty, and ultimately their resistance to change (Allen et al., 2007). Second, as an excellent feature of internal communication, transparent organizational communication can lead to employee trust, commitment, satisfaction (Men & Stacks, 2014) and perceived corporate reputation (Men, 2014b). However, the three key characteristics of transparent communication – substantial information, participation, and accountability – have not been holistically examined in the change context.

In summary, this study posits that transparent internal communication reduces uncertainty. Uncertainty arises because of the shortage, or ambiguity, of communication from the organization. The presence of informational transparency, featured by "truthful, substantial, and useful" information, can partially dispel the uncertainty. Meanwhile, the participation aspect enables communication to be two-way between management and employees, ensuring the given information is what employees want to know. Furthermore, communication characterized by accountability transmits the completeness of consequences — both positive and negative — of the change initiative. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Transparent communication is negatively associated with employees' feeling of uncertainty during change.

The role of communication in facilitating organizational change has long been acknowledged (Lewis & Seibold, 1998). Scholars have empirically shown that the quality of change communication is a key antecedent of employees' cognitive, affective, and behavioral change reactions, and they have associated a variety of managerial and organizational communication styles, structures, communication culture and climate, with openness to change, commitment to change, change resistance, and behavioral support for change (e.g., Elving, 2005; Neill et al., 2019; Yue et al., 2019). Following the same reasoning, this study posits that communication transparency enhances employees' understanding and control of the change, amplifies the legitimacy of the change, and may eventually lead to emotional attachment and an increased desire to be part of the change initiative. Thus, the following hypothesis is put forth:

H3: Transparent communication is positively associated with employee commitment to change.

Communication Channels and Change Management

Communication channel refers to "the means by which messages get from one individual to another" (Rogers, 1995, p. 18). Interpersonal channels and mediated channels are two broad classifications of communication channels. Interpersonal channels typically include face-to-face communication, such as one-on-one meetings, town hall meetings, department meetings, and site visits. Mediated channels use technology or mass media in communication, such as television,

videos, publications, e-mail, and social media (Men & Bowen, 2017). So far, the effectiveness of communication channels in change management has received scant attention (Lewis, 2019).

Organizational leadership and public relations professionals have a range of communication channels to select from to deliver change-related information and gather feedback and input from employees. Media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984) suggests that all these communication channels are not equal and that each channel can be evaluated based on the richness or "its information-carrying capacity" (Fulk & Collins-Jarvis, 2001, p. 628). Based on this theory, face-to-face communication is classified as rich media, due to its ability to transmit multiple signals including body language and tone of voice, the opportunity for immediate feedback from the receiver, the ability to tailor the message in real-time, and the ability to communicate in conversational language (Fulk & Collins-Jarvis, 2001; Men, 2014a). In contrast, print media such as newsletters or memos are considered lean media, and e-mail has been classified as moderate media (Byrne & LeMay, 2006). Men (2014a) classified social media channels such as blogs and social networking sites as rich media due to the potential for interactivity.

During organizational change, the selection of communication channels often depends on the outcome management hopes to achieve. While interpersonal channels are more suited to convey the complexity and risk of a change, mediated channels are more efficient in relaying general information that does not entail much complexity (Fidler & Johnson, 1984). Timmerman's (2003) model of media choice posits that one-to-many communication channels are preferred during the action phase of implementation because they are an efficient means to reach multiple recipients. When the change makes its transition to day-to-day routines, interpersonal communication channels such as group meetings and face-to-face communication are more likely to be used.

It is generally believed that multiple channels should be employed in communicating about change to increase message reinforcement (Clampitt, 2001). In this study, we argue that both mediated and interpersonal communication have their respective utility. First, mediated communication such as e-mail, intranet, television, newsletter, and the increasingly popular internal social media are quick ways for managers to deliver preplanned information. Furthermore, social media channels are becoming more interactive, dialogic, communal, thus enabling frequent two-way communication between employees and management. Even though mediated communication channels now afford an unprecedented level of interactivity and communality, it may not supplant the conventional interpersonal channels in change communication. Interpersonal communication simultaneously carries verbal and nonverbal cues, which facilitate message receivers' perception of care and genuineness from senders beyond pure information (Men & Bowen, 2017). The synchronicity embedded in face-to-face communication also allows for instant feedback, which aids in enhancing information transparency and reducing feeling of uncertainty. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Uses of mediated (H4a) and interpersonal communication channels (H4b) are positively associated with transparent communication during change.

H5: Uses of mediated (H5a) and interpersonal communication channels (H5b) are negatively associated with employee feeling of uncertainty during change.

Previously we hypothesized that the use of mediated and interpersonal communication is positively associated with transparent communication, and that transparent communication is negatively related to perception of uncertainty. In this process, transparent communication serves as a key mediator through which the effect of communication channels is palpable. Similarly,

Lewis (2019) has noted that the predictive power of communication channels on perceptions of change success is overshadowed by the quality of communication content, implying an indispensable role of communication transparency in linking communication channels and employees' positive reactions. Thus, our final hypothesis states:
H6: Transparent communication mediates the negative effect of use of mediated (H6a) and interpersonal communication channels (H6b) on employee feeling of uncertainty during change.

Method

In June 2018, we recruited 1,034 U.S. employees whose company had gone through a company-wide change in the past two years through Dynata, a global survey company with 1.5 million panel members in the U.S. Stratified and quota sampling methods were employed to ensure that the sample is representative of different age groups, gender, education, income, and types of industries, per U.S. Census data. Respondents reported a wide range of organizational changes experienced, including reorganization (16%), leadership change (14%), downsizing (12%), mergers and acquisitions (12%), new product lines (12%), and technology change (12%). Regarding participants' profile, there were 47% females and 53% males. The average age was 41 years. Most worked in a non-management position (38%), followed by middle-level management (31%), lower-level management (21%), and top management position (10%). More than half of participants had a bachelor's degree.

Measures

All key measurement items used Likert-type scales, ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7), or *never* (1) to *always* (7). *Transparent communication* was measured with three conceptual dimensions taken from Rawlins (2009): six items on participatory transparency ($\alpha = .93$), six items on informational transparency ($\alpha = .94$), and four items on accountability transparency ($\alpha = .90$). Regarding communication channels, participants were asked about the frequency their organizations utilize different channels to communicate about the change on a 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*) scale. Taken from Men (2014a), *interpersonal communication channels* include face-to-face employee meetings ($M = 4.90$), supervisory interpersonal communication ($M = 4.52$), and employee peer communication ($M = 4.46$). *Mediated communication channels* consist of print channels (e.g., memos, brochures, newsletters, reports, and posters) ($M = 4.13$), e-mail ($M = 5.10$), and intranet ($M = 4.05$). *Perceived uncertainty* has three indicators borrowed from Allen et al. (2007): job-related uncertainty (3 items, $\alpha = .84$); implementation-related uncertainty (3 items, $\alpha = .87$); and goal-related uncertainty (3 items, $\alpha = .87$). Finally, *affective commitment* was measured by five items taken from Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) ($\alpha = .83$).

Results

The proposed model was analyzed by employing two-step structural equation modeling analysis using the AMOS 25.0 software. The test of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model revealed satisfactory fit to the data: $\chi^2(20) = 125.51$ $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 6.28$, RMSEA = .07 (90% confidence interval: .06–.08), TLI = .97, and CFI = .98. The standardized factor loadings ranged from .74 to .96, suggesting a good construct validity of the measurement model. A second step evaluation of the structural model also revealed excellent data-model data: $\chi^2(22) = 127.16$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2/df = 5.78$, RMSEA = .06 (90% confidence interval [CI]=.05-.08), TLI = .991, and CFI = .997. Thus, the hypothesized model was retained as the final model (see Figure 2). Five out of the seven structural paths demonstrated significant results at the $p < .001$ level.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1 proposed the negative association between employee feeling of uncertainty during change and their level of affective commitment to change, which was strongly supported by the data, β = -.39, $p < .001$. Hypotheses 2 and 3 proposed the negative association between transparent organizational communication and employee feeling of uncertainty during change and the positive association between transparent communication and employee commitment to change. Both of these hypotheses were fully supported by the data. Transparent change communication from the organization reduced employee feelings of uncertainty (β = -.29, $p < .001$) and enhanced their affective commitment to change (β = .35, $p < .001$).

Hypothesis 4 proposed the positive influence of organizations' use of mediated communication (e.g., e-mail, print media, and intranet, H4a) and interpersonal communication (e.g., employee meetings, supervisory interpersonal communication, and employee peer communication, H4b) on employee perceptions of organizational transparent communication during change, which was confirmed by the data. In particular, organizations' use of interpersonal communication channels showed stronger effect on perceived communication transparency of the organization during change (β = .41, $p < .001$) than use of mediated communication channels (β = .24, $p < .001$).

Hypothesis 5 predicated negative effects of organizations' use of mediated communication channels (H5a) and interpersonal communication channels (H5b) on employee feeling of uncertainty. Surprisingly, both hypotheses were rejected by the data. In particular, use of mediated communication channels showed a small but significant positive effect on employee feeling of uncertainty, β = .09, $p < .05$ while the organizations' use of interpersonal channels showed non-significant direct effects on employees' feeling of uncertainty, due to the strong mediation effect of transparent communication (reported below).

Indirect (Mediation) Effects

Apart from hypothesis testing, a formal test of indirect effects using a bootstrap procedure (N = 5,000 samples) was conducted to further examine the mediation role of perceived transparent communication during change in the relationship between organizations' use of communication channels and employees' feeling of uncertainty. Results showed significant negative indirect effects in paths from the organization's use of interpersonal channels (β =-.12, p = .001[95% CI: -.16 to -.09]) and the organization's use of mediated channels during change (β =-.07, p = .001[95% CI: -.10 to -.05]) to employees' feeling of uncertainty via organizational transparent communication during change, supporting hypothesis 6. In other words, through enhancing perceived organizational transparency during change, the organizations' frequent use of interpersonal and mediated channels to communicate about change both indirectly reduced employee feeling of uncertainty during change.

Discussion and Conclusions

As an extended effort to examine the role of strategic communication in change management, the study explored how the organizations' selection of communication channels, mediated versus interpersonal, and the related organizational communication transparency influence employees' feeling of uncertainty during change and their commitment to change. Key findings are further discussed below followed by their implications for internal communication scholars, practitioners, change implementers, and organizational leaders.

The Role of Transparent Communication during Change

As a defining characteristic of excellent internal communication (Men & Bowen, 2017), transparent communication has been empirically associated with numerous organizational and

employee outcomes, such as employee trust, employee-organization relationships, internal reputation, and employee engagement (Jiang & Luo, 2018; Men, 2014 a, b; Rawlins, 2008; Yue et al., 2019). Particularly in the organizational change context, scholars have argued that openness and transparency are essential to building employee trust, combatting rumors, and reducing change-related anxiety (Yue et al., 2019). Likewise, the current study showed that transparent organizational communication during change, featured by substantial information, participation, and accountability, not only reduced employee uncertainty about change but also enhanced employees' affective commitment to change.

Given the well-documented roles of communication in successful change management (Lewis, 2019), these results are not unexpected. First, when organizations provide relevant change-related information in a timely, accurate, objective, substantial and complete manner, employees are more likely to be informed about the *what*, *why*, and *how* about the change. The Uncertainty Reduction Theory suggests that individuals who face uncertainty tend to seek information to reduce it, as a means of coping (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Added information resulted from transparent organizational communication during change, in this sense, can be instrumental in helping employees identify options of problem solving and cope with change (Bordia et al., 2004), leading to stronger sense of control. Second, as part of the transparent change communication efforts, organizations involve employees to identify the information they truly need and solicit their input, opinions and feedback in the change implementation process. When employees feel involved in and part of the change effort, they are more likely to commit to the initiative (Clampitt, 2001; Elias, 2009; Kotter, 1996). Third, transparent change communication highlights accountability. Employees are not only informed about the benefits of change but also see a clear, objective, and unbiased picture with regard to the downsides of change if any, and how benefits may outweigh risk. Such clarity and openness convey management confidence and help build employee trust, which further leads to their openness and commitment to change (Yue, et al., 2019). By showing the strong effects of transparent change communication on employee change attitudes, the study supported previous scholars' arguments that both information provision and quality matter for effective change communication (Allen et al., 2007)

Channel Matters: The Use of Interpersonal and Mediated Communication Channels

Another major contribution of the study is that it filled a research gap regarding the role of communication channels in change management (Lewis, 2019) by finding organizations' frequent use of mass mediated channels, such as newsletters, e-mail, and intranet, and interpersonal channels such as employee-meetings, supervisory interpersonal communications (i.e., group or one-on-one meetings) and peer interpersonal communications both helped foster communication transparency, despite the stronger impact of interpersonal channels than mediated channels. This finding reflects the notion that both one-way and two-way communications have a place when it comes to change communication (Clampitt 2001). Mass mediated channels such as e-mails, newsletters, and intranet, albeit limited by its ability to carry complex messages, non-verbal cues, convey emotions, and lack of immediacy and synchronicity, can reach a large audience. In addition, use of mediated channels allows for consistency of messaging and timing, which are important considerations during times of change. Results of this study showed that the more often these channels are used, the more change-related information is relayed, and the more informational transparency employees perceive. However, it is important to note that using mediated channels alone is not sufficient during change. Due to the one-way, downward, and lean features of most mediated channels, there's a lack of

opportunity for instant feedback, clarification, and discussions. As such, information overload (without clarification and discussion) could cause confusion, increasing employees' feeling of uncertainty.

This is when, the other type of commonly used channels, interpersonal channels should come in. Expanding previous literature (Lewis, 2006; Men, 2014), the study provided strong evidence for the effectiveness of interpersonal channels in fostering communication transparency and then uncertainty reduction. Simply, interpersonal channels, regardless of formal employee meetings, informal small-group discussions, or one-on-one meetings with supervisors or peers are "rich" channels that bear advantages of information immediacy, two-way information flow, instant feedback, and use of non-verbal cues. These characteristics are well suited for clarifying questions, communicating complex information, combating rumors, and management soliciting feedback and opinions from employees regarding change, which lead to perceived informational and participatory transparency. In particular, interpersonal communication with direct supervisors has been described as a filter, because they can explain the changes in a way that is relevant to employees and easier to understand (Allen et at., 2007). As aforementioned, experience of transparent communication, namely, employees being informed and involved, helps reduce employees' feeling of uncertainty.

Taken together, the study findings suggest that organizations' use of mediated and interpersonal channels both contribute to fostering communication transparency during change, which is an important indicator of quality change communication that, that in turn, reduces employees' feeling of uncertainty and boosts employee commitment to change. Interpersonal channels seem to play a more important role in this process than mediated channels. Highlighting the mediating effect of transparent communication in the relationship between organizations' use of communication channels and employee change attitudes, the study confirmed Lewis' (2019) argument that the predictive power of change communication channels on change success tend to be overshadowed by the quality of change communication.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings discussed above provide important implications for internal and change communication scholars, practitioners, and organizational leaders. From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the theorization of change communication by demonstrating the impact of communication channels and a particular communication strategy, transparent change communication, on employees' changed-related outcomes. The results provide new empirical evidence for the value of communication for effective change management. By showcasing the strong effects of transparent change communication in reducing employee feeling of uncertainty and enhancing employee commitment to change, the current study documented why communication transparency is an important feature of excellent change communication. The study also uncovered how communication channels and strategy work during change in influencing employee reactions by revealing the mediating effect of employees' feeling of uncertainty during change. While much has been discussed regarding how organizations should communicate during change in the literature, the mechanism that underlies the change communication process or explains how certain communication strategies or channels work or do not work has not been fully explored. Informed by uncertainty reduction theory and media richness theory, the study not only showed what communication channels and strategies work and how they interact, but also why they work in inducing positive employee reactions. With a particular emphasis on employees' perspective rather than the managers', the study also adds to the body of change communication literature regarding employees as active participants in the

process toward a co-created reality of change as opposed to passive message receivers. From a public relations perspective, the study extends the application of Rawlin's (2009) theorization of transparent communication to the change management context and demonstrated its effectiveness.

Implications for practice. The study's findings have several implications for effective change management and strategic internal communications. First, the results indicate that investing in mediated and interpersonal channels and communication transparency can increase commitment to change. Implications for leadership include encouraging frequent use of a variety of channels to communicate about change, with a particular focus on interpersonal channels. Achieving a healthy match between the organization's use of mediated and interpersonal channels during change can improve communication transparency. Due to the strong influence of interpersonal communication in this study, management and internal communication professionals should examine their communication programs to determine which interpersonal communication channels are effective and which ones should be enhanced or added. For example, there may be a need for additional direct supervisor training in how to communicate with employees during organizational change or leadership may need to create talking points for direct supervisors to use when discussing the change with their employees. Some organizations may have affinity groups or employee ambassador programs, which could help communicate important information during times of change. Other organizations may already have routine skip-level meetings, which allow for employees to meet with a supervisor a level above their direct supervisor. With training and talking points, direct supervisors will be more confident in addressing employee concerns and know when to seek additional information or assistance from leadership.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study has encountered several limitations that can be addressed in future research. First, instead of using a case-study approach which is commonly seen in change-related studies, we adopted a generalized survey which involved employees from a variety of organizations and industries whose companies had gone through a company-wide change. While such method increases the generalizability of the findings, it may lose sight of the nuances of the contexts (e.g., differences in the organizations, type of changes). Future research could cross-validate the model proposed in the current study by looking at a particular type of change (e.g., merger & acquisition, leadership change) in a single organizational context. Second, the data of the study were generated from only the employees' perspective. Although this is valuable in evaluating the effectiveness of communication channels and strategies from the audiences' standpoint, having the change/communication managers or organizational leaders' perspectives included could provide a more complete and comprehensive view of how the process works. Finally, while this study provided new insights regarding the impact of transparent communication and channel selection on employee commitment to organizational change, there are additional, and more specific factors that should be considered. For instance, future research could examine the different influences of interpersonal communication channels (e.g., company meetings, direct supervisor, peer-to-peer) as each relates to uncertainty reduction in the context of change management.

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Crisis and Risk Preparation: An Evidence Based Model for Communication

David Michaelson
Jennifer Clark
Stephan Merkens
Kevin Cleary
Teneo

Abstract

A review of the literature on preparedness for a crisis requiring a public relations response finds a common theme of the need for advance preparation in anticipation of a crisis based on the level of likely risk. The challenge for communication professionals is identifying which risk preparedness measures are essential and prioritizing crisis preparations that are most likely to result in successful outcomes in the event a crisis communication plan needs to be implemented. To answer this question, a study was conducted that evaluated 69 sites of a global industrial manufacturer to determine which of the company's sites needed to be prioritized for crisis communication training, resources, and support. The study consisted of an online questionnaire that assessed each location for the presence of specific operational risks (*risk score*) and if identifiable procedures were in place in the event an operational risk occurred at a specific location (*preparedness score*). An analysis of the findings was conducted that determined which procedures provided the greatest contribution to effective crisis preparation. Recommendations include procedures that are most essential for effective risk preparation.

Keywords: crisis, crisis communication risk, risk preparation, preparedness, reputation, vulnerability

"Everybody has a plan 'til they get punched in the mouth" (Tyson, 1987).

Mike Tyson

Introduction

Since the dawn of professionalized public relations in the early 20th century, responding to crises and risk mitigation have been core functions of corporate communicators. Communicators are praised for helping to resolve crises and are just as likely to be vilified when a crisis results in lasting damage to a brand or reputation. It seems for every Tylenol[1] there is equally likely to be a Deepwater Horizon[2] or Wells Fargo[3]. While the cause and scope of crises vary considerably, each has the potential to make a company appear heroic or be vilified in the court of public opinion.

Risk communication has been described by the National Research Council as "an interactive process of exchange of information and opinion about individuals, groups and institutions" (National Research Council, 1989, p. 2). A review of the literature on preparedness for a crisis requiring a public relations response finds a common theme of needing preparation in advance of any crisis based on likely risks determined by environmental scanning. Accordingly, most of the recommendations for advance preparation focus on the need to have a plan in place incorporating systematic scanning that includes careful monitoring of an organization's internal and external environments for detecting signs of threat that may influence threats or risks to that organization (Business Dictionary, n.d.).

Preparation also includes structural approaches to mitigate crisis: who is responsible for the response, whom to contact in the event of a crisis, how to respond when a crisis occurs, and training to assure the plan is effective in meeting its objectives as part of this information exchange process. According to Lerbinbger (1997), these crises can be categorized into eight distinct types: natural disasters, technological crisis, confrontations, malevolence, organizational misdeeds, workplace violence, rumors, terrorist attacks and man-made disasters (Lerbinger, 1997).

The focus of recommendations is most often placed on operational crises where there is "some threat to public safety and/or stakeholder welfare" (Coombs W. T., 2014, p. 1). However, crises can also be reputational. While reputational crises, as Coombs notes, "are far less likely to produce the same level of public safety or stakeholder welfare concerns" (2014, p. 1), this type of crisis is commonly a direct outcome of how an operational crisis is managed. A primary example of the impact of an operational crisis on reputation is the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon accident where BP's reputation was severely impacted as a result of their operational procedures and how the crisis was managed.[4]

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[1] The Tylenol (McNeil Labs/Johnson & Johnson) crisis took place in 1982. Seven people in the Chicago area died after ingesting Extra Strength Tylenol capsules that had been contaminated with potassium cyanide. This incident was the first known case of death caused by deliberate product tampering. (ChemEurope.com, n.d.)

[2] "The Deepwater Horizon oil spill (also referred to as the BP oil spill/leak, the BP oil disaster, the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, and the Macondo blowout) is an industrial disaster that began on April 20, 2010, in the Gulf of Mexico on the BP-operated Macondo Prospect, considered to be the largest marine oil spill in the history of the petroleum industry" (Deepwater Horizon oil spill, 2019)

[3] "The US bank made history [in 2016] after it fired more than 5,300 bankers and … forced two former executives to return $75 million in compensation – the largest in banking history – over the creation of two million fake banking and credit card accounts. Employees moved funds from existing customer accounts into newly created ones without permission to meet high sales expectations. Customers were then charged for insufficient funds or overdraft fees while bank employees also si ned people up for credit cards, racking up nearly a half million dollars in fees." (The top 10 PR disasters in history, 2017)

[4] "On September 5, 2014, a federal judge ruled that BP was 'grossly negligent.' The company was fined a record $18 billion under the Clean Water Act. The court ruled that BP repeatedly cut corners to boost profits." (Amadeo, 2019)

There is likely little or no disagreement among communication professionals that each of the stages recommended is essential in contributing to the successful implementation of a crisis communication program. While it is axiomatic that you "[d]on't wait until you are in a crisis to come up with a crisis plan,"[5] it does not mean that just because a plan is prepared that it will be effective in mitigating risk or, at a minimum, communicating vital information. The challenge for communication professionals is identifying which risk preparations are essential and prioritizing crisis preparations that are most likely to result in successful outcomes in the event a crisis communication plan needs to be implemented with the understanding that the specific role of public relations and corporate communication during a crisis or in preparing for that risk is "to strategically defend and explain the organization's position in the face of crisis-induced criticism, threat, and uncertainty" (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005, p. 46).

Literature Review on Crisis Communication and Response

One of the most comprehensive discussions of preparation in the event of a crisis is the 2005 work of Barbara Reynolds and Matthew Seeger (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). In that article and others, the authors describe a model known as "crisis and emergency risk communication" or CERC (p. 43). A central principle of the approach discussed by Reynolds and Seeger "is grounded in efforts to strategically manage and frame public perceptions of an event so that harm is reduced for both the organization and stakeholders" (p. 46). In a crisis, these communication efforts focus on informing key stakeholder groups about essential information rather than the more common model of using communication for persuasion or manipulation[6] that is commonly associated with the day-to-day practice of public relations (p. 48).

Similar discussion on approaches to managing crisis and risk communication is found in the work of W. Timothy Coombs (1995) (1999) (2014) (2015) and Matthew Seeger, et. al. (1998) (2002a) (2002b) (2003) as well as in thousands of professional and scholarly publications that discuss crisis communication planning, response and risk management. [7]

In 2014, Coombs outlined what he described as "the best research-based evidence from crisis communication research" (p. 6). In that article Coombs lists six specific "research-based" procedures (p. 6):

1. If possible, release information about a crisis before it is reported in tradition[al] (sic) or digital media.
2. Report information about a crisis on the organization's online communication channels. Stakeholders depending on social media for news are likely to learn about the crisis from the organization's social media rather than traditional media providing another opportunity to steal thunder.

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[5] Dr. Phil McGraw cited from Brainy Quote (McGraw, n.d.)

[6] "To create and to change public opinion it is necessary to understand human motives, to know what special interests are represented by a given population, and to realize the function and limitations of the physical organs of approach to the public, such as the radio, the platform, the movie, the letter, the newspaper, etc. If the general principles of swaying public opinion are understood, a technique can be developed which, with the correct appraisal of the specific problem and the specific audience, can and has been used effectively in such widely different situations as changing the attitudes of whites toward Negroes in America, changing the buying habits of American women from felt hats to velvet, silk, and straw hats, changing the impression which the American electorate has of its President, introducing new musical instruments, and a variety of others." (Bernays, 1928, p. Abstract)

[7] A search on the website of the Institute for Public Relations on July 12, 2019 resulted in approximately 250 articles, essays and commentaries on crisis and crisis communication. https://instituteforpr.org/page/1/?s=crisis. A search on Google Scholar for "crisis communication case studies" on August 12, 2019 generated 3,160,000 results https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C33&q=crisis+communication+case+studies&oq=crisis+communication+

3. Whenever there are victims or potential victims, immediately tell people how to protect themselves physically from the crisis.
4. Whenever there are victims or potential victims, immediately provide people with information and actions designed to help them cope psychologically with the crisis. This would include details about the crisis event, expressions of sympathy, corrective action, and counseling.
5. Organizations recover reputations and stock prices quicker when they communicate aggressively *(frequently and through many channels)* than when they communicate passively *(release very little information)*.
6. Denial should only be used when an organization faces a rumor or misinformation about the crisis.

There is little doubt about the value of applying these recommendations, as well as others, in the event a crisis occurs. The observational and historical research used to develop these procedures from numerous case histories is critical in understanding how crises develop, evolve, and resolve. Each of these sources are, for the most part, thoughtful and articulate discussions of what is often referred to as a "best practices"[8] approach that are supported with extensive case histories documented with examples demonstrating success and failure. However, despite the *prima facie* value of these recommended procedures, there is no evidence that statistically demonstrates that applying these procedures ensures *improved* outcomes in the event of a crisis.

It is not our intention to criticize prior research or recommend alternative procedures on crisis response. For the most part, we concur with the findings and recommendations in the multitude of studies and articles on the subject. However, despite the extensive insights and recommendations that have been published in the professional and academic literature, there still exists a significant knowledge gap in this subject. This gap is not related to recommended responses to an actual crisis. Instead the knowledge gap is in the *prioritization* of specific preventative or preparatory actions that can minimize or, at a minimum, mitigate potential escalation of a controllable event to a crisis where damage – *primarily operational but also reputational* – to a company or organization in the event an unforeseen crisis occurs.

Identifying Preventative or Preparatory Actions

In a 2008 article, Carmeli and Schaubroeck note that "…learning from failures is an important facilitator of preparedness for both present and prospective crises" (p. 177). However, the authors note that "… crisis experience and an industry's technological risk were not significantly related to crisis-preparedness…" (p. 177). Experience with and lessons learned from crises, which often includes *failure* as part of the overall experience, has significantly contributed to communicators' overall knowledge about managing crisis communication. Nonetheless, and in spite of this extensive *body of knowledge*, there remains a dearth of statistically verified information that demonstrates how this knowledge can be systematically applied to specific risks that assures appropriate preventative actions are taken and in turn contribute to preferred outcomes in the event a crisis occurs.

Research Questions

To better understand this knowledge gap and to determine which actions should be taken by companies as part of their crisis communication preparations, the following research questions were asked:

[8] "Best practices are simply the best way to perform a business process. They are the means by which leading companies achieve top performance, and they serve as goals for other companies that are striving for excellence." (PriceWaterhouse Coopers, n.d.)

RQ1: What risks are companies vulnerable to that can lead to a crisis? This includes understanding how risks vary by geography and type of facility.

RQ2: How well prepared are companies in the event a crisis occurs? Factors for consideration include protocols to be followed in the event of crisis, communication, and training.

RQ3: Which preparations are most essential in anticipation of a crisis occurring? Determining preparations that are most appropriate and commensurate with the level of risk.

Research Method

To answer these questions, a study was conducted that evaluated 69 sites of a global industrial manufacturer to determine which of the company's sites needed to be prioritized for crisis communication training, resources, and support. The study consisted of an online questionnaire that assessed each location for the presence of specific operational risks and if identifiable procedures were in place in the event an operational risk occurred at a specific location.

The question areas for the study included:

- Type of facility (e.g., manufacturing, administrative, research and development, etc.)
- Standard risk assessment classification of each site
- Proximity to population centers and sensitive environmental areas
- Level of potential risk by type (e.g., transportation, terror, natural disaster, cyber, etc.)
- Areas of greatest concern at each site
- Past crisis at the site
- Communication preparation in the event of a crisis
- Communication procedures included in crisis coverage at each site
- Frequency of crisis communication training exercises
- Access to training and crisis communication readiness materials
- Self-evaluation on crisis communication preparedness at each site
- Social media capabilities and utilization

Survey respondents were the senior most communication professional at each location who had direct responsibility for crisis communication at each site. Respondents in Europe and North America were asked to complete one evaluation for each site under their supervision. Respondents in Latin America, India, Middle East, Africa, and Asia were asked to complete a survey for the primary site under their responsibility. The first phase of the study was conducted in Europe in September 2017 and served as a pilot study. Adjustments were made to the questionnaire for the remainder of the data collection that reflect feedback from respondents and added clarity to the questions. The remainder of the study was conducted separately in the other regions between April 2018 and October 2018. Because this study includes a high proportion of all the company's facilities, there is only a minimal level of sampling error that can be ascribed to this research.

The geographic distribution of responses is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Geographic Distribution of Survey Responses

Region	Number of Responses	Countries	Types of Sites	Data Collection Period

Europe *(pilot)*	27	• France • Germany • Switzerland • Spain • Portugal • United Kingdom	• Manufacturing • Administrative • Research & Development	September 2017
North America	23	• United States • Canada	• Manufacturing • Administrative	April 2018
Latin America	7	• Mexico • Colombia • Brazil • Argentina	• Manufacturing • Administrative	July 2018
India, Middle East & Africa	6	• United Arab Emirates (UAE) • Turkey • India • Other African Locations	• Manufacturing • Administrative • Laboratory	September 2018
Asia Pacific	6	• China • Japan • Korea • Thailand • Vietnam	• Manufacturing • Administrative • Laboratory • Research & Development	October 2018
Total Responses	**69**			

Individual Site Risk and Crisis Preparedness Evaluation Method

Key data points from the survey were used to develop a *Risk Score* and *Preparedness Score* for each of the 69 sites that participated in this study.

Risk Score

The *Risk Score* takes into consideration two elements:

- An inventory of possible external impacts from risks that apply to each site, and
- Potential of specific risks occurring at each site

The external impacts inventoried are those that could occur at a specific site and result in or contribute to a crisis. These possible impacts include populations in proximity to the site, groundwater contamination, other environmental impacts, surrounding infrastructure, and neighboring industries. These risks were identified with input from executives with global responsibility management at the company whose sites were surveyed, as well as a review of

risks associated with that specific manufacturing industry. One point was assigned for each potential external impact for a maximum of five points (see Table 2).

Table 2: Risks Applicable to Each Site

. Which of the following risks apply to this site? *Please select all that apply.*	Points Scored
a. Near a major population center	1
b. Risk of groundwater contamination	1
c. Proximity to key infrastructure (e.g., port, key motorways, energy infrastructure, etc.)	1
d. Sensitive or protected environmental area	1
e. Proximity to neighboring industries that pose risk	1
f. Some other response	0
Range of Scores	**0 to 5**

The potential impact of specific risks occurring at each site was measured on a six-point scale of zero (0) to five (5) (question 4) where zero is "no risk," one is a "minor risk," and five is a "major risk". These risks include site emergencies involving spills, leaks and emissions, production and transportation issues, safety, and security, as well as cyber and terrorist threats. The extent of possible risks to a site (see Table 3) was averaged to generate an overall degree of risk that was applicable to each site. Each of these risks were identified with input from executives with global responsibility management at the company whose sites were surveyed, as well as a review of risks associated with that specific manufacturing industry. This averaged score ranges from zero (0) to five (5) with zero indicating "no risk" and 5 indicating "maximum risk" (see Table 3).

Table 3: Levels of Risk Scenarios Applicable to Each Site

. Please indicate the level of risk each of the following scenarios poses to this particular site using the following scale where 5 is a Major Risk and 1 is a Minor Risk.	Points Scored
a. Site emergency (e.g., injury / fatality / leakage / spills / emissions on site)	5, *Major Risk* 4, 3, 2, 1, *Minor* 0 *No*
b. Transportation emergency (i.e., incidents during transport to/from site)	5, *Major Risk* 4, 3, 2, 1, *Minor* 0 *No*
c. Production and/or business specific issues (e.g., flaring, product contamination, supply chain issues, force majeure)	5, *Major Risk* 4, 3, 2, 1, *Minor* 0 *No*
d. Regulatory and/or compliance issues	5, *Major Risk* 4, 3, 2, 1, *Minor* 0 *No*

e.	Legacy issues (that play out at the site / country level)	5, *Major Risk*	4,	3,	2,	1, *Minor*	0 *No*
f.	Terror attacks	5, *Major Risk*	4,	3,	2,	1, *Minor*	0 *No*
g.	Cyber attacks	5, *Major Risk*	4,	3,	2,	1, *Minor*	0 *No*
h.	Safety and security (risks to employees / family members, visitors)	5, *Major Risk*	4,	3,	2,	1, *Minor*	0 *No*
i.	Geopolitical risks, including political concerns in the public eye (local, regulatory, global) that could impact company	5, *Major Risk*	4,	3,	2,	1, *Minor*	0 *No*
j.	Potential for natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, earthquakes, etc.)	5, *Major Risk*	4,	3,	2,	1, *Minor*	0 *No*
	Range of Scores	**0 to 5**					

Summary responses each of these question sequences *(risks applicable to each site and overall levels of risk scenarios applicable to each site)* were added together to achieve an overall *Risk Score* that had a possible range of zero (0) or "no risk" to ten (10) or highest possible risk for each site using the following formula:

$$\textbf{Risk Score} = \Sigma Q3a\text{-}f + \bar{x}Q4a\text{-}j$$

This score ranged from zero (0) *(no risk)* to ten (10) *(highest risk)*.

Preparedness Score

The *Preparedness Score* is based on questions related to the site's crisis coverage plan, frequency of training exercises, and access to training and crisis readiness materials. The preparedness score takes three elements into consideration:

- Frequency of crisis management training exercises – on site and regionally
- Quality of access to crisis preparedness materials
- Presence of established protocols if crisis occurs outside of normal business hours

Frequency of participation in crisis management training exercises was measured for both on-site and regional training on a five-point scale ranging from "never" (1) to "monthly or more frequently (5) (see Table 5). The frequency of participation from on-site and regional training was averaged to generate a level of training frequency that was applicable to each site. This averaged score ranges from one (1) to five (5) with 1 indicating no training and 5 indicating monthly or more frequently.[9]

Table 5: Frequency of Participation in Training Exercises

[9] "Never" and "less than annually" are qualitatively distinct from annually to monthly or more and in future studies this scale will be adjusted from the current ordinal scale to something more like an interval scale that reflects actual time periods used for training exercises.

Q11 How often does the crisis communications focal point or team participate in crisis management training exercises?	Monthly or more frequently	Quarterly	Annually	Less frequent than annually	Never
a. On-site level	5	4	3	2	1
b. Regional level	5	4	3	2	1
Range of Scores			**1 to 5**		

Quality of access to crisis preparedness materials was also measured on a five-point scale ranging from "poor" (1) to "excellent" (5). These protocols included key contact information, escalation protocols and the availability of relevant basic information in the event of a crisis. Each of these protocols were identified with input from executives with global responsibility management at the company whose sites were surveyed as well as a review of communication protocols associated with effective crisis communication.

The quality of access to crisis readiness materials was averaged to generate a "quality of access" score that was applicable to each site (see Table 6). This averaged score ranges from one (1) to five (5) with one indicating "poor" access and 5 indicating "excellent" access.

Table 6: Access to Training and Crisis Readiness Materials

Q12 How would you rate your team's access to the following types of training materials and crisis readiness materials?	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
a. Templates in local language(s)	5	4	3	2	1
b. Local emergency response contact info	5	4	3	2	1
c. Local stakeholder contact info (e.g., mayors, representatives, etc.)	5	4	3	2	1
d. Dark site template and activation capabilities	5	4	3	2	1
e. Internal escalation and information sharing protocols	5	4	3	2	1
f. Basic information about site's function (types of materials on site, etc.) that might be relevant for external audiences in a crisis	5	4	3	2	1
Range of Scores			**1 to 5**		

The presence of established protocols in the event a crisis occurs outside of normal business hours was an inventory of the presence or absence of specific protocols that should be in place for key points of contact in the event of a crisis occurs during this time frame (see Table 7).

Each protocol was assigned a weight based on the overall contribution of each of these protocols in assuring that communication in the event of a crisis was properly implemented. The scores ranged from zero (0) where no protocols were in place to one (1) where all recommended protocols were implemented, yielding a weighted score for each site. Each of these protocols and its associated weight were identified with input from executives with global responsibility management at the company whose sites were surveyed as well as a review of communication protocols associated with effective crisis communication.

Table 7: Items Included in Crisis Coverage Plans

. Which of the following are included in your crisis coverage plan for this site outside of normal office hours? *Please select all that apply for crisis communications key point of contact.*	Points Scored
a. Key point of contact responsible for managing crisis communications for crisis situations	.20
b. Out-of-office email status with crisis communications contact information	.05
c. Established, written crisis response protocols available to those covering	.20
d. Staff rotation schedule for coverage outside of office hours	.05
e. Out-of-office hours mobilization plan / protocol for crisis communications focal points	.15
f. Access to key crisis communications resources	.20
g. Access to local agency support if required	.15
h. None of these	0
Range of Scores	**0 to 1**

Summary responses from question sequences on frequency of training *(Q11)* and quality of access to materials *(Q12)* were added and were multiplied by the score generated for the presence of established protocols outside of normal business hours *(Q10)* as the degree of presence or absence of these procedures is essential to overall preparedness. This resulted in an overall preparedness score for each site using the following formula:

Preparedness Score = ($\bar{x}$Q11a-b +$\bar{x}$Q12a-f) * ΣQ10a-h[10]

This score ranged from zero (0) *(no preparedness)* to ten (10) *(high preparedness)*.[11]

Findings from the Study

Four central findings emerged from this study:

1. **A notable gap existed between *risk levels* and *site preparedness* across the company**.

Overall levels of risk across all regions and all types of facilities was 4.9 on a scale of zero (0) to ten (10). By contrast, overall levels of preparation for this risk was 3.5 on the same zero to ten scale. Based on the calculations associated with risk and with preparation developed for this study, an evident shortfall gap exists between the risks facing the company across sites and levels of preparation required in the event a crisis precipitated by these risks (see Figure 1).

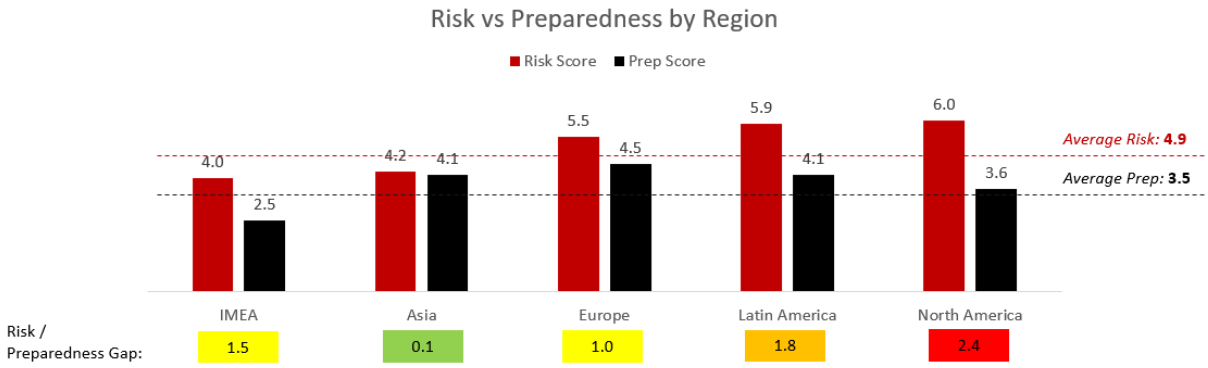
The gap between risk and preparation was larger at North American operations of the company where the shortfall gap between risks faced and preparation in the event a crisis occurred was 2.4. Asian facilities, by comparison, were virtually at parity in their levels of risk

[10] Scoring calculations in the pilot phase of the research that were conducted in Europe differed from the other regions but were calculated on the same zero (0) to ten (10) scale.

[11] The likelihood of a "zero" score is limited as the only opportunity to get a "zero" is not to have any items included in a site's crisis plan (Q10).

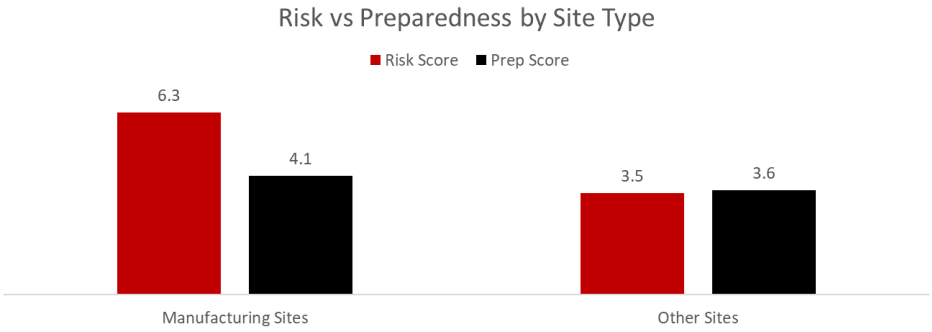
and preparation with an average risk level of 4.2 and an average preparation level of 4.1. IMEA[12] and Latin American operations also showed large gaps between levels of risk and levels of preparation, with regions having a shortfall gap in preparation of 1.5 and 1.8, respectively. This was particularly critical in Latin America where the overall self-reported level of risk was approximately the same as North American (5.9). While European operations also reported relatively higher levels of risk (5.5), their overall levels of preparation were higher with an average shortfall between risk and preparation of 1.0.

Figure 1: Risk Score vs. Preparedness Score by Region



As expected, manufacturing facilities had a higher level of risk with a risk score of 6.3 (see Figure 2). Accordingly, manufacturing sites were consistently the least prepared relative to these sites potential exposure to risk in the event of crisis with an average preparedness score of 4.1. While preparation scores were considerably lower for other types of facilities (3.6 compared to 4.1 for manufacturing), the corresponding risk for non-manufacturing sites was also lower (3.5 vs. 6.3 for manufacturing) resulting in parity for risk and preparation for non-manufacturing sites and a shortfall gap between risk and preparation of 2.2 for manufacturing facilities. This is particularly important as the potential exposure to risk at a manufacturing facility is considerably higher than in a sales or administrative facility. However, many administrative facilities were also underprepared in the event of a crisis.

Figure 2: Risk Score vs. Preparedness Score by Facility Type

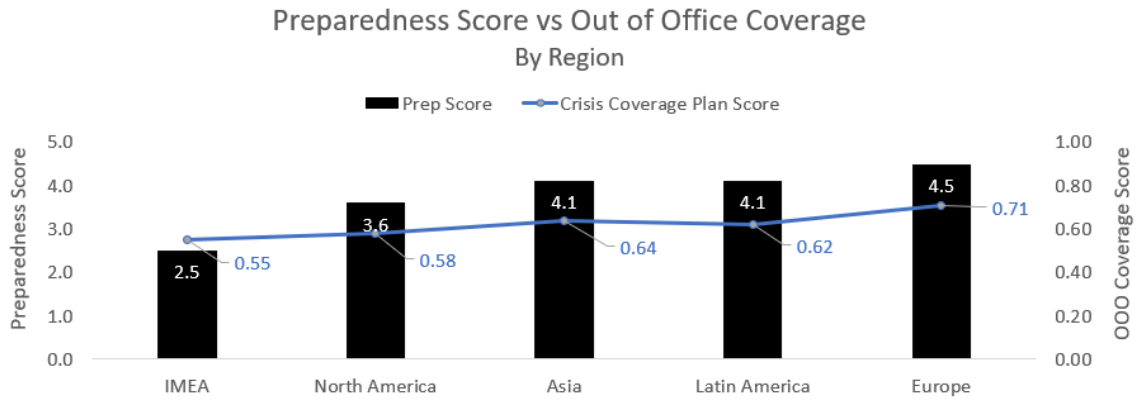


2. **A driver of low risk preparedness at company facilities was a lack of a comprehensive *crisis coverage plan* <u>outside</u> of normal office hours.**

[12] India, Middle East, and Africa

Facilities with lower overall preparedness were less likely to have policies or procedures in place for out-of-office hours coverage (see Figure 3). This trend is best demonstrated by the variation in preparation scores by region.

Figure 3: Preparedness Score vs. Out-of-Office Coverage by Region



Those regions with the lowest preparedness scores – IMEA and North America -- also had lower levels of out-of-office crisis coverage. In IMEA, the mean out-of-office coverage score was 0.55 on a scale of 0 to 1.0 where 0 is the lowest possible score with an overall crisis preparedness score average of 2.5. Out-of-office coverage scores in North America showed a similar pattern where the mean out-of-office coverage score was 0.58 and the crisis preparedness score was 3.6.

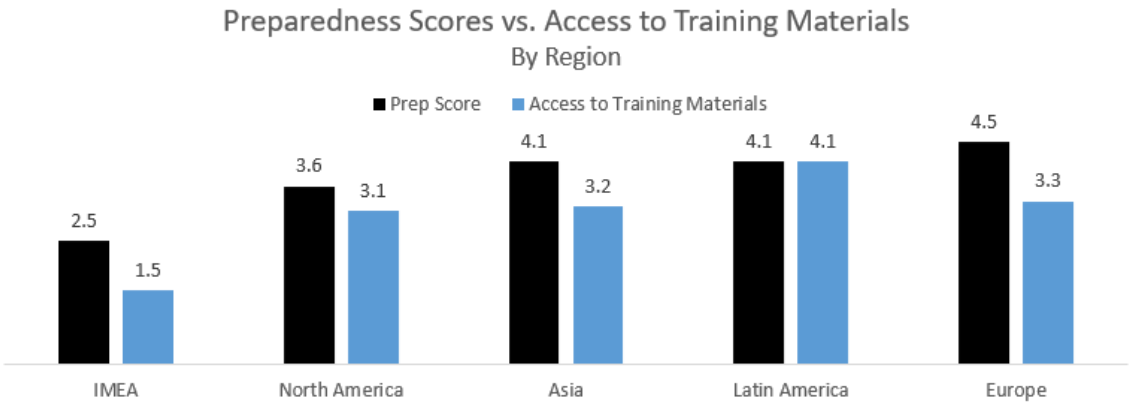
By comparison, out-of-office coverage was considerably higher in all other regions. This coverage was scored highest in Europe with a score of 0.71 followed by Latin America and Asia with scores of 0.62 and 0.64, respectively. As expected, overall preparation in each of these regions was also higher with a preparedness score in Europe of 4.5 and a score of 4.1 in both Latin America and Asia. These preparedness scores appear to reflect the outsized impact of out-of-office coverage on overall levels of preparation.

3. **A lack of access to training and crisis readiness materials is also a likely contributor to low levels of crisis preparedness**.

Sites with below-average preparedness were less likely to say they had the most complete access to these materials (see Figure 4). These sites also reported conducting crisis training less frequently than those with high levels of preparedness.

Out of the five regions included in the study, Europe was the only region where lower levels of access to training materials did not align with overall levels of preparation. This is likely because of a higher concentration compared to other regions of administrative facilities rather than manufacturing.

Figure 4: Preparedness Score vs. Access to Training Materials by Region

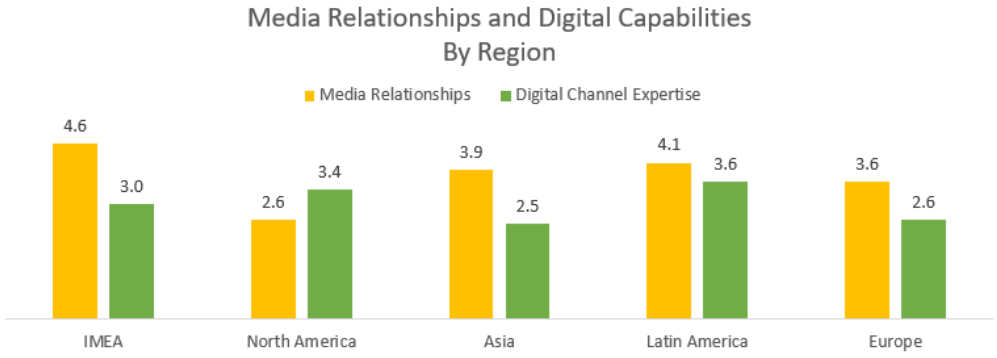


4. **Media relations and monitoring capabilities – a critical part of crisis preparedness – were inconsistent from site-to-site and from region to region.**

Teams responsible for crisis communication varied considerably in their levels of knowledge required to effectively use the digital channels available to them in a crisis (see Figure 5). Nonetheless, there was strong qualitative agreement their team would benefit from further training in this form of communication.

While most sites reported maintaining strong relationships with traditional local news media in the event of a crisis, fewer included comprehensive digital or social media planning as part of their media relationships. This is particularly noteworthy, as the time requirements for communicating critical information in the event of crisis that could impact surrounding areas have shortened dramatically and are essential for maintaining control of information in the event of a crisis (Coombs W. T., 2015, pp. 17-18).

Figure 5: Media Relationships and Digital Capabilities by Region



Advanced Analysis

The data from this study clearly points out the existence of gaps between potential risk and preparedness in the event a crisis occurs due to these risks. However, even with this insight, the critical question of what preparations should be prioritized in anticipation of a crisis that will provide the greatest contribution to successful preparation if a crisis occurs remains open. While the advice that communication advisors provide is valuable[13] and will contribute toward effective

[13] See discussion of Coombs on page 5 of this paper

crisis response planning and resolution, a communicator or risk manager needing to develop a crisis preparation program is left without clear direction of how to prioritize their resources. The research question to be answered is *identifying which preparations are most essential in anticipation of a crisis occurring by determining preparations that are most likely to result in an appropriate level of response in event of a crisis*.

To determine the priority and underlying drivers of which preparations provided the greatest contribution to having an adequate level of preparation in the event of a crisis, three multivariate analyses were performed: First, an exploratory regression analysis was performed, regressing each of the following: Risk Score, Preparedness Score, and Delta (the difference between Risk and Preparedness Scores) on the set of questions which contributed to overall Risk and Preparedness Scores.

By analyzing pairwise correlation coefficients between input and output variables, no obvious correlation existed. This lack of pairwise correlation was not sufficient however to invoke the use of factor analysis as a means of identifying contribution to either risk or preparedness. To ensure that the relevant sample is appropriate for Factor Analysis, Bartlett's test was employed (Snedecor & Cochran, 1989). Bartlett's test of sphericity checks whether the observed variables intercorrelate using the observed correlation matrix against the identity matrix. If the test is found to be statistically insignificant, we should disregard the use of Factor Analysis. In this instance, factor analysis was warranted. The results of Bartlett's test for both Risk and Preparedness, and Preparedness only can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8: Bartlett's Test for Risk and Preparedness

Test – Statistic	Risk and Preparedness	Preparedness Only
X2	1332.68	352.85
P	5.18 X 10-59	5.34 X 10-29

Next, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted among the input variables. The EFA was done in Python, using the *scikit-learn* package to perform the EFA, and *pandas* to aggregate and scale the data. As some of the input variables are scaled differently, it was necessary to rescale all the data on the interval [-1,1], so as not to bias the EFA.

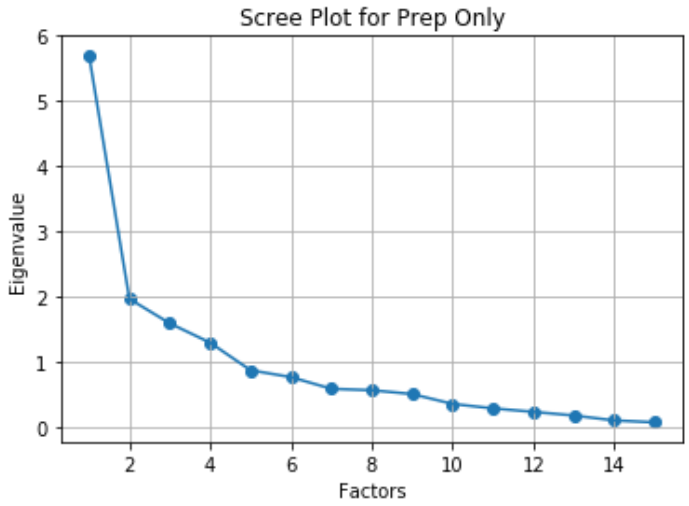
Using the "Elbow Method" the optimal number of factors was determined to be three, which accounted for 95.7% of the variance. EFA was performed for both the combined Risk and Preparedness Scores, as well as just for Preparedness Scores alone, giving consistent results between the two analyses. Three factors based only on the preparation scores were identified from the analysis: 1) advance preparation, 2) communication access, and 3) training and testing.

A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) (Cerny & Kaiser, 1977) test was conducted on both the "risk and preparedness" and "preparedness only" data. This provided a measure of sampling adequacy to answer the question "is my sample appropriate for factor analysis?". The "risk and preparedness" data had a KMO score of 0.72 and the "preparedness only" data had a KMO score of 0.85.

In the scree plot associated with factor analysis of the "preparedness only" sample, the canonical criteria one imposes on the number of factors, and which items are included in each factor is that the number of factors includes all factors for which $\lambda > 1$, and the rotated factor

load F has a magnitude |F| > 0.4. This is reasonable but can sometimes complicate ease of interpretation. We analyzed both 4-factor and 3-factor models to arrive at a sensible interpretation post hoc (see Figure 6). This interpretation corresponds to the following guidance: includes all factors for which λ > 1.5, and the rotated factor load F, is |F| > 0.3.

Figure 6: Scree Plot for "Preparedness" Only



While both samples could generate valid factor models, there was a heuristic reason for determining the "preparedness only" sample as more appropriate for this analysis since many of the criteria that contribute to a facility's risk score are intrinsic to the type of facility (e.g., manufacturing) and also vary by geography. Consequently, the risk score lacked universality among facilities, and as such provided limited guidance overall on universal approaches to risk preparedness. The detailed composition of each factor is provided in Appendix A.

Contribution of the Factors to Effective Crisis Preparation

To determine the impact of each of the three factors to positive levels of preparation in advance of a crisis, the data from the survey was filtered to determine at which sites preparation scores exceeded risk scores. Of the 69 sites included in the study, 13 or 19% had preparation scores that exceeded risk scores indicating that adequate and appropriate preparations were likely in place in the event a crisis occurred at one of those facilities.

Table 9 presents the distribution of these facilities by region and type of facility.

Table 9: Geographic Distribution of Sites with Adequate Preparedness

Region	Number of Responses	Types of Sites
Europe *(pilot)*	7	• Manufacturing (2) • Administrative (2) • Research & Development (3)
North America	2	• Manufacturing (2)
Latin America	1	• Manufacturing (1)

India, Middle East, & Africa	1	• Administrative (1)
Asia Pacific	2	• Not identified (2)
Total Responses	**13**	

Regression analysis was again performed, regressing each of the following: Risk Score, Preparation Score for those sites with a positive Delta on the three factors contributing to overall Risk and Preparation Scores. This analysis showed a strong correlation between a positive Delta and each of the three factors – advance preparation, communication access and training / testing.

Performing a multiple regression on the three factors found from our exploratory factor analysis on Delta provided we find that each of the factors contributes positively to Delta (F = 8.997, DF = 3, p = 0.000118, R^2 = 0.409). The results of the regression are given below:

Delta = 8.185 * F1 + 26.7 * F2 + 0.99 * F3 + 35

The summary statistics associated with this regression are as follows. The seemingly disproportionate coefficients appearing in the regression manifest themselves due to the scales chosen for the numerical value of each question.

Each of the three factors contributed significantly to positive levels of crisis preparation. However, the contribution of each factor was highly disproportionate (see Table 10). Approximately two-thirds (64%) of the contribution to positive levels of crisis preparation was attributed to *Advance Preparation*. This advance preparation included identifying key points of contact in event of a crisis, having established written protocols, staff rotation schedules for coverage, available templates in local languages, local stakeholder contact information, internal escalation protocols and basic information about the site function where the crisis could occur. *Communication Access* contributed to 22% of positive levels of preparation with *Training and Testing* contributing about 10% of the overall contribution to positive levels of preparation (see Appendix A).

Table 10: Factors and Associated Weights

Factor	Weight
Advance Preparation	0.640
Communication Access	0.220
Training and Testing	0.097

It is worth nothing that these three factors do not account for the entirety of the variance, the remainder 0.043 is the unexplained variance. As there is some discretion that entered into the choice of what elements were included in each factor, and what associated factor loading threshold was chosen, this is in no way unusual.

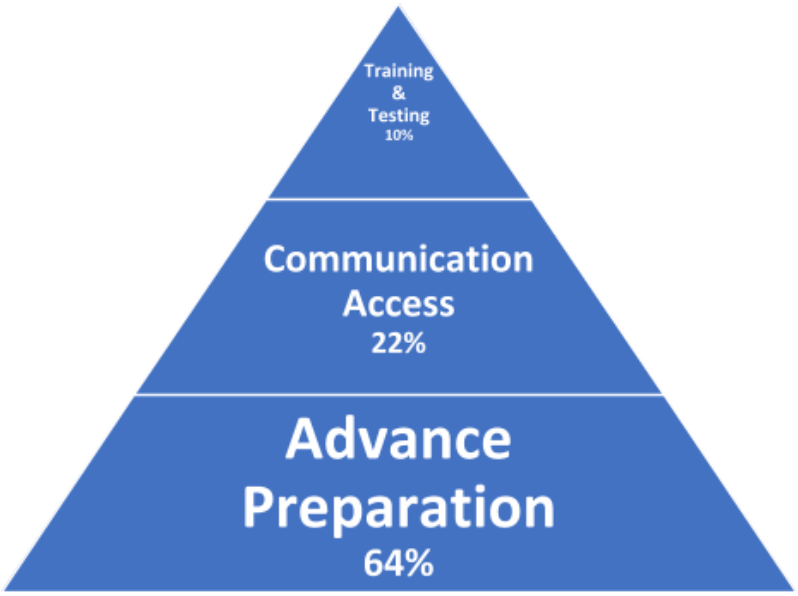
Implications for Communicators

Balancing risk with adequate levels of preparation in anticipation of a crisis has been and remains one of the most significant challenges facing communicators. The issue facing

communicators has rarely been what should be done in the event of a crisis. There is voluminous documentation on the subject. Rather, the perplexing issue is determining priorities when preparing in the event of a crisis. As this study shows, the traditional emphasis on *testing and training* remains a critical part of any crisis preparation planning. However, this testing and training will have little impact if the foundational work of *advance preparation* and documented *communication access* are not fully functional. An extreme example of what happens when this balance is not in place occurred in New York City on September 11, 2001. New York City had rigorous testing and training programs in place. However, the facility that housed the emergency response center was located within the World Trade Center complex and was destroyed in the attack. While this is a rare and generally unlikely example of a crisis, this error in advance planning contributed to severely interrupted communication access and delayed response.

The crisis preparation model shown in Figure 7 needs to establish *advance preparation* as the primary activity in the development of crisis communication planning and preparation.

Figure 7: Crisis Planning and Preparedness Pyramid



This is the *foundation* upon which communication access, testing and training protocols are based. While successful preparation requires implementing all three factors – *advance preparation, communication access, training, and testing* – without advance preparation no crisis preparation plan can be completely effective.

Appendix A

Table 1: Attributes of "Advance Preparation"

Attribute	Contributing Weight
• Established written crisis response protocols to those covering	.19
• Staff rotation schedule for coverage outside of office hours	.16
• Key point of contact for managing communications for crisis situations	.12
• Company templates in local languages	.10
• Local stakeholder contact information	.10
• Basic information about site's function that might be relevant for external audiences in a crisis	.10
• Internal escalation and information sharing protocols	.09

Table 2: Attributes of "Communication Access"

Attribute	Contributing Weight
• Access to key crisis communications resources	.41
• Access to local agency support if required	.31
• Out-of-office hours mobilization plan/protocol for crisis communication focal points	.08
• Out-of-office email status with crisis communication contact information	.07
• Local emergency response contact information	.07

Table 3: Attributes of "Training and Testing"

Attribute	Contributing Weight
• Participate in regional level crisis management training exercises	.40
• Access to dark site template and activation capabilities	.32
• Participate in on-site level crisis management training exercises	.15

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How Public Relations Can Create Ritual Narratives to East the Pains of the 21st Century in the Workplace

Paulo Roberto Nassar de Oliveira
Emiliana Pomarico Ribeiro
Aberje
Universidade de São Paulo (Brazil)

Luiz Alberto de Farias
Vânia Penafieri de Farias
Universidade de São Paulo (Brazil)

Abstract

The paper aims to generate reflections on how Public Relations professionals can help to reduce the so-called "pains of the 21st century" in the workplace – such as anxiety, depression, fear, tiredness, stress – from the creation of new narratives of communication, with messages and campaigns that are more ritualistic and humanized.

Keywords: organizational communication; public relations; new narratives; employee communications.

In many organizations, there is a growing climate of saturation, pressure, and anxiety caused by informational excesses, unreachable goals, and paradoxical narratives that fuel organizational bullying. The main aspect of this study involves understanding how so-called ritual narratives – planned by Public Relations professionals – can contribute to ease the "21st-century pains" in the workplace. Although there is a considerable number of studies on Organizational Communication and Employee Communication, there are still few of them addressing how PR professionals can be agents of transformation of the organizational environment by contributing to these new narratives.

The goal is to strengthen studies and practices in the field of Public Relations since procedural dynamics in organizations can generate pains that hinder the assertiveness and effectiveness of communication. Therefore, the paper intends to generate reflections for a better confrontation of the challenges imposed by the organizational culture, based on humanization based communications.

To illustrate and understand the pains felt in the work environment, we held a discussion with about 200 professionals from Brazilian organizations, participants of the courses "Humanization of Internal Communication," organized by Aberje – Brazilian Association for Business Communication, between 2015 and 2018. The next step was a critical-interpretive process about new narratives created by PR professionals, adapted to these new ways of feeling the world of work. The study proposes reflections on the challenges imposed on the organizational environment, providing an overview of the many impacting factors of professional performance and quality of life of people in their work environments. Thus, it is expected that the results – aimed at a critical look at contemporary organizational scenarios – will bring contributions to studies and communication practices, from a more human, ritualistic, and transformative perspective in the face of increasingly complex and challenging power relations in organizations.

21st Century Pains

Between 2015 and 2018, about 200 communication professionals from Brazilian organizations took part in discussions while participating in the courses "Humanization of Internal Communication," held by Aberje – Brazilian Association for Business Communication. Two questions were asked: "How do you feel in your daily work?" and "Why do you think you feel this way?". They were required to record their feelings and perceptions on paper and then share their responses with the room.

The most relevant answers on how they feel in their daily work were: 97% tired, 94% anguished, 93% pressured, 92% stressed, 89% overworked, 86% anxious, and 78% frustrated. When asked about the main reasons that make them feel that way, communicators highlighted the issues of hyper connection (which provides anxiety, a sense of urgency, excess of information being thrown at them, and the need to be connected 24/7), lack of recognition (also understanding that there is not much space or time for feelings in the work environment), small and multifunctional teams (which creates overloads), lack of budget for campaigns, lack of time, lack of focus (due to high daily demand), pressure and self-pressure to achieve results.

These spontaneous answers brought more negative than positive responses. Besides, when asked why they feel this way, they justified mostly the negative questions. These responses suggest a reflection of the metaphorically called "21st-century pains", enhanced by the issues of hyperconnection, immediacy, and self-pressure to obtain a high performance to reach goals – goals, that, many times, do not have an obvious meaning. If, on the one hand, "technological developments could free man from work; on the contrary, they seem to put you under psychic pressure" (GAULEJAC, 2007, p. 217).

Without plunging into deep interpretations about the anthropological understanding of each disease – since each culture, context, and society establish their standards of normality and abnormality – and

without detailing individual factors that make someone more susceptible to a certain pain, one can consider the insights of contemporary thinkers and reflect about these new contexts of "a world full of confused signs, prone to change quickly and in an unpredictable way" (BAUMAN, 2004, p.7) and the possible impacts that these changes have on minds and in the bodies of countless people.

For Harari (2016), we are experiencing a great race in the 21st century. We run all the time – and fast – to avoid economic collapse or ecological disintegration, or to seek the so-called individual and collective happiness endlessly. And this rush to reach those desires ends up affecting both the psychic and the physical bodies of the human beings of the 21st century. Even after centuries of economic growth, technological developments, and scientific progress – an era in which one would imagine that life should become serene and peaceful and increasingly free of care and worries, at least in the most developed countries – the reality is quite the opposite. "On the individual level, it results in high levels of stress and tension (...) Despite all our achievements, we feel under constant pressure to do and produce even more" (HARARI, 2016, p.223).

For Han (2015), postmodern individuals are empowered and led to believe that they can do anything to increase their productivity. In this way, they end up exercising what the author calls the positivity of power, often imposing violence on their own psychic and physical bodies, in search of high performance at work. They even assume responsibility for failure and guilt for not achieving the goals imposed by organizational strategies.

In this scenario, the subject of obedience emulated by Foucault (2010) is replaced by the issue of performance that promotes a self-exploration of the subject's abilities, becoming both the explorer and the exploited. Likewise, sociologist Richard Sennett (2010) reflects on this context in which individuals start to have new work relationships where there is no long-term logic. Therefore, they feel under pressure – by mechanized processes of productivity, by superiors, by peers and, mainly, by themselves – to produce positive results at all times, in several simultaneous projects, are more likely to fall ill, as well as to corrupt their social bonds. Along the same lines, Vicent de Gaulejac (2007), says that

> performance and profitability are measured in the short term, "in real-time," putting the entire production system under permanent tension: zero delay, exact time, tense flows, immediate management, etc. It is about doing more, always better, always more quickly, with the same means and even with less staff. (GAULEJAC, 2007, p. 45)

Consequently, the subject of performance in the 21st century is a faster and more productive professional than that of obedience in the 20th century, even though he remains disciplined in doing what has to be done. Only, from then on, they become aggressors of themselves and their relationships with others. For Han (2015, p.91), the performance society creates exhausted, depressed, and worn out people, as if they are tired of struggling with themselves. This psychic disorder of a depressive character, preceded by mental and physical exhaustion, is called burnout.

> Burnout, which usually precedes depression, does not refer so much to that sovereign individual who lacks the strength to be master of himself. On the contrary, burnout is the pathological consequence of self-exploration. The imperative of expansion, transformation, and reinventing oneself has the counterpoint of depression, which presupposes an offer of products linked to identity. The more frequently you change your identity, the more you boost production. The industrial disciplinary society depends on a firm and unchanging identity, while the non-industrial performance society needs a flexible person to increase production. (HAN, 2015, p.97)

According to psychologist Ana Rossi, from Isma-BR, (apud SENDIN; TATIANA, 2018), 96% of people who suffered burnout do not feel able to work, despite that 92% continue to go to their workplace to work, since they are afraid of being fired or replaced if they ask for leave. Bauman (2004) states in his reflections that this self-exploration, as well as its consequent depression, stress, or anxiety, are consequences of an inability to achieve a perfect fit between effort and reward in everyday life since it seems impossible to match the speed and pace of the flow of time. Pain is a picture of frustration, which "he called the 'inadequacy complex' and pointed out, according to his own definition, as one of the great afflictions of 'liquid-modern' life" (SENADOR, 2018, p. 102).

In this sense, in Brazil, mental illnesses accounted for more than 37% of the reasons that motivated workers to leave their professional activities in 2016 (TRT / MG, 2017). With a share of 5.8% of the population suffering mental illnesses, Brazil has the highest rates of depression in Latin America. At the same time, among the Americas, it is second only to the USA (5.9%). At the global level, the World Health Organization predicts that in 2020, depression will be the most disabling disease in the world (ONU BR, 2017).

According to a survey on work and well-being produced by the American Psychological Association (Levine, 2018), there is a growing feeling of helplessness and lack of control taking hold in corporate environments, which are increasingly hostile, competitive, and less welcoming. In the USA, for example, depression has direct and indirect costs estimated at US$ 250 billion. Meanwhile, presenteeism –defined as a fall in productivity in the workplace – accounts for 50% of these costs. Despite the suffering and evident impairment of the professional performance, depression is the most underdiagnosed disease, with 45% of depressed people not receiving the correct treatment, according to data from the World Health Organization,

In a survey conducted by the International Stress Management Association (Isma-BR), nine out of ten Brazilians in the job market experience symptoms of anxiety, while 47% suffer from some degree of depression (SENDIN, 2018). Hyperconnectivity, shortening of deadlines, a state of emergency for finding solutions, and the need for absence of errors endorse this permanent state of an environment of emergency in which the worker meets

> (...) increasing tensions, linked to the shortening of deadlines, the imperative of "tense flows," the requirement of "fair time," the consequences of "zero failure," and "downstream management." Each one is invited to work faster, to eliminate "lost" times, to justify any delay and setback. (GAULEJAC, 2007, p. 199)

Moreover, so many tensions can also lead to stress, a reaction that has physical, psychological, mental, and hormonal components that harm human beings. Gaulejac (2007, p.205) points to the appearance of possible somatic and psychosomatic disorders that doctors classify in five categories that may be connected and be a consequence of self-exploitation at work, triggered by stress: 1) psychological disorders: anguish crises, phobias, panic states, insomnia; 2) digestive disorders: gastric ulcers, epigastric cramps, ulcerative hemorrhagic rectocolitis; 3) dermatological diseases: psoriasis, eczema, hives; 4) cardiovascular disorders: myocardial infarctions; 5) behavioral disorders: migraine, smoking, physical violence, alcoholism, suicides, etc.

Chanlat (2007) predicted an increase in the number of people going through these "21st-century pains" because of work, as organizations increasingly show themselves as "a place conducive to suffering, physical and psychological violence, boredom, and even despair [...]" (CHANLAT, 2007, p. 25). In the same vein, Gaulejac (2007, p.82) is also critical of the organizational strategies that subject

individuals to adapt to the "working time," to the productive and financial needs, which are most of the time "detached from time of human life" because

> they force men to suffer an abstract, programmed time, contrary to their needs. The temporality of work leads to the imposition of rhythms, cadences, ruptures that move away from biological time, from the time of the seasons, from the time of human life. The abstract measure of time allows you to disconnect it from physiological or psychological needs: sleep, food, procreation, aging, etc. (GAULEJAC, 2007, p.82)

Thus, employees need to be faster, in a more accurate, more productive, and more concrete manner. They have no time and space for many reflections, thoughts, errors, emotions, and subjectivities. They feel alone in a race, responsible for achieving great numerical results and without the expected recognition. The immediacy in resolutions and productions is one of the significant behaviors observed in today's society. And all this causes a feeling of impatience, irritability, and lack of availability for others (SENADOR, 2018, p. 39).

For Gaulejac (2007), the organizational environments usually contain strategies that follow an obsession with numbers, behind cold and objective rationality, which make many workers lose their sense of measure. They are "close relations between the financial economy and the libidinal economy, between the managerial norms and the psychic mobilization, between the management of companies and the management of oneself" (GAULEJAC, 2007, p. 37), so that they bring up resistances and disappointments in the organizational environment, in addition to feelings of fear and guilt. Commonly, at first, violence is hardly recognized and named in a way that "erodes the motivation, security, and self-esteem of workers daily" (FARRAH, 2016, p. 47). Over time, many times,

> [...] what started as a pleasurable job, in which professional sense and fulfillment was sought [...] and found, ends up becoming a cumbersome and unwanted burden, with which the individual drags on, without energy, without a will, without finding meaning to that routine, from which you only want to get away (SILVA, 2016, p. 65).

Thus, what is here called a "21st-century pain" is a metaphor that reflects how behaviors and experiences are transformed according to changes in the social, economic, and cultural contexts and also the arrival of new interactions made possible by new technologies. It's a new reality within the organizational environment, which can potentiate some of these pains in this new century, precisely because of the uncertainties it provides. And, the big question is that such difficulties make people put their emotional, inner life, adrift (SENNETT, 2010, p.19).

After all, how not to suffer, trying to always be the best in the race of the organizational environment, to achieve a supposed success in unattainable goals, following processes and more processes, in a context that bombards everyone with countless information and takes away them out of focus, without time and space, often to generate meaning for themselves and what they do with their lives?

Alvin Toffler (1973) was one of the first to write about information overload even before the spread of digital media. The author already warned that the growth of technologies would increase the production of information so quickly and in such large volumes that people would have difficulties in processing and absorbing large loads of information, in discerning its relevance, and in making sense of it, analyzing them, and turning them into something really useful for their lives, that is, transforming information into knowledge and concept.

The diverse information that reaches people every day – consequently stimulating their focus – triggers difficulties in managing what is most important and what should be focused on to generate meaning. This is what is suggested by the concept of "the attention economy," coined by Thomas H. Davenport and JC Beck (2001) in the book of the same name to designate attention management. It is seen as a limited asset of increasing importance due to the growing number of the content generated by the most varied media, especially by digital media.

The difficulty in maintaining focus on a single task, due to the range of information on offer, is precisely what Holmes (1997) calls "Attention Deficit Syndrome," characterized by the individual's inability to "focus his attention during any reasonable length of time" (HOLMES, 1997, p.331). Related to this phenomenon, Lipp (2000, online), from the PUC-Campinas Stress Laboratory, comments:

> The brain has filtering mechanisms that prevent the absorption of excess information. But, when a person wants to pay attention to everything, they neutralize the filter and start to absorb everything. But they cannot process this flood of information accurately and end up having a decrease in the ability to reason analytically (LIPP, 2000, online).

Therefore, the affluence of information creates the poverty of attention. Digital technologies – which enhance the rapid arrival of information, bombarded every second, on several bright screens that flash messages, continuously – sustain a life immersed in distractions. Some of the surveys even indicate that people peep on their smartphones about 150 times a day. Apple released a study of iPhone users, suggesting that they unlock the device about 80 times a day (SENADOR, 2018, p. 65). Consequently, it means that, due to technologies in all environments, everyday life is an ocean with waves of information, distraction, and blur. And the more distractions there are, the more disagreements about the purpose of the work and consequently the lack of motivation for its fulfillment.

> The flood of data that hits us leads to sloppy shortcuts, such as selecting emails by subject, skipping many voice messages, reading over notes, and memos. It is not just that we have developed attention habits that make us less efficient, but that the weight of the messages leaves us very little time to reflect on what they really mean simply. (GOLEMAN, 2013, p.17)

Thus, cognitively overloaded, with a constant flow of emails, texts, messages, accounts payable, people reach a brain state contrary to the clear focus for discoveries, being more prone to errors and loss of self-control. Thus, the attention deficit hinders deep reflection and decision-making, as well as the ability to gain insights and be creative. "Amid the turmoil of our daily distractions and our to-do lists, innovation stalls; in free time, it flourishes" (GOLEMAN, 2013, p. 50).

With digital technologies and the countless flashing applications that notify new information, lack of focus is intense. As a consequence, there are difficulties in having different ideas, often accepting a routine full of rules and protocols, which hinder innovation and humanization in relationships. One feels that it is not possible to keep up to date with everything that happens in the world. The feeling that arises – even if unconscious – is usually of "guilt" about the accumulated readings, the news that did not reach the ears, what was not seen, not commented on, nor opinioned.

All of these findings are symptoms that Wurman (1999) considers as indicators of the difficulty of people in dealing with the massive information load, which only makes people more anxious, often with low self-esteem and with a negative feeling that their knowledge is superficial. For Wurman,

"almost everyone has some degree of information anxiety. We read without understanding, we see without realizing, we hear without listening" (WURMAN, 1999, p.38).

Notably, these processes of interactions in this virtual world through mobile interfaces influence emotions and cause reflexes in social relationships and activities, making them, according to Bauman (2004), apparently more ephemeral and superficial. The author demonstrates that human connections are now simultaneously more frequent but also too brief and banal.

The attention deficit is also linked to a lack of focus on the other, preventing empathic relationships, which also affects moods. For, an empathic relationship requires joint attention – the mutual focus of the people they relate to. And, in the context in which we live, there is usually an effort on our part to have this type of human moment, "taking into account the ocean of distractions that we all face daily" (GOLEMAN, 2013, p.15), both because of informational excesses and personal distractions.

Personal distractions are those with a constant focus on ourselves: our appearances, our content, our interactions, and repercussions on what we comment, publish, and share. In a way, there is a "fear of being forgotten, isolated, of losing social visibility. While some are very fond of this moment of isolation, of meditation, for others, however, this is desperate" (SENADOR, 2018, p. 121).

People's fear is intimately embedded in their stories. And this insecurity in the face of new technologies, social networks, the large amount of information in the present, instant relationships, short-term activities, and superficial experiences generate in people a need to record their stories, proliferating, without control, an attempt to produce a large set of virtual memories in the private field (GARDE-HANSEN, 2011). It is an attempt to individualization against massification. It is an attempt at subjectivity, in a world where objectivity and rationality prevail.

The present is not experienced deeply, only registered for a past with no time to be evaluated in the future. Besides, the excessive use of the internet leads individuals to become, many times, antisocial beings, focused so on themselves that they have difficulties in living with co-workers, friends, and even with their families (SENADOR, 2018, p. 126). When this happens, these individuals may be experiencing another pain of this 21st century: nomophobia, which is the "disorder of the digital age characterized by the discomfort and anxiety caused when the person is without a digital connection" (SENADOR, 2018, p.25).

That is, this pain corresponds to the fear of being unable to communicate, via cell phone or computer, over the internet. It is the fear of going offline. It is a digital dependence on "interaction between people and telecommunications equipment, especially smartphones, due to the unavailability of access to cell phones (...) or internet connection, which can cause feelings of discomfort and anxiety" (SENADOR, 2018, p. 107).

Therefore, an internet addict usually suffers from depression, insomnia, and a loss of interest in social activities, which directly affects their work, with reduced productivity daily and even the possibility of physical problems. The demand for help to fight technological dependence has increased due to psychological factors such as anxiety disorders, low self-esteem, social phobias, attention deficit, and hyperactivity, among others, and social factors, such as loneliness, isolation, and lifestyle in large urban centers (SENADOR, 2018, p. 110 – 111).

According to the book "Dependência de internet: manual e guia de avaliação e tratamento" (which can be translated as "Internet addiction: manual and assessment and treatment guide"), produced and organized by Kimberly S. Young and Cristiano Nabuco de Abreu (2011), once dependent, individuals may tend to see their virtual reality as more valid than their lives in real-time.

The vertiginous expansion of smartphones has extraordinarily popularized access to social media, making our daily lives integrate with them in such a way that we start to live almost in a

parallel universe – the digital universe - where relationships develop primarily in social networks. How will this influence our lives, our work, our daily lives? GAULEJAC, 2018, p. 23)

The boundaries between the imaginary, the spectacle, and everyday life have been definitively blurred, blending mediatized fiction and "real" life in an ambiguous space. Individuals have the means to achieve notoriety and success, exempting themselves, for this, from the stages and processes traditionally associated with artistic ascension. The perspective of the self (myself) can represent anxiety in capturing the "era that will never come back" (SEMPRINI, 2010).

As this "selfie" society reflects, when thoughts wander, they do not go to reflections on the other, which leads individuals to see themselves only slightly. The lack of relationship with the other deteriorates the capacity for gratitude. For Han (2015) and Sennett (2010), the gratification crisis is linked to a narcissistic disorder and the lack of relationship with others, which brings pain and suffering to oneself.

The narcissist is not used to experiences, they want to experience everything they find themselves with. In experience, we find the other. They are transformative encounters, they change us. The experiences, on the contrary, prolong the self and the other, in the world. In self-love, the limit to the other is clearly overcome. In narcissism, on the contrary, it merges. (HAN, 2015, p.84)

Therefore, the current context has suppressed the riches of profound experiences and, consequently, the way of relating to others. People and organizations are becoming saturated with information, weakened by experiences, and lacking in meaning and affection. For Larrosa-Bondía (2002), an experience is what happens to us, what happens to us, and what touches us. However, in the context of excessive information, speeds, and shallow thoughts about ourselves, a lot happens to us, little happens in us, and almost nothing touches us or affects us deeply:

experience, the possibility that something may happen or touch us, requires a gesture of interruption, a gesture that is almost impossible in the present times; it requires stopping to think, stopping to look, stopping to listen, thinking more slowly, looking more slowly, and listening more slowly; stopping to feel, feel more slowly, dwell on the details, suspend the opinion, suspend the judgment, suspend the will, suspend the automatic action, cultivate attention and delicacy, open our eyes and ears, talk about what it happens to us, to learn slowness, to listen to others, to develop the art of meeting, to be very quiet, to have patience and to give ourselves time and space. (LARROSA-BONDÍA, 2002, p. 24)

Therefore, when reflecting on the impoverishment of experiences in a dynamic and uninterrupted world, there is also talk, above all, of the relational weakening; that is, the lack of time and space for affections between people. For the Epicurean philosopher Espinosa (1979), relating is the natural logic of life. To live is to be part of the world and to be subject to constant encounters with other parts of this world. To meet these different parts is to relate to them, to affect and be affected by them.

However, if there are countless possibilities for superficial encounters in these new contexts, little can affect them profoundly. What happens in the context of the selfie, the abundance of information, the speed, and the ephemerality is a continuous movement of disenchantment since the magic that touches the being has fainted in new stimuli that quickly replace and are replaced.

For Bauman (2004) and Sennett (2010), we experience today a disintegration of impersonal bonds and ties. It is as if we were wearing a mask that simultaneously allows us to enjoy the other's company, but also that protects us. Thus, the "friction and stroking of shoulders, contiguity, intimacy, sincerity, entering into the other, without keeping secrets, confessing compulsively and compulsorily" (BAUMAN, 2004, p.49) – which used to human defenses against loneliness – are now replaced by frenetic and frivolous interactions, such as likes, words in chat boxes, virtual comments, so that:

> when we look more closely and remove the mask, we discover unfulfilled longings, frayed nerves, frustrated loves, sufferings, fears, loneliness, hypocrisy, selfishness, and compulsion to repeat... performances replace ecstasy, the physical is inside, metaphysics, outside... (SIGUSCH apud BAUMAN, 2004, p.65)

All this complexity and fluidity of the 21st century, with its weaknesses and flexibilities, mainly affect the organizational environment, the professional relationships, and their affectivity. A life full of frustrations and pain, therefore, condemns the organizational culture. How can communication contribute to the construction of new narratives, adapted to these new realities?

New Narratives and Rituals for a More Humanized Organizational Culture

New organizational patterns of coping with the countless challenging scenarios presented in this study continually emerge. They range from remodeling the physical work environment to actions that can alleviate everyday tensions, seeking to create a kind of oasis, naturalizing the work environment as a unique environment, endowed with a completeness that will suffice the professional's life, leaving out other personal needs. Ultimately, looking for the creation of "homo corporativus".

As much as internal communication has its recognized importance in communication planning in organizations, good, assertive vehicles are not enough if there is not a full adherence to the human and to the organizational culture, which can be defined as

> a set of fundamental values and assumptions expressed in symbolic elements, which, in their ability to order, assign meanings, build organizational identity, both act as an element of communication and consensus, as well as hide and instrumentalize relationships of domination. (FLEURY and FISCHER *apud* MARCHIORI, 2006, p. 80)

These confrontations, when strategically planned and aligned with the principles and characteristics of the organizational culture, tend to be more efficient. In this sense, the organizational culture arises from the essence of the organization and, even though it exists from power relations, culture – somehow imposed by the organization – is transformed and transmuted from the relationship with the other. Culture is organizational, but the everyday experience is individual and human, and the combination of these factors brings up three fundamental aspects: artifacts, shared values, and underlying assumptions. Nevertheless, none of these elements can affect if there is no affection on the individual's part on some level so that they can be impacted – negatively or positively.

The mentioned aspects work as levels of the organizational culture and its interaction, according to Schein (1997). Thus, the first level – artifacts – encompasses visible and / or audible behavior patterns, the visuality of the physical space, and the rules of conduct and dress of people, language, technology, and products.

At the second level – values -, they are tested in the physical environment and practiced by social consensus. Values contribute to the analysis of how members behave in the face of an organizational situation.

The third level refers to underlying assumptions, which include relationships with the environment, nature of reality, time and space, nature of the human activity, and nature of human relationships. These are indisputable values given their character of "truth" and their repetition. The organization's rituals are found in this third level of culture, characterized by an 'eternal return' of what is said, well said, wrongly said, or not said (NASSAR, FARIAS, and POMARICO, 2019). The levels of the organizational culture and its level of communicative "tangibility" can be better seen in the table below:

ARTIFACTS, TECHNOLOGY, AND ART	Visible, but often not decipherable
VALUES	Excellent level of knowledge
BASIC ASSUMPTIONS	Considered to be true. Invisible. Unconscious.

Source: adaptation of MARCHIORI, 2006, p. 95

The understanding of organizational culture and its rituals already includes a large number of paradoxical elements. At the same time that the constant transformation present in individuals and organizations is seen as natural and belongs to an expected evolutionary process, change processes are often sources of conflict and resistance; that is, a desire for stability that is opposed to discomfort, the new, the unexpected.

Understandings about the nature and significance of organizations lead to this intrinsic relationship with organizational culture and the importance of narrative rituals in the context of continuous changes and living organisms, even if procedural.

With a broader focus and taking into account the aspect of social interaction, the influence of the environment, and a constant movement of mutation, Morgan (1996) points out that organizations are true living systems, with different levels of adaptability to varying types of environments. Oliveira (2002) highlights the resilience experienced in organizations in an overflowing perspective beyond the walls of the workplace, because

> as organizations grow and expand in all areas of social life, on the other hand, they describe the options of extra-organizational life for individuals, causing them to create psychological, social, and technological accommodation mechanisms so that they can adequately coexist and survive. (OLIVEIRA, 2002, p. 79)

In the work environment, the trend is the change that will continue to transform the social system, requiring an adjustment of behaviors by professionals and a constant awareness by organizations to create a permanent recognition of flexibility, even if they always encounter obstacles (SOTO, 2008). The author also says that

> people who carry out the changes are people, which leads us to the conclusion that the traditional emphasis on the best strategic management technologies will hardly achieve the best results expected if it does not focus on the reality and development of the staff. (SOTO, 2008, P. 270)

The organizational culture must permeate and function as a supporting pillar for any ritual narratives built in the work environment. As an example, we can cite the transformation of corporate

office environments, in which hierarchies are demystified through the absence of walls and the emergence of workstations devoid of symbolic power, greater physical and visual proximity to other people in the workplace, loss of individual reference, and possession of a workstation for more fluid and interactive use of physical space.

However, the change in physical space cannot be limited only to what is understood as a visible artifact, as exposed by Schein (1997). Paradoxically, such a process of change can generate a series of organizational tensions, namely: loss of the feeling of belonging and territory in the face of a shared, changeable and impersonal workspace; disorders caused by collective physical proximity, such as excessive noise and minimal privacy – even though the work environment does not retain individuality characteristics a priori.

Such changes are complex and require new narratives that are coordinated and expressed in rites and rituals, shared values, played by the organization continuously, and echoed in the organizational environment. Shared values based on strategies with humanized narratives must take into account the individuals' adaptability time and the maintenance of a healthy organizational climate. The absence of these components can lead to dissonant shared values, such as resistance to shared and changing physical environments, social isolation, conflicts in interpersonal relationships, among others.

From studies by Pettigrew & Whipp about change in organizations and the direct relationship with communication, Reis (2004) highlights three dimensions: communicational pattern, communicative practice, and communicational initiatives. For each of the dimensions, the content of the relationship and the aspects of change can be related. Thus, for the first dimension "context of change," there is the creation and reproduction of expectations and the creation of the communicational pattern of response. For the second dimension, "process of change", there is a search for characterization, particularization, and differentiation in the dynamics of the relationship, which generates communicative practice. Finally, in the third dimension, "content of change," actions are implemented – fostering reactions – through communicational initiatives.

There is no way to experience organizational transformations – often triggered by the external environment – without a robust communicational presence. It increasingly requires much more than efficient vehicles for the flow of information, but instead transforming agents of change that can strategically work communication in the face of humanization aspects.

Studies that involve quality of working life (QWL) – an essential aspect of humanization in organizations – date from the 1950s, and are revisited from time to time, given the complexities of modern life that strongly impact the world of work. According to Forno and Finger (2015, p. 109), "it has been shown that job satisfaction is reflected in profitability for the organization, whether through increases in production or improved commitment."

Job satisfaction is the translation of assertive, ritualistic organizational narratives, which place humanization as the protagonist and make it possible to reduce the levels of tension so prevalent in the corporate environment.

Final Considerations

The reflections made here – based on the perspective of a digital, fluid, random, abundant, changeable, ephemeral, chaotic, complex, exposed, and uncertain context – demonstrate that, in many cases, organizational cultures may be created that highlight the so-called pains of the 21st century.

Formed by interpretations, understandings, and constructions of meanings, the organizational culture is based on transcendent and subjective values – such as the feelings and affections (positive and negative) of the subjects who live and interrelate in a given time and workspace. Controversies, a multiplicity of opinions, beliefs, and affections that change with each new challenge float in the work

environments. Hence, the organizational culture is linked to the human, to each individual who is part of that environment.

Therefore, it is not possible to generalize or create unique, rational, and protocol models of communications in organizations. The reflections brought here point not to conditions or rules to be followed for a communication that will vehemently deliver affections and positive results. On the contrary, due to the complex context studied, the discussions are precisely opposed to ideas of ready models and imposed on all.

Even if they are not trained in STEM disciplines, communication professionals would very much like to believe in a magic formula of communication that they could rationally control and measure. For this reason, they are often seduced by these models, rules, and metrics, which bring them certain credibility in showing a result, however abstract or intangible it may be. Nevertheless, the reality reminds us that perfection is always relative, that the possibilities are infinite, that the same message can affect different individuals positively or negatively, that error is always possible in the human world, and that conflicts are inherent in relationships because everyone has their incompatibilities.

Overall, when the goal is more related to humanization and less to institutionalization, one stops merely submitting oneself to representative roles, labels, and positions that prioritize and privilege control, the rational, the paradoxical, the meaningless, and the lack of recognition, freedom, and opportunities for innovation. Then, they give rise to respect, without crises of affective artificialism, moving from the fast of indifference to a regime of urgent transformation, focusing on new, more humanized narratives that privilege care and compassion.

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Comparing and Contrasting Public Relations and Marketing Functions in Practice: A Case Study of Such Functions in a Sports Crisis

Bonita Dostal Neff
Indiana University Northwest

Abstract

The functions utilized by public relations and marketing are often not clearly defined within the practice. There are in some academic areas, however, efforts assume marketing can subsume public relations in the practice environ. Yet ongoing public relations academic research and educational programs suggest more progress in preparing public relations for the practitioner and academic roles. This assumption is tested in a crisis within a sports context.

Keywords: business communication, public relations, marketing, theory-to-practice

The functions of public relations and marketing differ greatly. Yet, these areas are often practiced as similar or overlapping in intent. James G. Hutton in his chapters on "Defining the Relationship Between Public Relations and Marketing: Public Relations' Most Important Challenge" (Heath, 2001; Heath, 2010), views the issues about Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) as really about "the fundamental nature of the relationship between marketing and public relations" and not an issue of subordinating "public relations under marketing "as pushed by the advertising industry. (205;514). In this sense, Hutton proposes, "the marketing field is methodically reinventing itself as public relations." (210;514). In this research effort, the research is presented to counter or establish how public relations is bringing "both from practical and intellectual perspectives," the theory and content that defines the differences for the domains of public relations and marketing.

Hutton initially discussed if public relations and marketing should be partners or rivals. His discussion largely indicates that marketing is evolving into public relations due to several problems basic to the weak position of public relations (note his discussion occurred primarily between 2001 and 2010 initially). He continually states that public relations "has been very slow to respond to the challenge, both from the practical and intellectual perspectives." (205) He notes both disciplines have much in common: communication, persuasion, relationships, messages, media, and segmentation of audiences. Hutton notes the language has changed in marketing to subsume many public relations functions.

A few years later, Dr. Neff organized a preconference on integrated communication to discuss in-depth the various views at the International Communication Conference. The event attracted an international audience as well. James Hutton was asked to present his perspective. After presenting essentially his position as outlined above Hutton simply stated—"It is too late for public relations." He could not be convinced to discuss his statement further.

Public Relations Discipline Progresses with National Initiatives

To identify and extend the public relations scholarship outside of marketing, several commissions and special task force reports as outlined here emerge for the next ten years and sustaining to the present time. The public relations discipline advanced serious discussions on the role of public relations through national commissions and committees resulting in major reports addressing issues in the public relations discipline. Reports from the Commission on Public Relations Education issued national reports on *Public Relations Education for the 21st Century,* (October 1999), *The Professional Bond: Education, Public Relations, The Practice* (November 2006), and *Fast Forward Foundations Future State. Educators + Practitioners* (2017 Report on Undergraduate Education). The Public Relations Society of American's Educational Affairs Committee published *Standards for Certification in Education for Public Relations*--2005-2006. Recently, top-level 30 educators and 30 public relations practitioners, by invite, participated in a "state of the field" conference gathering at San Diego State University October 18, 2019, prior to the national PRSA-PRSSA international conference. The results are yet to be published. In all of these publications and processes, the discipline of public relations deepened in nuance and integrated concepts regarding communication with a specific focus on complexity of public relations functions.

Also during this time period, the *Public Relations from Theory to Practice scholarly text* received a PRide Award for scholar text edited-by authors Tricia Hansen-Horn & Bonita Dostal Neff published in 2008. This scholarly text on public relations established a number of theories

from the application of theory-to-practice covering the concepts of systems about power and communication networks and extended the research about power & networks in resource management, crisis management, strategic issues management, organizational-public relationships in cyberspace. A second theoretical construct cluster continued by "creating action and meaning through messaging" with areas of research focusing on : diffusion of innovation via public relations, speech act theory as the foundation for public relations leadership, constructionism from a public relations perspective, social drama as practice, contingency theory focusing on conflict. A third approach examined the standards for contextual possibilities such as: moral philosophy and ethics from a public relations perspective, social norms theory in public relations, communication rules, theory in public relations campaign development, rhetorical approach to relationship, meaning through public relations communication, social intervention, crisis communication, and situational crisis communication theory. The last area of focus examined the global perspective on "International Public Relations: Toward an Integrated Theoretical Case," the place of theory in public relations practice, the feminist approach to public relations scholarship, and a critical approach to the development of public relations in the 21st century through a critical analysis of public relations academic journals. This collection of variety in public relations theory is based on a broad and very diverse strategic theory base. However, this serious research in public relations, mostly on the national level in the U.S., was essentially an educational outreach for preparing student entering the field of public relations and primarily affecting departments focused on some form of communication.

In 2014, associate professor Nelli Bachurina at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia, examined the fundamental elements through a comparison and contrast of integrated communications.(IC). The "article concludes IMC and IC are distinctive and consistent historically separate. Public relations (corporate communication) and marketing have provided theoretical foundations and distinctive attributes for "IC" and "IMC," respectively. IC is interdisciplinary in nature with historical links with various domains of communication and disciplines concerned with relationship building, for example, public relations." (Bachurina, 2014)

Bachurina moves the scholarship forward with the recognition that "..thanks to the public relations scholarship contribution, a more substantive and broad term integrated communication (IC) appeared to solve the problem, however, … this distinction between IMC and IC has been under recognized in scholarship. The author continues to note significant problems, for example, "the practical absence of boundaries between the concepts…" and "despite the high potential of the IC notion its theoretical framework is still much weaker than that of IMC." (Ibid.)

Bachurina' contribution was presented at the 100th conference of the National Communication Association in Chicago in 2014. During this period of time, American scholars were very active. As mentioned, had Nelli Bachuria accessed these commission studies and major policy conferences reports, her conclusions could have been modified, especially about public relations theoretical work.

Business Communication Defined in 2018

The definition of business communication "from the perspectives of two major professional groups that traditionally engage in strategic communication within and on behalf of business organizations focuses on public relations and marketing." (Neff, *The International Encyclopedia Strategic Communication,* 2018). Essentially, "these professionals influence the

ongoing strategic planning process on all levels: global organizational intent, mission, problem/opportunity, goals, objectives, strategies, and tactics." (Ibid)

There are two major considerations before outlining the key characteristics of public relations and marketing functions from the Business Communication entry. First, anchoring these strategic communication efforts ties closely to public opinion. Secondly, these concepts should be also considered within organizational contexts "as defined by organizations' goal-oriented resource needs." (Ibid)

Outlining key concepts from the Business Communication article served to develop the standards and parameters for examining the public relations and/or marketing elements of the case study. Developing descriptive standards for functions related to either public relations and/or marketing was a means to establish the critical analysis framework.

Comparing and contrasting public relations and marketing functions as highlighted in the Business Communication article featured the strategic practice for both professions. However, in examining these professions' "similarities," the nature of each profession may be strikingly different regarding the execution of overarching goals which illustrates public relations broader reach." These key principles drawn the Business Communication article are outlined below as guided by the encyclopedia article into an analytical instrument for evaluating the historical development of strategic functions to create a statewide sports event. These extracted principles create the standards for evaluating the strategic functions of a nonprofit organization sponsoring a sports event in terms of mission, problems or opportunities, goals, objectives and tactics.

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Table A

COMPARISON AND CONTRAST OF KEY FUNCTIONS

Difference of Execution of Goals in Internal and External Communication

Public relations boundary spans to external contacts with stakeholders but a commitment to internal communication needs

Marketing does not focus on internal communication but brings the core internal audiences together … through shared meaning

Message and Media: A Difference of Processes and Stakeholders: Each have Distinct but Interrelated Importance to the Success of Business

Public relations exhibits a greater variety of message formats and/or approaches that are much more aligned as interests shared by companies and customer

Marketing tends not to cover community news, issues of importance, or public policies

Marketing tends to be more focused on how businesses communicate with markets and less with the larger array of stakeholders

Substantial differences in Relating to Strategic Management (different set of skills)

Public relations is more knowledgably regarding the ins-and-outs of journalism, the legal and policy requirements of the Securities and Exchange Commission and stock markets.

Public relations understands the big picture issues regarding how best to manage their organizations' charitable contributions processes, how to write speeches, and how to develop and implement issues management programs.

Public relations is best in matters of crisis communication as risk management and communication

Marketing is better versed in break-even analysis, competitive analysis, package design, and queuing theory, for instance

Attitude

Public relations is more of a "conciliatory, peacemaking approaching to relationships and the attitudes relevant to their formation and implementation.

Marketing is considered to be "more aggressive, competitive, hyperbolic, and with a selling mind-set.

(Important point: Although their research, process, and objectives often are similar, the knowledge base, audiences, and mind-sets of the two disciplines are distinctly different.)

The Critical Role of Communication

Marketing notes the trust & commitment are key elements of a strong relationship and communication is just one antecedent.

Public relations notes strategic communication is the process of enacting the signs of trust as well as indicating how commitment is both self-evident and subject to demonstration (emphasizing communication).

Public relations notes communication is the means for establishing the infrastructure grid in which discussion and engagement occur and in which the nature of each relationship is demonstrated.

Outcomes—A Way to Balance Business Interests with Public Policy

Public Relations is more concentrated on business communication involving issues management, identity management, crisis management, and relationship management.

Marketing is obviously more concentrated on strategies and outcomes of business communication that involves selling.

(Important point: The intersection of business communication within the strategic tradition of these two professions illustrates

how research, theory, planning, and evaluation support the strategic process along with the great importance of public opinion.

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Applying Critical Analysis Structure for Testing Hypotheses

This critical analysis structure is established by comparing and contrasting key areas identified in the Business Communication's primary strategic disciplines--public relations and

marketing. The key similarities and differences outlined in Table A are tested against three hypotheses proposed to examine the historical strategic activity of a nonprofit organization sponsoring a statewide sports event. The theoretical framework for the study focuses on Speech Act Theory (culture, episode, relationship self/public/organization) as enacted in the strategic communication process.

The critical analysis of the key elements surrounding the event in terms of history, event development, and contextual situations provides evidence for analyzing the strategic approaches. The case study, a statewide sports event in crisis, is selected for examining the IMC vs IC perspectives.

H1 The history of the event's founding reflects a public relations perspective

Theory: The original activists establishing the sports event acted well in terms of Speech Act Theory. In meeting the standards for speech act inclusiveness, the initial steps incorporated the following: Understanding the culture of the state, the nature of the demands of the episode (statewide sports event), the attitude of the people in relationship and the connections between the self, the public, and organizations. In line with Speech Act Theory and with strong knowledge of how to use speech acts, languaging for action, the sports event was executed with incredible success. The team was well aware of the external perceptions about the state and internal concerns about the sport.

Case Activity: RAGBRAI—the *Register's Annual Great Ride Across Iowa* was started in 1973 by friends working in the newspaper business: a Copy Writer from the *Des Moines Register*, a Columnist from Washington D.C. bureau, and the Public Relations Director from the *Des Moines Register*. The mix of journalists with public relations internally was a perfect arrangement for accessing the media. The result reported indicated the coverage was mainly by newspapers (the *Des Moines Register* is a respected statewide newspaper), magazine coverage, and nationwide broadcast overage. The relationship between public relations and journalism is well understood. To have public relations within a statewide newspaper is a connection that offers a great advantage for the two disciplines.

The organizers of the statewide sports event were aware of concerning perceptions about their state, especially externally. This goal was to attract those outside of the state to the event. Those in state, who were not into a weeklong type of sports episode, were being offered opportunities to consider this relationship. Ultimately, the organizing team had to work with many individuals, various publics, and established organizations using not only media sources but Word-of-Mouth (WOM) campaigns. The successful RAGBRAI event each year established a strong media connection along with a WOM momentum through authentic experiences. The power of WOM, for example, is responsible for the Mall of America in Minneapolis and the attendance at Christmas, Indiana attracting more attendees than Disney World.

The statewide sports event located in the Midwest state of Iowa had a number of important characteristics to support the success of major bicycling event. A recent ranking of the states reveals additional clues to the importance of Iowa sponsoring a sports event. The key state characteristics factoring into creating a context supportive of a major sports event were highly ranked. Overall, the State of Iowa is ranked as the Best in the nation for 2018.

States ranked on eight key standards measured in Overall Rankings in 2018

States	Health Care	Edu-cation	Economy	Oppor-tunity	Infra-structure	Crime & Corrections	Fiscal Stability	Quality of Life
#1 _Iowa____	3	5	17	4	1	15	21	9
#2 _____	7	13	20	3	6	11	24	2
#3 _____	10	3	2	35	8	14	1	22

Through the identification of the fit-of-the-community criteria, the top state, Iowa, has a clear first in "infrastructure." A state with the best infrastructure in the nation is a perfect environment with ample, quality roads and bridges assuring a conducive environment for a sports event. An on-the-road bicycling event is enhanced when "health care" is the 3rd highest state characteristic, "opportunity" as the 4th best, and the "quality of life" is 9th best. These factors enhance such a sports event as a weeklong bicycling excursion through communities.

Other perceptions, some negative, concerning education, conservatism, or lack of diversity does not reflect the number one ranking state's actions in policy or cultural accomplishments. The first-ranked state developed the SAT educational test, developed the junior college system, developed the national sex education program for schools, was the first state to establish a masque, and the state is electronically wired for urban and rural areas.

H1: Supported.

The position for the "statewide event was founded by Donald Kaul author of "Over the Coffee" a popular column published in 150 newspapers in the U.S. who was also a two-time Pulitzer Prize finalist "--in 1987 for the Cedar Rapids *Gazette* and 1999 for the *Register*." Kaul titled his idea as "RAGBRAI River to River." John Karras, Kaul's longtime colleague and the other RAGBRAI founder, simply rode together during the time where bicycling gained popularity and "they just wanted to ride across the state and have the Register foot the bill." (K. Munson, Register, Jan. 11, 2018). The 3rd member of the team was the Public Relations Director of the *Des Moines Register*" in 1973. (Crowder, 2019) Extensive public relations through the media (newspapers, magazines, and national broadcasting) along with "word-of-mouth" or WOM led to a "sold out event every year for 23 years by the 4th event. How does a state attain a high level of communication media and WOM response in a short period of time? The answer reflects the personalities of Kaul (who passed away at 83 years in 2018) and Karras's close relationship with the public relations director who had access to news outlets. Some credit the team's awareness of the perceptions about the state of Iowa and the authenticity of the experience suitable to bicyclists: good roads and bridges, friendly communities, and a strong healthcare system.

H2: The factors creating the crisis are more within the functions of marketing.

Theory: The Speech Act Theory principles were under pressure from some organizational team members in 2019. Although the culture, the episode, and the self, public, and organizations remained the cornerstone of the event, dissension began to emerge and disagreements indicates a crisis looming in the near future.

Case Activity: Although the organizers overcame the initial internal and external concerns with exceptional success primarily with media exposure and word-of-mouth, some of the organizers were pushing back on "action as usual. " Then suddenly an announcement in *USA*

Today (2020) noting several of the organizers of a marketing team had left the planning organization and intending to develop a competing event. Eventually the renegade team agreed not to compete with the dates of RAGBRAI for 2020. Now with the pandemic cancelling RAGBRAI for 2020, a new agreement, same route, for 2021 is in place. No word of any plans from the marketing members who left RAGBRAI.

H2: Supported.

The organizational group was now called a marketing team. The crisis culminated when three members of the marketing team left RAGBRAI with the intent to develop a competing event. Why would part of the organizing group do such an act when the event was very successful? The answer—is a marketing response—more money and those who represented the original Speech Act Theory's ethical commitment resisted the idea of more money--more sales, hence conflict. Here is a statement establishing the financial impact of this sports event:

> RAGRAI is the oldest, largest and longest recreational bicycle-touring event in the world. It stated in 1972 as something hatched by two *Des Moines Register* writers but quickly grew into a phenomenon. The organizers typically receive about 200 applicants to be host city. The more than 10,000 official rides can bring $3 million a day to local economies according to some estimates. (Crowder, Ibid)

The other side of the money issue related to the revenue brought into the organization per se. A summary of the event's participation and successful financial outcome added to the pressure for change to enhance revenue outcome:

> *About 10,000 registered riders from all 50 states and international locations. *Sold out every year for 23 years. *No growth as maxed out every year. *Only 8,500 allowed (maintains control & safety) to ride the entire week (moved to a lottery system). *Week long: register for $175.00. *Revenue level: $1,487,500.00. *Daily wristband $30 a day (revenue varies). *Weeklong nonrider registration $35 (revenue varies). Inspired 200 other rides in the nation. *326,850 people pedaled 19,542 miles. *Largest daily ride count: 1988 - 23,000 riders from Boone to Des Moines; 1997 - 20,000 riders from Des Moines to Creston; 2013 - an estimated 36,000 from Perry to Des Moines. *Visited 780 towns (in 44 years). * By 1997 has been to all of Iowa's 99 counties. (Ibid.)

RAGBRAI, committed to an established nonprofit viewpoint, initiated several donation efforts to causes. For example:

> Former RAGBRAI director, Jim Green who instituted the "Dream Team, a program offering disadvantaged youth a chance to participate in RAGBRAI for free. If Dream Team members complete training rides, make good grades and finish their river-to-river journey, they receive new bikes. In addition to the ride dedication, RAGBRAI donated $10,000 to the program in the director's honor (Jim Green passed away two years earlier). (C. Crowder, January 25, 2020)

H3: The relationship between the two strategic areas, IMC vs IC, establishes gaps between the practice and the intellectual and theoretical perspectives of each discipline.

Theory: The Speech Act Theory emphasizes culture, episode, relationship, and the self/public/organization. When an event is extremely successful often, the thought "more is better" as marketing pressed this case for financial gain. Ignoring the culture, the healthy nature of the episode, diminishing the relationships, and pushing for organizational dominance over the public and/or the self can lead to a loss of much good achieved, besides incurring a loss of relationships.

Case Activity: The break of some of the marketing members from the organizational team initiated a crisis. The point that was articulated focused on "more money could be made and the intent to grow the sports event. However, as discussed in the theoretical constructs of Speech Act, the communities while rewarded well for the route traveling through their town and the fact that the applications are very robust; there are concerns about the impact on the state if competition was initiated.

H3: Supported

The gap between IMC vs. IC are differences that span practice, theoretical conceptualization, and intellectual mindset. These comparisons found in Neff's 2018 "Business Communication" analysis formed the strategic communication of two disciplines, public relations and marketing. This also provides the standards for the analysis supporting the third hypothesis outcome illustrating the two domains are very different and thus have very different emphases and outcomes. Here the standards identified and analyzed for each strategic discipline as outlined from the table of standards in Business Communication.

Strategic Functions Compared & Contrasted:
A Case Study of Evidence for Actions for Each Discipline

Differences in Internal and External Communication

Public Relations: Strength in boundary spanning for both internal and external networks. (media and word-of mouth). Being sponsored by a statewide newspaper with ongoing public relations relationships effective. Maintained empathy and a nonprofit approach to "charging vendors (major issue)." Overcame perceptions internal and external perceptions about Iowa as well as the idea of a statewide week-long bicycling event.

Marketing: Only the strategic communication functions utilized were those for public relations. RAGBRAI founded under the *Des Moines Register's* public relations director focusing on media (newspapers, magazines, national broadcasting) and the two founders WOM network.

Messages and Media

Public Relations: Having the event located in a statewide newspaper guarantees a flow of

"messages and media" attention. In addition, public relations focuses on developing

relationships allowing for word-of–mouth to be well executed.

Marketing: Not initially participating with the groundwork with community (not the usual marketing interest).

Strategic Management Differences in Relating to Strategic Management (different set of skills)

Public Relations: The PR strategic discipline is aware of the "ins-and-outs of journalism and public relations relationships," as mentioned. Public relations nderstands the "charitable contribution processes and is prepared to develop "issue management" programs for issues like "food safety."

Marketing: A discipline not oriented towards nonprofits. Issue management and crisis communication are viewed as a public relations responsibility. *Attitudes*
Public Relations: This sport event is totally dedicated to developing relationships with a family emphasis. This nonprofit philosophy is illustrated by a quotation from a member of the executive committee: "Sally Quandt, a Denison RAGBRAI executive committee co-chair, said the fees were not the important concern." "We're here for the ambassadorship and for the goodwill and for welcoming these people," she said. Another comment stressed the nonprofit concern: "Ulmer said the supervisors were concerned about setting fees that would be fair for nonprofits."
Marketing: More aggressive with a "selling mindset"—an attitude that emerged in 2019 after years of very successful event outcomes. By this point of time, the title of the position at the REGISTER had changed from public relations to marketing.
Critical Role of Communication
Public Relations: PR continued to stress communication as a\the central role representing this strategic discipline. Selling was not recommended because the numbers allowed on the weeklong bicycling event maxed out and moved to a lottery system for safety reasons.
Marketing: Communication is one antecedent and the marketing staff turned to analytics to push for have a bigger event and take on more marketing initiatives as a strategic approach. As noted, the event has changed little over the years with such success and the leadership pushed back on the marketing ideas. Consequently, resignations by several staffers from marketing were accompanied by a threat to run a competitive sports event against RAGBRAI.
Outcomes: Pubic Policy Needs to Balance Business Interests
Public Relations: The members of the marketing team unfortunately decided to move to a

marketing strategic approach. The relationship function of Speech Act principles

would be lost if "business interests" took over. Creating an argument, that success

simply could be greater if sales were pushed created a variety of concerns.

For example: "The balance of the discussion concerned appropriate vending fees for the

unincorporated areas of the county,"

Marketing: Obviously refused to maintain a public relations strategic approach, revolted and left the team with a threat to compete against the RAGBRAI event.

Final Summary

This case study compares and contrasts strategic communication actions to provide insight into public relations broader view in contrast to the "bottom line" approach that often drives organizations to take on the marketing mantel. The case study provides a stronger landscape of what is best for society other than simply making money. This is a study of how public relations has a strategic role in protecting public policy from business. At this point RAGBRAI is cancelled for 2020 due to the pandemic with an agreement with the RAGBRAI route towns to resume the weeklong ride for 2021. No word from the resigned marketing members about future plans.

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Research, Measurement and Evaluation Job Advertisements: Responsibilities, Requirements and Gendered Language

Julie O'Neil
Thao Pham
Texas Christian University

Abstract

This research analyzed communication research, measurement and evaluation job advertisements to discern typical job responsibilities and job requirements. Researchers also critically examined the gendered language of the job advertisements according to the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974). Results of the study have implications for public relations educators and for research on gender and public relations.

Keywords: Measurement and evaluation, digital and social media, gender, feminist theory

Introduction

Due to the ubiquity of digital marketing and social media tools and practices, public relations educators have sought to develop and strengthen pedagogical approaches related to these areas (Ewing, Kim, Kinsky, Moore, & Freberg, 2018). The increased importance of digital and social skills also necessitates a consideration of what current employers are requesting in job searches for such positions. The skills required for these positions—data, analytics, and measurement—have traditionally been considered more masculine in nature in terms of role responsibility (Hammer, 1997). If public relations creative and strategic responsibilities expand to include data and analytics, what perception shift will that yield for the public relations profession, one that has been called the Velvet Ghetto (Cline et al.,1986; Creedon, 1991)? This research has two primary purposes: (1) to analyze current job requirements and responsibilities for these communication research positions, and (2) to examine the use of gendered language in research, measurement, and evaluation job advertisements for public relations practitioners.

Literature Review

Women and the Public Relations Profession

Women started to heavily infiltrate the public relations profession in the 1970s and 1980s, leading some to worry that public relations would lose its stature and influence (Cline et al., 1986; Creedon, 1991). A pink-collar ghetto happens when wages and prestige drop in a profession due to the preponderance of women in a profession, similar to what has happened in teaching, nursing and library services. The International Association of Business Communicators funded a 1986 study called the Velvet Ghetto (Cline et al., 1986) that indicated that even though women dominated the public relations position, they made less money than men and had lower stature. Women currently comprise approximately 75% of all public relations positions, yet occupy only 20% of leadership positions (Fitzpatrick, 2013; Institute for Public Relations, 2019). Grunig, Toth, and Hon (2000) argue that the values of public relations are feminist in nature—two-way communication, relationships, cooperation, and respect. Other feminist values are apparent in the realm of social media employment. Duffy and Schwartz (2018) explain that women's penchant for being social and connective, their high willingness to compromise compensation for experience, and their vulnerability to replacement are among the reasons for young, middle- to upper-class women's overrepresentation in the social media intern pool. Hence, within the media world dominated by men, social media has become the new "pink-collar ghetto of tech" (Chaney, 2009, para. 9).

Gender Biases in Job Advertisements' Language

Structured Perceptions of Gender

Gender biases in specific types of work or tasks come from socially structured perceptions of genders (Abele, 2003; Eagly,1987; Heilman, 2012). Throughout history, media have portrayed men as immune, logical, and rational and women as vulnerable, emotional, and irrational (Ostberg, 2019). These portrayals reflect society's perceptions and expectations of gender, which have an effect on women's underrepresentation in many areas of employment, such as leadership positions, natural sciences, and engineering (Gaucher, Friesen & Kay, 2011). As the topic of gender inequality is complex and encompasses many different principles, such as sociology, politics, and history, attributing women underrepresentation (or overrepresentation, in the case of public relations) in any line of jobs to a particular factor is difficult. However, the focus of this project is to examine the language used in job advertisements; hence, we limit the range of literature to hiring language and readers' perceptions of such language usages.

Gendered Language in Job Advertisements

Multiple studies suggest a connection between gender representation and gendered wording in job advertisements, which reinforces social gender perceptions and influences people's professional choices (Duffy & Schwartz, 2018; Gaucher et al., 2011; Taris & Bok, 1998). This use of gendered language discourages women from pursuing certain professions. In the statistical field, Hammer (1997) revealed systematic sexism in classic statistics textbooks for college programs. In these textbooks' examples, the role of intellectual workers, such as leaders, financial analysts and researchers, were assigned to men while women were assigned roles of followers or generic professions, such as teachers. The study revealed a correlation among such portrayals, female students' math phobia, and women's underrepresentation in statistics-related professions. Taris and Bok (1998) suggested that as gendered wording is a cue for belongingness, women felt less qualified for a position advertised with masculine characteristics. However, they felt more qualified for a neutral or feminine-worded position.

Gendered Language Usage

Men as Leaders, Analysts, and Problem Solvers

Research suggests a systemic association of certain words with masculine or feminine characteristics in job advertisements (Gaucher et al., 2011; Taris & Bok, 1998). A 2014 Danish study that examined the language of job advertisements for top leadership positions found that readers associated most of the qualifications in the job descriptions with masculine traits. Although leadership responsibilities, such as management, budgeting, and planning seem gender-neutral, these responsibilities were often described with masculine adjectives, such as "hard," "solid," and "result-driven," which increased readers' association between these responsibilities and masculinity (Askehave & Zethsen, 2014). Analytical or strategic roles that require researching and working with data have been associated with a masculine personification (Hammer, 1997), which suggests that being analytical or strategic are perceived to be masculine traits. Taris and Bok (1998, p. 598) tested a list of person characteristics in personnel advertisement with future job applicants and found that the top masculine characteristics in job advertisements were "commercial feeling," "management competence," analytical skills," "entrepreneurial skills," and "resolution."

Women as Natural Communicators, Connectors, and Sympathizers

Women, on the other hand, have been perceived as sociable, connective, and sympathetic, which makes them natural communicators who fit in specific job descriptions, especially in public relations. Duffy and Schwartz (2018) found that the ideal social media worker would be "fun, well-connected, passionate, and emotionally managed," (p. 2978) which were identified with feminine characteristics. Women have not been portrayed as strategic or science-oriented in statistics textbooks' examples, and the gender imbalance in STEM-related fields also contributes to this perception (Hammer, 1997). Among leadership positions, cooperating is considered a feminine trait as a result of feminine activities, which include supporting, listening, and empathizing (Askohave & Zethsen, 2014). Taris and Bok (1998) found that the top personnel characteristics associated with femininity were "communication skills," "teamwork," "good contractual skills," and "ability to motivate other people" (p. 598).

The Demand in Public Relations and Advertising for Analytics and Research

Although research has always played an essential role in informing public relations process and strategies, the emergence of big data and digital platforms has created a need for data-driven research approaches in public relations (Weiner & Kochhar, 2016). Among the 12 professional values and competencies promoted by the Accrediting Council on Education in

Journalism and Mass Communication, five of them relate to digital analytics (Ewing et al., 2018). Public Relations practitioners and educators also indicated that research and analytics was the fourth most desirable skills (out of 13) for entry-level public relations practitioners (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018).

Despite the growing need for digital analytics expertise, some members of the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) Measurement Commission have lamented they have difficulty finding talent for their positions in research, measurement and evaluation (personal communication, July 15, 2019). Are educators and organizations, such as the IPR, training individuals with the necessary skills to be successful in such positions? To answer such a question necessitates an understanding of current job requirements and responsibilities in communication research, measurement and evaluation positions. To accomplish this first objective, researchers analyzed communication research, measurement and evaluation job advertisements to examine those requirements.

As a secondary purpose, researchers critically examined the gendered language of the job advertisements according to the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974). Duffy and Schwartz's (2018) analysis of social media job advertisements revealed that job expectations communicated in the ads connote a "feminized nature of social media employment, with its characteristic invisibility, lower pay, and marginal status" (p. 2972). Researchers wondered if the opposite might be true for communication positions that rely on data and analysis, skills typically associated with masculine roles. Lee, Place and Smith (2018) concluded that even though public relations leadership positions continue to be occupied by men, social media work may be helping to level the playing field. Because many research, measurement and evaluation positions now include analyzing social media, the growing analytical job responsibilities may serve to reduce the power divide, particularly if more women are fulfilling a more masculine role.

Method

The data sample included 101 full-time communication and research job positions that were posted on Glassdoor between September 30 and October 7, 2019. The sample consisted of 101 job postings related to research in communication on Glassdoor collected between September 30 and October 7. All the searches were set to these parameters: Full-time, posted last month, job function – media & communications. The search terms used included "communication research," "communication insight," "research insight," and "communication strategist" (181 results). The final sample consisted of positions that specify research and strategy for at least 10% of the responsibilities and require applicants to have analytical skills/research experiences.

Researchers coded the job title, location of the job, the industry of the organization advertising the position, and salary information. Researchers then read the job descriptions and inductively developed a coding scheme to capture position requirements and responsibilities, a process informed by grounded theory. Researchers also coded the ads for gendered language. For example, terms like "analytical," "leadership," "self-motivated," were coded as masculine while terms related to "relationships," "understanding," and "compassionate" were coded as feminine.

Results

Job Titles, Location, Industry and Salary Information

As indicated by Table 1, approximately 70% of research communication jobs are managerial, indicated by titles such as strategist, manager, and director.

Table 1

Position Titles of Research Communication Jobs

Position Title	Frequency	Percentage
	n	(%)
Strategist	36	35.6
Manager	20	19.8
Director	15	14.9
Coordinator	7	6.9
Analyst	5	5.0
Specialist	4	4.0
Planner	3	3.0
Associate	2	2.0
Assistant	2	2.0
Supervisor	2	2.0
Lead	1	1.0
Other	4	4.0
Total (N=101)	101	100.0

Researchers next identified job postings that contained the term "senior," "manager," "director," and "lead" as leaders' positions or positions with higher seniority. Out of 101 job postings, 45 met the requirement. Only 5 out 45 leading positions listed research-related responsibility as the prominent or main duty (more than 75% of the job description) of the job, which the researchers coded as "full-time research job." The remaining 40 postings were coded "part-time research job" as research-related responsibilities only accounted for up to 30% of the job description. Table 2 suggests that senior positions mostly incorporated research responsibilities (88.9%) with other job duties and did not make them the priority of team leaders.

Table 2

Seniority of Full-time versus Part-time Research Communication Jobs

Type of job	Number of jobs	Percentage
	n	(%)
Part-time	40	88.9
Full-time	5	11.1
Total	45	100.0

As indicated by Table 3, nearly 50% of the research, measurement and evaluation jobs are in marketing/advertising and business services.

Table 3

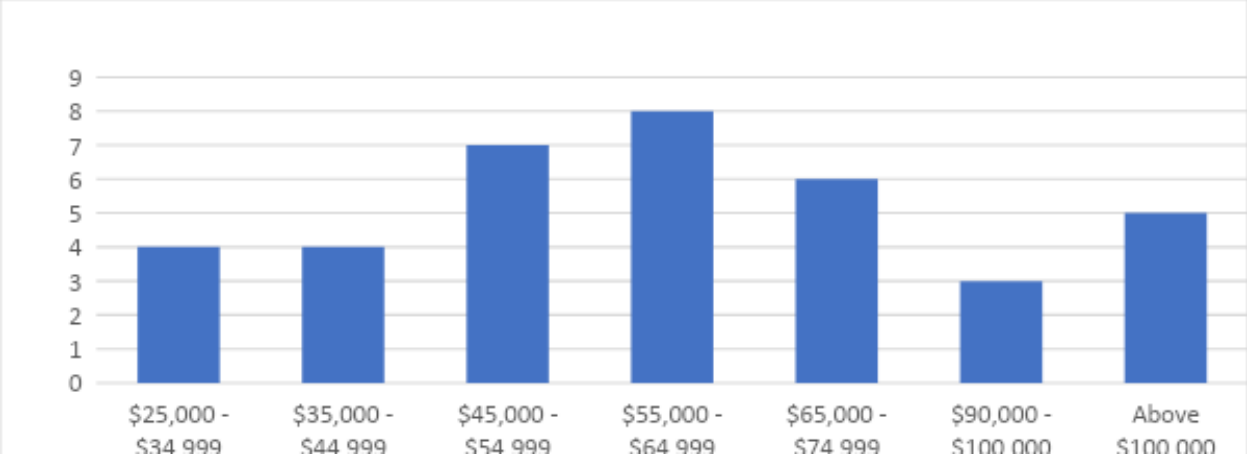
Industry of Research Communication Jobs

Industry	Number of jobs n	Percentage (%)
Marketing/Advertising	29	28.7
Business Services	23	22.8
Healthcare	9	8.9
Media/Broadcasting	9	8.9
Education	6	5.9
Information Technology	6	5.9
Manufacturing	5	5.0
Social Assistance	4	4.0
Entertainment	4	4.0
Retail	3	3.0
Telecommunication	2	2.0
Government	1	1.0
Total	101	100.0

In terms of location, states that were most often listed in the ads included California (*n*=19), New York (*n*=10), District of Columbia (*n*=8), Florida (*n*=6), Virginia (*n*=6), and Minnesota (*n*=5). Finally, Figure 1 indicates the average salaries of positions (only 37 out of 101 postings listed). The greatest number of people make between $45,000-$74,999.

Figure 1

Salary Range of Research Communication Jobs



Job Requirements

Degree

For job postings that specified degree requirements, 55 positions (80.9%) required a bachelor's degree; five positions required a master's or MBA (7.3%); 5 positions required either

a bachelor's or a master's (7.3%), and five positions required a master's or higher degree (M.A., M.S., M.D., J.D., PhD) (4.4%).

Out of 42 postings that specified field/major of education, 16 positions (38.0%) required a degree in Communications/PR/Journalism or related field; 8 positions (19.0%) required a degree in Marketing/Business-related field; 5 positions (11.9%) required a degree in a Data Analytics-related field; and 13 positions (31.0%) accepted either a Marketing/Business-related or Communication-related degree.

The required average years of experience was 4.6 years.

Software and Skills/Knowledge

The most popular software that employers listed are displayed in Table 4. Skills and knowledge included SEO (search engine optimization), SEM (search engine marketing), OTT (over-the-top), traffic metrics, A/B testing, data analytics and data visualization, presentation and teamwork.

Table 4

Software Requirements for Research Communication Jobs

Analytics:	Google Analytics, SPSS
Database:	comScore, Gfk/MRI, Nielsen
forms:	Google AdWords, Facebook Ads Manager, Big Ads, Google AdPlanner, Google Display
Office:	MS Office Suite (Word, Excel, PowerPoint), Access

Language Analysis of Ads

As indicated by Table 5, advertisements contained a male-dominated narrative about research, measurement and evaluation. Common male themes included strategic and analytics; results oriented, efficient and effective; and independent, motivated, focused and strong.

Table 5

Male Gendered Language in Advertisements

Theme	Examples of Language in Advertisements
Strategic and analytics	Strong analytical abilities; Technical or analytical field a plus; Identifying strategic opportunities; Big-picture strategic thinking; Strategic point of view that also solves a client's business problem.
Results oriented, efficient and effective	Data driven and results-oriented mindset Drive results, drive growth and loyalty, drives the brand Provide efficient and effective administrative and project management support; Achieving results with accuracy
Independent, motivated, focused & strong	Strong demand, strong skills, strong command, strong ability to multitask Comfortable solving problems independently Focused on high quality results Motivated by an insatiable curiosity and a desire to drive impact

The advertisements contained less examples of female gendered language. Themes included listen and understanding, building relationships and facilitating collaboration, and people person, teams (see Table 6).

Table 6

Female Gendered Language in Advertisements

Theme	Examples of Language in Advertisements
Listen and understanding	Actively listen, ask the right questions Strong interpersonal skills, particularly listening Translating into easy to understand storytelling presentations
Building relationships and facilitating collaboration	Collaboration with project staff and leadership, collaboration with the public relations and marketing team, exceptional collaboration skills
People person, teams	People person; Keeps teams and clients focused; Facilitated communication among teams

Discussion and Conclusion

The vast majority of contemporary jobs require research, measurement and evaluation as a part-time job function, not full-time. Approximately 70% of the positions are senior-level. The greatest number of jobs are in marketing/advertising (29%) and business services (23%). Roughly 80% of research, measurement and evaluation jobs require a bachelor's degree, with 69% of jobs requiring/accepting a degree in a communication-related field. Employers indicated they want applicants to be proficient with a wide range of software and analytical skills (e.g. Google Analytics, Google AdWords, Facebook Ads, SEO, SEO, OTT). Educators may want to think about adding some of these into curriculum. In summary, the job market for positions in research, measurement, and evaluation seems robust and viable for public relations graduates.

Most of the language in the advertisements emphasized masculine traits, such as being strategic and analytical, results oriented, efficient, effective, independent, motivated, focused, and strong. Much less emphasis was on the feminine traits of listening, building relationships, and being people-focused—feminist values that are typically associated with the public relations profession (Grunig et al., 2000). The continued growth of research, measurement and evaluation, defined by language that connotes masculine traits, may ultimately shift the perception of public relations stereotype as a "Velvet Ghetto," in which women are overrepresented in technician positions that typically lack power and prestige (Lee et al., 2018). Moreover, women's potential movement into research, measurement and evaluation positions may alter gendered role prescriptions and ultimately serve as a means to provide women greater prestige and power. Future research could include interviewing students' and practitioners' perceptions and responses to the ads themselves.

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Anecdotes over Evidence, Ostracization over Community: A Narrative Analysis of the Anti-Vaccination Crisis

Michael J. Palenchar
Anna Kochigina
University of Tennessee

Abstract

There has been a rise in the anti-vaccination movement. This study examines the surprising success of the anti-vaccination movement from a narrative theory analysis. We review the extant literature on narrative theory, crisis communication and the anti-vaccination movement, and conclude with recommendations for those engaged in this unique health crisis. Research results include: (1) the potential downfall of ostracizing a particular stakeholder; (2) the strength of storytelling versus statistics; (3) the influence of Facebook mothers' groups; (4) the role of celebrity parents in creating an appealing narrative related to issues of uncertainty reduction and cognitive dissonance; and (5) how opposing views on vaccines are affecting the narrative of the story and causing a health crisis. The findings extend the theories of crisis and risk communication and suggest how health communication practitioners can build their risk and crisis campaigns more effectively.

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Introduction

In 2019, the World Health Organization named vaccine hesitancy as one of the top ten global health threats. This research project, comprised of three different studies, examines the surprising success of the anti-vaccination movement from narrative theory analysis focusing on the key components of Fisher's (1984) narrative theory along with Palmlund's (2009) typology of risk bearers. The methodologies included a content analysis of data from various traditional and social media sites via Salesforce's social studio cloud computing software, as well as other traditional content analysis tools.

Research results include: (1) the potential downfall of ostracizing a particular stakeholder;

(2) the strength of storytelling versus statistics; (3) the influence of Facebook mothers' groups; (4) the role of celebrity parents in creating an appealing narrative related to issues of uncertainty reduction and cognitive dissonance; and (5) how opposing views on vaccines are affecting the narrative of the story and causing a health crisis. The findings extend the theories of crisis and risk communication and suggest how health communication practitioners can build their risk and crisis campaigns more effectively.

Risk and Crisis Communication

The abundantly used term "crisis" describes a situation in which something severely threatens normal functioning and continuation of a company, organization, or group. Therefore, crisis communication is how practitioners address their publics in the wake of these threats.

According to Coombs (2015), these threats can be specified as either a disaster or an organizational crisis. The anti-vaccination movement identifies best with a long-term crisis over disasters that threaten normal functioning. While the movement itself did not occur suddenly, diseases that were abolished did reappear rather quickly. Both the national population and the global population are affected by the reappearances of these diseases. While the anti-vaccine movement may be seen as a crisis, there has been increased support for a transition from crisis management to risk management. Many organizations misidentify whether the situation is an issue, risk or actual crisis. At this point in time vaccine refusal is more of a risk because it poses dangers for public health.

Risk communication is a sector of the communication field that focuses on potential risks for stakeholders. Covello, von Winterfeldt & Slovic (1986) operationally defined risk communication as any purposeful exchange of information regarding potential risks for interested parties. Risk communication should serve to educate on potential risks and benefits of multiple courses of action (Fischhoff, Bostrom, & Jacobs, 1993). It is essential in crisis communication, because it acts as a preventative measure to crises. Commonly, risk communication is strongly tied to health communication, as it represents the large risks for overall public health. Current risk communication strategies have motivated health professionals to be more visible in their campaigns and response programs (Glik, 2007). To supplement that visibility, practitioners must create strong narratives for health campaigns to better relate to the public.

Narrative Theory/Paradigm

Developed by Walter B. Fisher (1984), narrative theory or paradigm states that narratives can be applied to all communication created by humans, not just those of fiction. The fact that narration is not only a part of fictional works but that of all human communication allows one to study communication narratives in a new light. All of the pieces of fictional works such as characters, storylines, narrators, conflicts, and more also exist in non-fiction stories. These non- fiction stories help shape communications between the storyteller and participating audiences, which makes for a meaningful interaction. The narrative of the story also allows one to form opinions, thoughts, beliefs, reasons, and can be persuasive. Thus, it can affect the way one shapes beliefs and reasoning from the narrative, and persuasion can occur when one feels the narrative gave one a reason to believe the new information presented in the narrative (Hoppin, 2016).

In order to understand the narrative paradigm, Fisher (1984) constituted the five parts of the paradigm including people as narrators of stories. Secondly, he asserted that the model of how one communicates and makes decisions is with "good reasons" and can change based on the channel of the media, variety, and the setting. Next, how one applies "good reason" can be different based on one's history, background, and upbringing. Likely the most important aspect, the fourth part of Fisher's narrative paradigm says, "Rationality is determined by the nature of the persons as narrative begins – their inherent awareness of narrative probability, what constitutes a story, and their constant habit of testing narrative fidelity" (p. 8). Lastly, "good reasons" make up the best aspects of story and life.

While there are several parts to his paradigm, the narrative paradigm also looks at rationality and reason in a different manner. Fisher (1984) stated, "The narrative paradigm insists that human communication should be viewed as historical as well as situational, …as being rational when they satisfy the demands of narrative probability and fidelity…" (p. 2). According to Fisher, narrative rationality is the collective ability that all humans share, and he believes that everyone has the power to be rational. In addition, Fisher argued a key function of narrative rationality is "identification and deliberation" (p. 9). Narrative fidelity looks at the stories and if the narratives of the stories are indeed accurate with the ones that the receiver has experienced in his or her life.

Fisher postulated that humans do not have to learn narrative fidelity or narrative probability, but rather humans acquire the skills needed throughout life experiences.

The narrative paradigm is that it can be applied in situations of opposing narratives (Hoppin, 2016). This is of interest because of how humans form opinions and beliefs, and if the narrative is in opposition to one's belief, it will affect how the narrative is viewed. Fisher (1984) stated that "If a story denies a person's self-conception, it does not matter what it says about the world" (p. 14). This paper will examine the literature reviews of the state of vaccine hesitancy and will review how opposing views on vaccines are affecting the narrative of the story and potentially causing a health crisis in the United States.

Vaccine Hesitancy Background

Vaccine hesitancy, also known as those resistant to obtaining vaccines, has become a problem in the United States (Hoppin, 2016). In fact, in 2019 the World Health Organization (WHO) named vaccine hesitancy as one of ten global health threat. According to the WHO, vaccinations stop 2-3 million people from dying each year. This could be increased by nearly 1.5 million if the vaccination rate across the world was amplified. The WHO declared that measles has increased 30% across the world. Through research with an advisory group on

vaccines, they identified several reasons why people around the world have vaccine hesitancy including "complacency, inconvenience in accessing vaccines, and lack of confidence…" (p. 14).

There are a number of causes that have spurred Americans and others to question vaccines, including a controversial article published in 1998 by the *The Lancet*, a medical journal in Britain by surgeon Andrew Wakefield and 12 others (Hoppin, 2016). The authors of the study, which was paid for by lawyers looking for data to support lawsuits against the manufactures of vaccines, claimed that the measles, mumps, and rubella shot, also known as the M.M.R. shot, caused bowel disease and most damaging, autism. Once the paper was published, it was found that data had been falsified, and the study was rescinded in 2010 by *The Lancet*. In addition, once the data was shown to be falsified, Wakefield was no longer allowed to practice medicine in the United Kingdom.
Unfortunately, the sharing of the study was widespread, and the damage was done even though it was proven to include falsified data (Krishna, 2017).

The current data as explained in a *New York Times* article shows that the herd rate, also known as the ideal number to shield the majority of the population against the disease, has decreased for the third continuous year with the M.M.R. shot as only 94.3% of kindergartners in 2017-2018 had the vaccine. The ideal herd rate should be 95% (Hoffman, 2019). As shown by the drop, the vaccine hesitancy movement is increasing in the United States thanks in part to negative feelings toward vaccines through the anti-vaccination movement (Krishna, 2017). Reviewing the literature of the effects that social media has on vaccine hesitancy will help shed light on many health challenges that medical professionals face from the counter argument not to vaccinate.

Social Media Effects on Vaccine Hesitancy

The world of social media continues to grow with new social apps being created each day.

For the purpose of this paper, we will focus the social media review on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest. Various studies have examined the effects of social media on the pro- vaccine and anti-vaccine movement. Smith and Graham (2017) studied the anti-vaccination faction through mapping on Facebook using six different Facebook pages. While the study is a few years old, the results remain true today. Their findings show that Facebook is an effective channel for the anti-vaccination movement because of how the distribution and networking of the channel work. In addition, the study discovered that those following the six Facebook pages preferred the method of sharing posts rather than commenting on the posts (Smith & Graham). This is significant because of the power that sharing posts on Facebook has. It allows one to span messages from more people than commenting, thus allowing the message to go further.

In another study on Facebook and Twitter, Deiner et al. (2017) monitored social media discussions from 2009 to mid 2016 regarding vaccination. In sum, 58,078 Facebook posts and 82,993 tweets were classified. On Facebook, the algorithm identified 22,306 posts as anti- vaccination posts, while 17,928 posts were identified as for vaccination. On Twitter, 16,297 tweets were noted as for vaccination while 43,259 tweets were identified as anti-vaccination posts. The results of the study are impactful because they continue to show that those in the anti-vaccination group are active on social media stimulating the online conversation.

The world of social media continues to have impact on the vaccine movement because of how social media users have direct access to not only share content but also to create content to share ("Social Medicine," 2018). The content that is shared can quickly spread misinformation about vaccines. Boghani (2019) spoke with data scientist Renee DiResta about the vaccine hesitancy movement. DiResta remarked that she first began her research on the anti-vaccine movement on social media channels in 2014. Since that time, she and another partner found the use of dubious accounts by a small group of social media users who were creating hashtags to support the anti-vaccine movement to spread information in a larger way, thus appearing to be more of a force than was true (Boghani). Not only are anti-vaccinators spreading the message in public social media forums, but the groups are also using private groups like popular mom Facebook groups in various towns (Hoffman, 2019). Hoffman interviewed a mother from Aurora, Colorado, who explained how she was pressured by a mother's group on Facebook into not vaccinating her first child in 2011. She has since reversed her decision and has had both of her children vaccinated, but the power that the other mothers held over her in the Facebook group was powerful at first as she did not want to be removed from a new friend group and wanted the support from the mothers in that group.

Not only are humans using social media to spread information or misinformation about the vaccine movement, but so are social media bots (Yuan et al., 2019). The research conducted used sentiment analysis with machine learning and group surveillance on social media networks to review patterns of communication on Twitter for those in favor and those not in favor of vaccines. Specifically, the study focused its research on the 2015 California measles outbreak that originated at Disneyland. Using many vaccine-related keywords, the time period of February 1-March 9, 2015, was used. Throughout the duration of the research, 3,913 accounts were found to actually be bots. The bots created 30,332 tweets. Of the bots, the anti-vaccine group accounted for 1.16%, and the pro-vaccine group accounted for 1.51%.

Now that the research has shown that social media channels are popular for both pro-vaccine and anti-vaccine believers, social media companies have taken note and are trying to limit the way anti-vaccination content is shared. For example Pinterest was among the first to put in regulations regarding content that supports vaccine hesitancy (Wilson, 2019). Pinterest not only removes anti- vaccination content, but also does not allow its users to search for anti-vaccine content. The blocking began in 2018, but the policy was created in 2017 regarding negative vaccine information as well as other untrue information in the health realm.

Social Influencer Effects on Vaccine Hesitancy

Social media influencers – both commonplace people and celebrities – have a history of involvement in the anti-vaccine debate, some for the vaccines, others expressively against (Lutkenhaus, Jansz, & Bouman, 2019). Followers of celebrities can be influenced by their opinions, especially if the follower has not made up his or her own mind regarding vaccinations (Antrim, 2019). One of the most outspoken celebrities against vaccines is actress Jenny McCarthy (Dickson, 2019). She has used her power in the media to speak out against vaccinations claiming that her son received autism from the M.M.R. shot and that she would not vaccinate in the future (Hoppin, 2016). Her distain for vaccines continued to worsen and in 2009 she commented in *Time* magazine that "If you ask a parent of an autistic child if they want the measles or autism, we will stand in line for the…measles" (Kluger, 2009, para. 6). Yet again in 2010, she insisted that the M.M.R. shot does cause autism calling public health officials liars (Hoppin, 2016). In recent years, McCarty has tried to backslide on her comments

from the early 2000s by asserting that she is not anti-vaccine and has not been labeled correctly in the past (Hoppin).

McCarthy is not the only celebrity who seems to be backtracking on vaccine comments. Actress Jessica Biel got involved in the vaccine debate in June 2019 (Gutierrez & Karlamangla, 2019). Beil was lobbying against a vaccine bill in California that would make the medical exemptions to vaccines harder for health care officials to use (Dickson, 2019). She posted her trip to the California state capitol and her visit with F. Kennedy Jr. on Instagram along with her feelings on the bill. She was immediately met with backlash and was forced to further explain her opinion. In her rebuttal, she said, "I am not against vaccinations. I support children getting vaccinations and I also support families having the right to make educated medical decisions…" (p. 2).

Storytelling vs. Statistics

A second part of this project focused on narrative analysis focuses on key components of Fisher's (1984) narrative theory and Palmlund's (1992) typology to explain the importance of narrators in stories. Palmlund's (1992) *risk narrative analysis* identified six risk character features related to risk discourse: (1) *Risk bearers* perceive themselves as or are actual victims of the negative consequences of the risk. (2) *Risk advocates* are the heroic protagonists who speak on behalf of the risk bearers. (3) *Risk generators* create the risks, or are thought to do so, and therefore are likely featured as antagonists in the risk narrative. (4) *Risk researchers* apply science to determine whether risks occur and if so how they can be abated or mitigated. (5) *Risk arbiters* are the characters in the risk narratives who take actions to save the risk bearers from present or future risks. (6) *Risk informers* are persons, such as reporters, news directors, critics, protestors and book authors – persons who stand outside of the conflict as such and make statements about it – who comment on the actions, risks, policies, and outcomes.

In the case of the anti-vaccination movement, the narrators have primarily been identified as parents who are taking their kids' health and safety into their own hands by refusing vaccines for them. In order to spread awareness about their cause, the parents of the anti-vaccine movement rely on multiple rhetorical tactics. Two of the most popular sharing methods are storytelling and statistics which seem to be most prominent on social media sites. As the CDC points out (CDC, 2019) the only medical study in which anti-vaxxers can base their statistics from was retracted in 2010 and marked as falsified information by the British General Medical Council. Because of the general lack of medical statistics to base their messages off of, researchers suspect anti-vaxxer advocates will rely more heavily on storytelling as their most effective method to get their point across. For example, a popular organization that contributes to this method of sharing is the *VAXXED* channel on YouTube that specifically focuses on recording and posting documentary-style videos of families that have been affected by vaccines. In a specific video, *Vaxxed Stories: Colton in Utah*, a child that has been affected by vaccines, Colton, sits with his mother and other siblings and shares his vaccination story. This is similar to how other personal anecdotes of anti-vaccination families are documented online. The stories posted on this channel on YouTube are then viewed and shared by other anti-vaxxers through the platform's sharing feature that enables the videos to be posted on any other chosen social media platform.

Social Media and Risk Actors

Research within unity of experience is paralleled in the realm of cognitive dissonance - a key component to understanding the length to which human interaction stems towards

forming opinions. “Interactions within a social network create complex structures similar to political sub- communities that develop on ideological ground from Democrats and Republicans to pro- vaccination and anti-vaccination groups” (Vaccine Weekly, 2018, para. 5). Similarly, results continuously show evidence toward the lacking strength of empirical data when standing against the strength in shared cause, “It appears that reports of vaccination experiences by ‘people like me’ are trusted irrespective of the source that delivers them” (Haase et a., 2015, p. 924). As theorist and industry leaders embark on combating the anti-vaccination campaign, previous studies suggest scrapping the urge to elevate scientific evidence and data as the frontrunner is deconstructing the debate.

Standing outside of scientific evidence and public opinion stands the ever-growing notion that vaccinations are a threat and catalyst to assumed harm to one’s health. “The fear parents have for their suffering child is a powerful rhetorical motivator, and the persuasive power of a single narrative should not be underestimated” (Hoppin, 2016, p. 46). The anti-vaxxers continually gain traction with incoming supporters of the movement potentially due to the lack of a narrative, or cause of their child’s symptoms otherwise. Studies from overarching data have squashed evidence towards a link of vaccinations and autism, yet there has been a lack of quantifiable evidence towards what factors are playing a role in the narrative of these children who are succumbing to ‘latent’ symptoms. “Those who believe in a connection between vaccines and autism, as well as those who insist there is no scientific evidence of a causal relationship, all want to do what they believe is best for the children. They all believe that their narrative has fidelity and provides good reasons to guide future actions” (p. 51).

Previous research has proven the internet to provide ample narratives of vaccination conspiracies and arguments against scientific facts, offering an excellent avenue in which to study the manifestation of Palmlund’s risk narrative analysis in a timely conversation. “On these sites, misinformation was pervasive. Providing better education has not been effective, and activists and not persuadable. For this reason, more consideration must be given to the social discourses underlying anti-vaccinationists - making the anti-vaccination issue of significant complexity,”(Kata, 2010, p. 1715). Therefore, the misinformation prevalent on social sites no longer remains the crisis at hand, but rather the reasoning behind the massive digestion of such material.

Brief Summary of Methodologies and Primary Results Methodologies

Study 1: Social Influencer Effects on Vaccine Hesitancy

This paper examined the Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook accounts of celebrities that have been vocal about the vaccine debate in the mainstream media including actresses Jenny McCarthy and Jessica Biel, and tattoo artist and makeup entrepreneur Kat Von D. This paper deconstructed narratives through a content analysis study utilizing Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter posts, to search for posts that included “vaccine,” “anti,” and “vaccinations” as well as related posts on autism on which followers commented about vaccines and the proposed relation to autism. The time period for the study was January 1, 2009, to November 29, 2019, which covers nearly 10 years of content.

Study 2: Storytelling vs. Statistics

The methodology includes a content analysis of data through the use of Twitter analytics.

We reviewed search results for those engaged in this unique health crisis, specifically those involved in storytelling and statistics. Data was collected from November 1-30, 2019, by both

researchers using the advanced search tool on Twitter to identify the use of the keywords 'vaccines' and 'autism' together. Once these keywords were located, researchers coded the tweets into one of two categories, including: statistics and storytelling. Statistics were identified as tweets with numeric representations of support for the movement that failed to create any direct connections with the audience's personal narratives. Sharing stories were identified as tweeted videos and written narratives of someone's personal story regarding their use of vaccinations. Since this study focuses on the anti-vaccination movement, tweets that indicated a pro-vaccination stance were ignored. Original tweets and their threads were considered. While conducting this study, any tweet concluded to be pro-vaccination was not considered. Therefore, researchers had to make their best judgement of what was sarcastic and what was sincere. The judgement of researchers was more accurate than a computer system which may not recognize sarcasm. A computer analysis might also incorrectly assume the tweet is supporting the movement when the text said something like "Click on the link below to learn why vaccines cause autism." In which case, once you click on the link it sends you to a webpage declaring "IT DOESN'T."

Study 3: Facebook Fables Reveal Risk Characters

A qualitative, narrative interpretation of the social media and traditional media data, through content analysis and other quantified tables produced by interpretation was utilized in order to focus on the role of risk arbiters and risk informers through a Facebook page promoting the fight against vaccines. The research question was formulated based upon the strategic analysis of a Facebook page entitled, "Moms against vaccines." The purpose of the Facebook page is described on the site as the following, "This page is dedicated to spreading the truth about vaccines" (https://www.facebook.com/Moms-against-vaccines-166728633746834/). The page promoting the stance against vaccination had a following of 2,087 Facebook users during the span of the research. In order to conduct a thorough examination of such a specific niche in the anti-vaccination campaign, the research focused on posts during the years 2017 and 2018. The qualitative study sought to categorize and rank the messages used to promote the anti-vaccination narrative by counting the satirical, anecdotal, and statistical messages used in the two years. The first category, satirical, is defined by messages which used memes, satire, and humor to refute the argument of vaccination. The second category, anecdotal, incorporates messages which display stories and accounts of individuals affected by vaccinations. Thirdly, statistical messages, also labeled "logic," are those messages on the Facebook page which are published or academic nature. A total of 52 posts from January 1, 2017, until December 26, 2018, was evaluated to determine which category the message fell in - satirical, anecdotal, or academic.

Results and Discussion Study 1: Social Influencer Effects on Vaccine Hesitancy *Jenny McCarthy*

As one of the first celebrities to be outspoken about vaccines, McCarthy first ignited a firestorm when mainstream media outlets ran with a quote from a piece in *Time* magazine where she was quoted as saying, "If you ask a parent of an autistic child if they want the measles or autism, we will stand in line for the…measles" (Kluger, 2009, para. 6). Since the time of the interview, she has taken a more relaxed approach on commenting on vaccines in regards to her social media accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. In looking at her social media accounts from 2009 to November 29, 2019, she has been most active on Twitter where she has 11.9 million followers. During the nearly 10-year timespan, she had twelve posts or replies on Twitter related to vaccines. In a post on April 4, 2011, McCarthy said, "My

motto is to educate and then vaccinate." In fact, on Instagram on April 13, 2014, she linked to an article in the *Chicago Sun Times* about setting the record straight regarding her vaccine beliefs. She continues to state that she is not against vaccines. Overall, her Facebook usage regarding vaccines was small with 969 comments, 2,989 reactions, and 553 shares. On Instagram, her seven vaccine related posts received 25,142 likes and 2,549 comments. Finally, on Twitter, her twelve vaccine associated posts had 432 retweets, 82 likes, and 125 comments. Results from a study on Twitter regarding vaccine content by Mitra et al. (2016) showed that conspiracy related themes were popular on Twitter, which could explain why Twitter was where McCarthy had the most anti-vaccine content. She has exposed herself as both a risk generator and risk bearer with her opinions on vaccines on social media; however, the overall number of narrative messages concerning vaccines was surprisingly lower than what was originally thought. Thus, McCarthy is not affecting the vaccine hesitancy movement on social media.

Kat Von D and Jessica Biel

Since her rise to fame on reality television in the early 2000s, Von D has gained millions of fans on her social media accounts where she posts about her tattoo business, makeup line, shoe line, and personal life. She has 1.9 million Twitter followers, 12,215,581 likes and 11,915, 926 follows on her Facebook page, and 7.2 million followers on her Instagram page, where she is most active.

Although she has no tweets regarding vaccinations, she does have posts on her Instagram and Facebook posts regarding the topic.

In recent years, Von D has been accused of being an anti-vaccination advocate. Since 2018, she has posted three specific Instagram posts addressing vaccinations. In a now-deleted post from Instagram on or around June 7, 2018, Von D posted a photo telling her followers that she and her husband would be raising their child as a vegan and without vaccinations. She stated that negative comments would not influence her choices and that she would do research on the topic. Before the post was deleted, it had received as many 755,960 likes. A few months later on June 14, 2018, she posted a picture on Instagram stating that she was not against vaccinations. She addressed that she has concerns about vaccines while acknowledging that they can work for some people. She disabled comments on the post and received 196,585 likes. After continued backlash, Von D made a post on March 14, 2019, telling her followers that she had created a YouTube video addressing rumors of her being an anti-vaxxer. The Instagram post received 149,250 likes and 6,446 comments.

Von D shares a lot of the same content on her Instagram and Facebook. Her Facebook has the same posts regarding vaccines as her Instagram. Her post on June 7, 2018, garnered 221K reactions in total, 88K comments, and 24k shares. Her June 14, 2018, post received 39K reactions, 18K comments, and 5.4K shares. Von D's March 14, 2019, post had 56K reactions, 8.1K comments, and 9.2K shares. With 38,600 shares, Von D's sharing could quickly spread misinformation about vaccines (Boghani, 2019). Although she has posted that she will not be vaccinating her child, Von D does not seem to actively promote the anti-vaccination movement and has stated multiple times that she is not an anti-vaxxer. She has also stated that she does not like having to address the issue repeatedly on social media.

Actress Jessica Biel also has millions of followers across her social media platforms. She is active on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Biel has 924.7K followers on Twitter and 8.2 million followers on Instagram. She has not posted anything on Twitter or Facebook regarding vaccines and has one post about the topic on Instagram. On June 13, 2019, Biel

posted a photo to Instagram explaining that she had been working with California legislators about a bill concerning vaccines. In the post, she states that she is not against vaccines and that she supports children getting vaccinated, but she wants parents and doctors to be able to decide for themselves whether or not they should vaccinate their children and patients. While Biel has only one post, followers of celebrities can be influenced by their opinion, especially if the follower has not made up his or her own mind regarding vaccinations (Antrim, 2019).

Von D and Biel share similar narratives on their social media posts. Similar findings regarding McCarthy, Von D, and Biel suggest that they do not seem to be greatly affecting the vaccine hesitancy movement on social media due to the limited number of posts each one has made. Von D and Biel are risk generators as defined by Palmlund's (1992) risk narrative analysis because of the influence that their posts have over their millions of followers. While Von D and Biel state that they are not against vaccines and want people to decide for themselves whether they want to vaccinate their children, the narrative of vaccine hesitancy was still planted, which can place doubt in the minds of their social media followers.

Study 2: Storytelling vs. Statistics

The results of this study indicated that out of 93 tweets from November 1-30, 2019, deemed anti-vaccination, 12 used statistics to increase support for the movement and 81 used stories to share their experiences. All 93 tweets included the words "vaccine" and "autism," and showcased some method of advocation for the popular anti-vaccination movement belief that vaccines cause autism. Of the 81 tweets that used stories to share their experiences, about 7.4% were in the form of short documentary-style videos showcasing families with children who have suffered negative effects from the vaccinations they were given, but more than 40 of the story-telling tweets used personal anecdotes or referred the reader onto another account or website with someone else's personal anecdote. Out of the 12 tweets that used statistics as the method of advocation for the anti- vaccination movement, only two directly quoted an official source, while the other 10 included statistics with no source listed and therefore are not necessarily reliable from a first glance. It is worth mentioning that though 93 tweets from the month of November were advocating the vaccines cause autism movement, there were more than double the tweets directed at the movement with negative connotations which leaves room for further study.

These results allow researchers to predict similar results could be found with a study including other social media sources and media distributors. Our study extends Fisher's (1984) paradigm through the analysis of the five parts of the paradigm: people as narrators of stories, influence of the environment, applying reason, determining rationality, and good reasoning.

People as Narrators of Stories

Any story would fail to continue without effective narrators (Fisher, 1984), including the anti-vaccination movement. This study uses Palmlund's (1992) *risk narrative analysis* allowing researchers to identify the risk bearers and risk arbiters within the movement currently. Twitter was an appropriate source to review tweets from both those affected by the movement as well as those leading it. As mentioned in the literature review, risk bearers perceive themselves as or are actual victims of the negative consequences of the risk (Palmlund, 1992); therefore, those involved in the movement will identify themselves as risk bearers as they feel the health and safety of their children is threatened. The results of this study indicated that risk bearers and risk arbiters were present on Twitter in Nov. 2019. Many of those who felt threatened by the use of vaccines were likely to share their story in the form of warnings to other parents. Palmlund identified risk arbiters as those who take actions to

prevent others from experiencing potential risks. In the review of available Twitter data, more than 87% of the anti-vaccination posts included stories or personal opinions, some even posted videos to warn people of the dangers of vaccinations and how they affected their child.

Applying Reason

This study is indicative that narratives may in fact be more powerful for this movement than statistics. With the only medical study that proved the link between autism and vaccines having been debunked and retracted, there is not much for the anti-vaxxers to base their argument off of statistically. In the case of this analysis, there was an extremely low percentage of respondents who used statistics to further their argument towards a link between autism and vaccines. The 12.9% of respondents using statistics to advocate for the dangers of vaccines could be representative of the lack of statistics available for them to cite; and therefore, they have to rely on stories to share experiences.

Determining Rationality

As discussed previously, the key arbiters in this story are parents (Bloom, Marcuse, & Mnookin, 2014). The rationality of these parents is based on stories of what has either happened to their own children, or children in their community. Therefore, their rationality is found through personal narratives that mean more to them than any statistic from an unrecognized face. This is representative through the roughly 80% of individuals in this study who used stories over statistics to increase support for the movement. Though Wakefield's study was retracted (CDC, 2019), the movement has continued to flourish without significant medical evidence and research. The rationality therefore must rely primarily on their personal experiences, especially parents who illustrate a concern for their children. In the future, it would be useful for researchers to attempt categorizing subjects into one of two categories: parents and nonparents. This would serve to test whether parents are holding a majority of this conversation on Twitter.

Good Reasoning

This study indicated that while both pro-vaxxers and anti-vaxxers ridicule one another, they both have stories that ultimately drive their movements. As Fisher points out (Fisher, 1984) a good reason is all it takes for a story to be effective. Anti-vaxxers stories have been so effective because they are true and often heartbreaking stories of children who have been negatively affected by vaccines. The power of sympathy is a well known tool in the advertising field, and much like the commercials that make you tear up and want to join the movement, anti-vaxxers are able to use these stories and messages to broaden their reach. The major source that produces these stories is the *VaxXed TV* channel on youtube. As previously mentioned, the directors seek out stories of families around the world and upload them to their channel. Though the research and statistics prove that the numbers of affected children are not enough to deem it a crisis (CDC, 2019), these stories have the power to spread fear in the parents of many vulnerable parents who are uneasy about vaccines, which in turn continues to spread the anti-vaccination movement.

Study 3: Facebook Fables Reveal Risk Characters

After analyzing the 52 total posts within the two year data set chosen, the messages most commonly used within the page were satirical in nature. These posts were largely found to incorporate graphics and images of memes which targeted the logic and reasoning of the pro- vaccination stance. Comments shed light on the main target of satirical memes, the messages mainly sought to tear down the arguments or identities of the CDC, physicians, and the United States government. In this way, their messages portrayed not

only the vaccines, but those suggesting the administration of vaccines proved to be a massive threat. Evidence of statistical and logical messages were the second most common post on the page. These messages were posts which sought to create an argument deconstructing the vaccination stance mainly by paralleling the correlation of death in infants and effects which arose in infants prior to a doctor visit. Lastly, anecdotal messages were intermittently posted through the two-year period, granting the more personal approach to the support the anti- vaccination campaign. Anecdotal messages were transmitted through the owner of the Facebook page ranging from a variety of sources. Stories of mom's and nurses revealed their stance on ending the regulation on vaccines due to the tragic circumstances which they pair with their child's vaccination.

Our study reinforces Fisher's narrative paradigm by fundamentally looking at advocated risk plot themes by noting the messages distributed on a Facebook page. Palmlund promotes the following five parts of the narrative paradigm: people serving as the narrators of stories, the ways in which one makes decisions with good reason, apply good reason given context and background, how rationality is dictated by a person's nature, and the good reasons which make up the various aspects of a story (Fisher, 1984). The scope to which his typology manifests in the context of the Facebook mom's page study is centralized around the understanding of people as narrators of stories. In the context of the public Facebook page, the members of the site act as characters contributing to the plot of the anti-vaccination campaign. The differentiating views on the vaccination debate serve as an example of how two different narrators are able to define their own rhetoric in order to bring about their desired perception of risk.

Through the various public posts, the narrators in the study implored satire, personal stories, and logical reasoning in order to structure their experiences and stance on the vaccination discussion. The motivation behind their heightened use of a version of humor and memes in their posts may be attributed to the context in which their messages were distributed - social media. The extreme images and use of dark humor may be a testament to the lack of risk found on social media platform compared to a face-to-face interaction at a parent-teacher conference. The cohesive typology of the features of a narrative mimic the parallel thread of shared beliefs from individuals on the Facebook page. The good reason communicated by the members of the page is a unified charge to deconstruct the reasoning of the CDC and opposing mothers who vaccinate their children. A cohesive message aimed at the refutation of the vaccination argument is apparent through the messages aimed at devaluing the "good reason" of government regulation and deconstructing the narrative of those under the belief of protecting the masses by vaccinating their own child.

Conclusion

This project was conducted with my students in a crisis communication graduate course and centered around the important risk and crisis topic of why some parents are electing to not vaccinate their children despite the overwhelming science to the contrary. While a pilot study with limited preliminary date, the research results included: (1) the potential downfall of ostracizing a particular stakeholder; (2) the strength of storytelling versus statistics; (3) the influence of Facebook mothers' groups; (4) the role of celebrity parents in creating an appealing narrative related to issues of uncertainty reduction and cognitive dissonance; and (5) how opposing views on vaccines are affecting the narrative of the story and causing a health crisis. The findings extend the theories of crisis and risk communication and suggest how

health communication practitioners can build their risk and crisis campaigns more effectively.

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Testing a Model of Drivers and Outcomes for Corporate Communications Team Performance

Timothy Penning
Grand Valley State University

Mark Bain
Upper90 Consulting

Abstract

In a previous study involving depth interviews and a survey of Chief Communication Officers (CCOs), the authors identified the key drivers and inhibitors of high performance on corporate communications teams. In this follow-up study, the authors tested a resulting model of four performance drivers and four outcomes of high-performing teams. In addition, the study analyzed the different perspectives of CCOs and their team members. Results indicated that each variable in the model had several dimensions that were rated distinctly. Also, there was significant difference in how CCOs evaluated their organization across many variables relative to those who report directly to them and the members of their teams. Also, there was significant difference on how respondents rated their team on performance variables depending on if they perceived their role as providing communication services, driving stakeholder advocacy, or enabling the company's outcomes. Finally, respondents provided open feedback on their opinions about what to do to improve performance in their team. These responses are summarized in relationship to the proposed model and suggestions for future research. Academics and professionals alike can apply the results to: a) understand what constitutes "high performance" in corporate communications, b) consider how to develop high performance in specific organizations, c) be conscious of the outcomes, and therefore the incentives, of achieving high communication performance and d) be aware of differing assessment of performance between CCOs and other members of the communication team.

Introduction

It could be taken as a given that the leadership of any organization would strive for high performance. However, defining that abstract concept in a meaningful way has been an elusive goal. It is possible that each organization would have its own definition of high performance, given organizational culture, specific industry or competitive environment, and other factors. Specific functions within an organization, such as public relations and communications, may also have unique perspectives on what constitutes high performance.

However, previous research has determined, if not a definition, at least the commonly agreed upon characteristics of high performance from the perspective of corporate communications. In addition, the primary causes and inhibitors of high performance of corporate communication teams have been determined. From this research, models of high performance have been proposed. It is the purpose of this paper to put forth and test an updated model of the drivers and outcomes of high performance in corporate communications teams.

The results of this paper can be useful to academics who may do additional research to refine the model and advance it to new theory proposals. It also serves professionals who seek practical application in building and maintaining corporate communications teams that perform at a level that contributes to organizational success.

Literature Review

Performance

The concept of performance with regard to corporate communications has many dimensions accounted for in previous literature. The roles played by public relations and communications professionals is a key aspect of performance. Two key roles—manager or technician—were determined in numerous studies (J. E. Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Dozier, 1992; Dozier & Broom, 1995). The enacted role may not necessarily be consistent with the practitioner's perceived role, given other organizational factors (Moss & Green, 2001; Toth et al., 1998; Heath, 1994). A survey of senior communication professionals in the UK (Moss D. , 2005) determined five categories of roles: monitor and evaluate; issues management; policy and strategy advisor; problem solver; communication technician (tactical production). More recently, a study by the Arthur Page Society found new job roles for the CCO and her/his team, including content and engagement designer, influencer engagement leader, digital strategist, behavioral scientist and culture czar (Arthur Page Society, 2016). A 2017 survey by PR firm Weber Shandwick of 153 CCOs worldwide revealed that CCOs collaborate regularly with other corporate departments, including marketing, legal, human resources, government relations and public affairs (Weber Shandwick, 2016). Similarly, the University of Southern California's Communication and Public Relations Generally Accepted Practices (GAP VIII) study noted that public relations and communications as a function is increasingly seen as a contributor to organizational success (Strategic Communication and Public Relations Center, 2014).

Conceptions of performance in public relations in particular have been associated with the term "excellence" from the studies (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995) that determined companies practiced 'excellent' communication if among other things: senior management was committed to communications excellence, CCOs reported directly to the CEO, PR and communication was more preventive than reactive, and the company was committed to research as well as ongoing training and development. The Society for Human Resource Management (2015) has defined a high-performance work team as "a group of goal-focused individuals with specialized expertise who collaborate to relentlessly pursue performance excellence through

shared goals, shared leadership, collaboration, open communication, clear role expectations, accountability and trust among its members." There are a variety of characteristics of high-performance teams. Thiel (2009) noted six characteristics of high-performance teams: common purpose, clear roles, accepted leadership, effective processes, solid relationships, excellent communication. Wolski (2016) describes high-performance teams as those that function at a high level for an extended time, are efficient and effective and have qualities of diversity, clear goals, effective communication, trust and ownership. Communicating well and aligning the team's talent in the context of business relationships are also seen as elements of high-performance teams (Cancialosi, 2015).

A number of other studies describe variables that affect the performance of teams. These include cohesiveness, or the degree to which teams stay together in pursuit of a common goal (Molnau, 2016), a shared understanding of terminology (Brewer, 2016), and willingness and eagerness to share knowledge (DeVries, van den Hoof, & deRidder, 2006). It is also notable that leaders and their followers have different perspectives of the job performance of leaders, with leaders evaluating themselves higher than those who report to them (Plank Center, 2016).

Since public relations is called a management function, it is important to consider the degree to which corporate communication teams in particular contribute to organizational performance overall. (Schultz & Grindem, 2002). Liang, et. al. (2010) found that more communication in general between top management teams improves overall organizational performance, whereas decentralized communication has a negative impact on performance. Within teams, meanwhile, task orientation, feedback and upward communication have positive effects on perceived organizational performance in mission-oriented organizations but potentially negative effects on performance in rules-oriented cultures (Garnett, Marlowe, & Pandey, 2008). A South African study found that corporate communications professionals see variables affecting organizational performance at the individual, organizational, professional, industry and country levels (Le Roux, 2014).

Traditionally, performance in organizations has been measured by key performance indicators, or KPIs. The performance of teams in particular has been operationalized by a solution quality average, a measure of the quality and quantity of task performance (Guzzo & Dickson, 1996). In this case, for products, quality was measured in terms of innovation level, viability in the market, and competitiveness in the market rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale from "not at all" to "a lot." More recently, in the Arthur Page Society (2016) study, 93 percent of CCOs responding said KPIs specific to communication today are different than 3-5 years ago and include employee engagement, customer loyalty, propensity to recommend to others, social influence and likelihood to act based on past behavior.

Models and Theories of Performance

There are several models and theories Michaelson, Wright and Stacks (2012) proposed a model focused on campaigns (as opposed to total organizational performance) and include three levels in what they call the "Excellence Pyramid": a basic level that includes setting objectives, research and planning, outputs, outtakes and outcomes, and results; an intermediate level that includes deep connections to target publics, leadership support and engagement, and creativity and innovation that provides a unique approach; and an advanced level in which a campaign sets the agenda for the target audience on key messages.

The strategic contingencies theory of organizational power (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, & Pennings, 1971) suggests that the corporate communications unit would both maintain power and demonstrate value through high-performance measures of its distinctive

functional contributions to the organization, because organizations are systems of inter-dependent subunits. The model in this study draws from the concept to the extent that it considers both drivers and outcomes of performance.

Zerfass and Viertman (2017) proposed a model called a "communication value circle" that includes four value dimensions of communication in organizations: enabling operations, building intangibles, adjusting strategy, and ensuring flexibility. Another qualitative and exploratory study looked into communication value as a measure of maturity (Johansson, Grandien, & Strandh, 2019). The study investigated 11 organizations and 85 stakeholders on variables of communication pre-requisites, competence, practices and assessments. The authors proposed a "Communication Maturity Index" that includes four levels: immature, emerging, established, and mature.

Lencioni (Lencioni, 2002) proposed that the five dysfunctions of a team are absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results. The corresponding model of Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team include a consideration of appropriate focus on results, accountability, commitment, conflict, and trust.

Based on the above and in additional research, the authors of the current study found in previous research a set of drivers, inhibitors and outcomes of high-performance in communications teams (Penning & Bain, 2018). Depth interviews and a subsequent survey with CCOs found five common characteristics of high-performing corporate communications teams: adaptable, specific and appropriate levels of expertise, analytical and strategic, demonstrate leadership across the organization, and are collaborative internally and with other functions. In addition, eight key factors in achieving high team performance emerged, in the following order: aligned with business goals, collaborates with other functions, adapts rapidly to change, has respect and a culture that encourages individual's best work, members understand the company's business, has a clear role, CEO support, and interpersonal skills. These factors and the comments about them, combined with consideration of Lencioni's model, led to a new model of corporate communications team performance to be tested in this study.

A Model to Be Tested

Taking into consideration other models and previous research specific to corporate communications teams, the authors devised a model to be tested in this paper. The model includes four primary drivers of high performance in corporate communications teams, as well as four outcomes and enablers of performance. These categories include attributes consistent with several aspects of previous research.

The primary drivers of high performance, each with three attributes, include:

- *Full commitment*— These teams articulate and embrace a future vision for the team., members consistently demonstrate supportive behaviors based on agreed values and skills, and they care about the function's collective success (not just their own);
- *Focus on results*— These teams have an explicit strategy that is tied to business objectives, they use appropriate systems, tools and processes to enhance their work, and they take a disciplined approach to continuous learning and improvement;
- *Constructive conflict*—These teams encourage diverse thought and expression to foster better solutions and build harmony, they promote open and honest communications within and beyond the team, and they make timely and constructive feedback a standard operating practice;
- *Shared accountability*—These teams define and use clear, relevant measures that map to business and other outcomes, they empower and support team members at all levels to

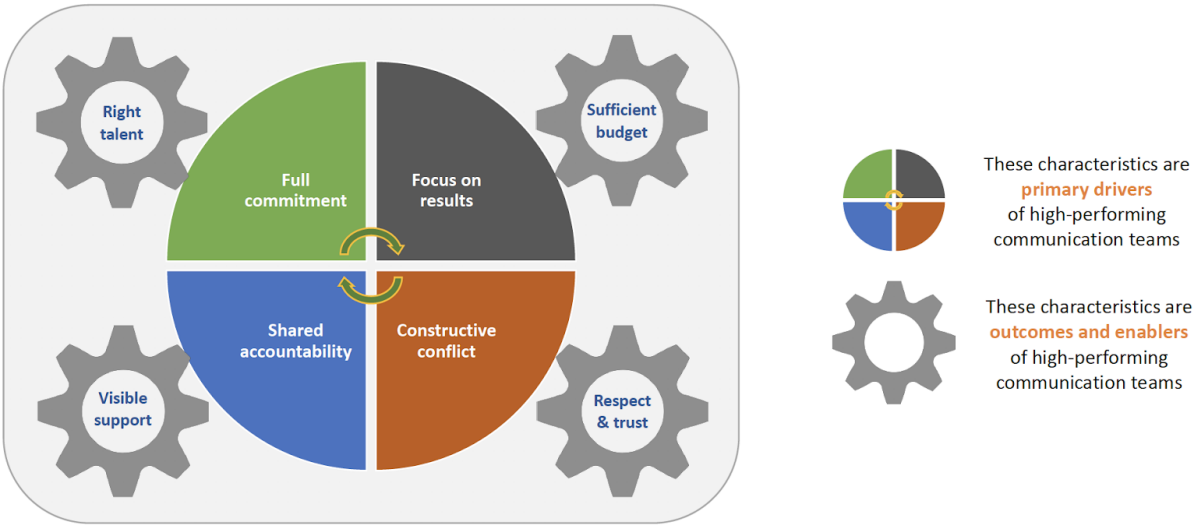
enhance success, and they recognize and reward performance consistent with team objectives and values.

The other aspect of the model includes characteristics of teams that are both enablers of high performance and the positive outcomes of achieving it. When team optimize the four performance drivers, they can expect to see valuable outcomes. These outcomes, in turn, will enable continued high performance. The outcomes/enablers are:

- *Right talent*—High-performing teams tend to possess the necessary skills for their work, have a sufficient number of people for their work, and are effective in attracting, retaining and developing talent;
- *Sufficient budget*—High-performing teams tend to have the budget they need to achieve their current objectives and to invest in their future;
- *Visible support*—High-performing teams tend to enjoy vocal and visible support from the CEO and other C-suite leaders, important endorsement that reflects and reinforces the team's value;
- *Respect and trust*—Members on high-performing teams tend to respect and trust each other and enjoy the respect and trust of others in the organization.

Figure 1

A Model of Corporate Communications Team Performance



Research Questions

Models are important in research and practice, but their real value is in the degree to which professionals agree with them and they provide meaning for specific contexts. For a model to have utility, there should be variance in responses—common responses would indicate that not much is being measured or tested. In the case of communications performance, there may be variance within teams and between organizations. Respondents may also have their own insights about what would improve performance, and whether the model is an appropriate test of that for their own organization. This led to a series of research questions for this study:

RQ 1: To what extent do **CCOs** view their organizational performance in terms of the model's primary drivers, enablers and outcomes of high-performance in corporate communications teams?

RQ 2: To what extent do those who are **direct reports** to the CCO and other corporate communication **team members** view their organizational performance in terms of the model's primary drivers, enablers and outcomes of high-performance in corporate communications teams?

RQ 3: Do CCOs and their direct reports and team members agree or disagree significantly on the aspects of the model?

Because each organization is different, the roles of the corporate communication teams may vary. The specific roles that public relations professionals play in organizations has been studied since the 1970s (Broom & Sha, 2013), when Broom and Smith (1979) proposed a four-part typology of roles: communication technician, expert prescriber, problem-solving process facilitator, and communication facilitator. Subsequent research and statistical analysis collapsed and simplified the roles into two: technician and manager (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Dozier & Broom, 1995). In addition to individual roles, previous models suggest organizations—or their corporate communications teams—conduct public relations or communications differently depending on which perceived model or role they predominantly follow. The earliest set of such models characterized public relations in four ways: press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). There have been many other iterations of these models. This student considered how teams may see their role as providing communication (public information), driving stakeholder advocacy (two-way symmetrical) or achieving business outcomes (two-way asymmetrical). This leads to another research question:

RQ 4: Does the team's perception of their **primary role** make a difference in their assessment of any of the aspects of the model?

Finally, respondents may view the model being tested as appropriate or they may identify additional factors that would affect communications team performance in their own context. This led to a final research question: (Broom & Sha, 2013; Broom & Smith, 1978, August)

RQ 5: What areas for improvement do respondents identify, and do they confirm the model or suggest revisions?

Method

A survey instrument was developed with several questions for each of the variables in the model, which address the four drivers and four outcomes of high-performance. CCOs from large organizations—domestic and global, corporate and nonprofit—were recruited to take the survey. They were also asked to give the survey to their teams. Screening questions were included to determine of the respondent was a CCO, directly reported to the CCO, or team member to enable subsequent comparison of responses. The survey was administered via email with several reminders and responses gathered in Survey Monkey, with data imported to SPSS for analysis.

An email appeal was sent to 528 randomly selected members of large organizations of CCOs. The CCOs were asked to forward the survey to their communications team members. Three follow-up appeals were made over a period of two months. Surveys had screener questions to differentiate responses from CCOs, direct reports, and team members for subsequent comparison.

After determining descriptive total statistics, one-way ANOVA regressions were run in SPSS to compare means on dimensions of model variables. Comparisons were done of CCOs,

direct reports and team members, as well as a comparison based on perceived role of the team in the organization.

Results

There were 221 completed responses, representing 25 CCOs, 50 direct reports, and 146 team members. Since the appeal went to 528 CCOs, the 25 respondents represent a response rate of 4.7%. Among the CCOs there were seven males and 17 females; among direct reports 23 males and 35 females; and among team members 52 males and 117 females, with 26 choosing not to disclose. There was a range of years of experience, from less than five years to more than 20. CCOs mostly had more years of experience.

While all responding organizations were international in scope, there was variance between them in size by revenue and the size of their communications teams. All had more than $1 billion in annual revenue but spread evenly from less than $2 billion to more than $40 billion. Communication team size ranged from less than 10 (7), to 11-49 (10), to 50-99 (5) team members. One team was larger than 100 members and one was larger than 200 members. Overall, 84 respondents considered their team role to be providing communications, 62 saw their role as driving stakeholder advocacy, and 74 indicated their team enabled business outcomes.

Each of the four primary drivers in the model had three associated survey questions, and the four outcomes/enablers in the model had two associated questions each. Responses ranged across the seven-point Lickert-type scale, with some questions having a range of 1-7. Means ranged from 3.92 to 6.2 across all variables, another indicator of variance. All responses are based on a 7-point Lickert-type scale with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = disagree, 4 = neither, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree.

RQ 1, RQ 2, and RQ 3 are all answered by looking at response to the questions associated with the dimensions of each model variable. Across all variables, CCOs tended to rate the performance of their team higher than direct reports, who in turn rated the team performance higher than team members, with a few exceptions. The difference was statistically significant for 12 variables, 10 associated with the primary drivers in the model and two on the "respect and trust" outcome in the model. This data, with significance levels for key variables indicated, is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Differences in Team Performance Assessment for CCOs, Direct Reports, and Team Members

Model	**Variable**	**CCO**	**Report**	**Member**	**F-Test**	η^2
Primary Drivers		*M*	*M*	*M*		
Full Commitment	Team has clear vision	6.16	5.54	5.46	$F(2,218)=2.580$, $p > .05$	.02
	*Consistent with values	6.36	6.10	5.63	$F(2,218)=5.713$, $p < .05$	.05
	*Care about success	6.60	6.34	6.09	$F(2,217)=3.034$, $p = .05$	.03
Focus on Results	*Strategy to outcomes	6.44	6.30	5.92	$F(2,217)=4.023$, $p < .05$	.04
	*Right systems, tools	5.12	4.62	4.28	$F(2,218)=4.352$, $p < .05$	.04

	**Continuous learning	6.16	5.86	5.35	F(2,216)=8.066, $p < .01$	.07
Constructive Conflict	**Different ideas	6.60	6.02	5.45	F(2,217)=9.191, $p < .01$	.08
	**Value open, honest	6.38	5.90	5.50	F(2,216)=5.772, $p < .01$	.05
	*Healthy feedback	5.76	5.60	5.15	F(2,218)=3.972, $p < .05$	.03
Share Accountability	Clear, relevant measure	5.36	5.48	5.11	F(2,218)=1.718, $p > .05$	.02
	**Empowered	6.16	5.76	5.36	F(2,218)=4.791, $p < .01$	.04
	**Reward to objective	5.96	5.52	5.08	F(2,216)=5.250, $p < .01$	.05
Outcomes/Enablers		*M*	*M*	*M*		
Right Talent						
	People with Skills	5.80	5.92	5.78	F(2,218)=.280, $p > .05$	--
	Number of People	3.76	3.62	3.95	F(2,218)=.661, $p > .05$	--
Sufficient Budget						
	Budget for Objectives	4.72	4.30	4.34	F(2,218)=.601, $p > .05$	--
	Budget for Future	3.92	3.88	3.94	F(2,217)=.023, $p > .05$	--
Visible Support						
	from CEO	6.04	6.14	5.85	F(2,217)=1.101, $p > .05$	--
	from C-Suite	6.08	5.86	5.58	F(2,218)=2.906, $p > .05$	--
Respect and Trust						
	**Team respects	6.28	6.06	5.54	F(2,218)=4.929, $p < .01$	.04
	**Other units respect	6.52	6.16	5.88	F(2,216)=5.187, $p < .01$	.05

Means are reported on a 7-point scale with 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.
**p < .05, ** p < .01. η^2 is effect size reported only for significant equations.*

In addition to these tests, two questions outside the model variables were asked—whether or not the team was able to recruit and retain talent with the right skills and to develop current team members. Means for hiring the right skills for CCOs, direct reports and team members were 5.64, 5.34, and 4.79 which was a significant variance (F(2,218)=5.312, $p < .01$). On the question of developing current members, the scores were 5.44, 5.16, and 4.73 which also varied significantly (F(2,217)=3.563, $p < .05$). CCOs were more likely to agree that they have the right skills on the team and develop team members than are members of their team.

To answer RQ 4, mean responses on each variable were compared according to whether respondents saw their team role as providing communications, driving stakeholder advocacy, or enabling outcomes. Here as well there was significant variance by these groups in 11 variables of the model. Generally, those who perceived their team role to be enabling outcomes rated their performance higher than those who saw their roles as driving stakeholder advocacy or providing communications. The variables that had significant differences are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Differences in Team Performance Assessment by Perceived Team Role

Model	**Variable**	**Provide**	**Drive**	**Enable**	**F-Test**	η^2
Primary Drivers		*M*	*M*	*M*		
Full Commitment	**Team has clear vision	5.25	5.47	5.96	F(2,217)=5.119, $p < .01$	.04
	*Care about success	5.98	6.26	6.41	F(2,216)=3.457, $p < .05$	.02
Focus on Results	*Strategy to outcomes	5.85	6.06	6.31	F(2,217)=3.752, $p < .05$	.04
	*Rights systems, tools	4.12	4.55	4.69	F(2,217)=3.590, $p < .05$	.06
Constructive Conflict	**Different ideas	5.38	5.68	6.03	F(2,216)=5.453, $p < .01$	.07
Share accountability	*Clear measures	4.94	5.34	5.41	F(2,217)=3.047, $p < .05$	.02
	**Empowered	5.25	5.47	5.92	F(2,217)=5.106, $p < .01$	.04
	**Reward to objective	4.92	5.37	5.60	F(2,216)=5.179, $p < .01$	.03
Outcomes/Enablers		*M*	*M*	*M*		
Visible Support						
	**from CEO	5.55	6.27	6.10	F(2,216)=7.266, $p < .01$	.04
	**from C-Suite	5.40	5.98	5.85	F(2,217)=4.963, $p < .01$	.03
Respect and Trust						
	*Other units respect	5.81	6.08	6.19	F(2,215)=3.110, $p < .05$	.06

*Notes: Only significant results are shown. Means are on a scale of 1-7, with 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. *p <. 05, **p <. 01.*

RQ 5 had to do with the suggestions the respondents had about how their communications team performance could improve. To answer that, the open-ended (qualitative) responses to a question in which they were asked to name three things that would lead to improved performance.

Nearly all the respondents, 116, answered this question. Their responses add validity that the variables in this model are associated with performance. Most of the suggestions they had to improve their communications team performance align with variables already in the model. It is likely they suggested factors on which they ranked their own organization low in the survey. For example, here are some common key words or ideas that emerge frequently in the qualitative data: trust, teamwork, collaboration, hire more people, link strategy to business outcomes, increase budget, provide tools and technology needed, empower and trust employees, become metrics driven or provide open feedback. Some comments that could serve to be additional factors affecting team performance include increasing team meeting frequency, ensure multi-lingual ability on the team, and adapt the fundamental structure of the team within the organization.

Discussion

In addition to being informed by the descriptive data overall, there are several interesting findings from looking at patterns in the survey responses to the performance model.

One practical outcome is to see the overall highest- and lowest-scoring variables in the model. The highest variables, with mean scores over 6 on the scale, were "cares about team success" (M= 6.2), "have a strategy tied to business outcomes" (M= 6.07), and "the team has respect from others in the business" (M=6.02). The lowest variables, those with overall mean scores below 5, included "having the right systems and tools" (M=4.45), "having the right number of people on the team" (M=3.85), "having enough budget to achieve objectives" (M=4.38), and "having enough budget to invest in the future" (M=3.92). The higher scoring variables are related to attitude toward role or function and could be driven by the CCO. The lowest scoring variables include factors influenced by organizational realities hard to change, such as the ability to hire, to purchase equipment and technology, or budget allocation.

Overall, respondents believe their teams do well on all four performance drivers. But they seem to rate full commitment and constructive conflict more highly than others. All respondents, and especially CCOs, rated their teams highest on two outcomes/enablers - respect and trust and visible support. When it comes to having the right talent, respondents indicated they have the right skills more than having the right number of people, a suggestion that these teams may have adapted to hiring freezes. Having sufficient budget was generally scored lower.

What is perhaps more interesting is the variance in perception of how well a team is performing when comparing CCOs, direct reports, and team members. It may be the CCO generally ranks variables higher because they feel responsible and it is a form of self-evaluation, whereas team members feel more free to be autonomous and critical. Another explanation is that certain variables, such as having a vision, providing good feedback and others, are more perceptual or implicit in nature. Other variables, such as having the right tools or aligning rewards with outcomes, are more tangible and already explicit.

CCOs would do well to not assume understanding by their team of the more tacitly understood aspects of performance. Intentional explanation, training and feedback tied to these variables could bring scores--and thus performance--more in line between CCOs and team members. Meanwhile, with the more tangible factors of performance, CCOs can use results of conducting the model test in their organization to demonstrate to CEOs and others what areas may be inhibiting performance in the view of communication team members.

Another interesting outcome of this study is the significant variance in perceived communications performance based on differently perceived communication roles in an organization. The fact that those who perceive their role to be enabling business outcomes

perceived their performance higher than those who perceived their role as stakeholder advocacy or simply providing communications is worth considering.

Those who saw their role as enabling business outcomes may have evaluated their performance higher because they work in an organizational environment that has a more complete or enlightened view of what communications is, that it is two-way and strategic and more of a management function. Thus, it is more likely to have more resources and behaviors already aligned with the variables in the model. By comparison, those who self-identify their role as advocacy or communications services are more tactical in nature and therefore perceive their team to be more functionary without visible support and other aspects of the model that would drive or be an outcome of higher performance.

As noted in results section, respondents suggested specific ways to improve performance. Their suggestions mostly aligned with variables already included in the model and the instrument to test it. As such, this aspect of the study helped to confirm model variables are practically relevant and demonstrate the utility of the model.

The study is somewhat limited by a smaller sample in terms of the number of organizations included in the responses. However, the effect sizes are all medium (Cohen, 1988) (Miles & Shivrin, 2001) and therefore do indicate a small but meaningful difference between CCOs and others on the team. Also, the total number of individuals responding is larger and shows that the variables in the model are considered relevant across individual roles.

Practical Implications

The study provided two insights for professionals, having to do with the team's role and the way they individuals rate their team based on their role on it. Teams that see their role as "enabling the company's outcomes" are more likely to rate their performance higher than those which see their role as "driving stakeholder advocacy for the company" or "providing communications materials and services to the company." In other words, a team's charter or vision can shape its performance.

Meanwhile CCOs tend to rate their team's performance higher than their direct reports and team members. In teams where this gap is wide, this could become a performance issue.

Therefore, to elevate performance, communication teams should start by determining their current state on the four performance drivers. In particular, CCOs and communication managers could ask what additional steps they can take to ensure that team members are fully committed to the team's success. They should also consider what more can be done to foster constructive conflict, creating a vibrant, open and dynamic work culture that allows all team members to freely share their best thoughts. By maximizing the four performance drivers, teams can expect to see positive outcomes/enablers which, in a positive feedback loop, will help to sustain and elevate their performance excellence.

Two concrete actions can be taken to move a communications team toward higher performance. First, a self-assessment can establish a baseline and help lay a path for specific and intentional actions to improve. CCOs, could start a team conversation about current performance, making explicit the four drivers and the four outcomes/enablers, and then determine which are strong and which need to improve. This can be acted on by creating a plan to improve team performance, support it with quantitative and qualitative measures, implement, monitor progress and adapt as necessary.

A second action would be a peer group comparison. Seeing how a corporate communication team's performance measures against other teams can be a good barometer of success as well. The authors may be contacted by those who wish to take the formal model test

and see their score compared to a group average of respondents, or compare themselves to the results resulted in this article.

In the end, the model as deployed in this study proved to be a good means of assessment of corporate communication team performance. The survey instrument identified areas of strengths and weaknesses, and where CCOs and teams may disagree specifically. Individual organizations could use the model to determine their own specific strengths, weaknesses, and differences in perceived performance. Making more explicit the perceptual aspects of performance, and seeking to provide the more tangible ones, could be a valuable action of CCOs in response to internal execution of the model.

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Ethical Engagement of Marginalized Publics on Social Media

Katie R. Place
Quinnipiac University

Abstract

Although scholarship has sought to understand social media engagement of marginalized publics, little research has explored ethical implications of such. This study explored how PR professionals foster engagement with marginalized publics via social media. Findings suggest that engagement must be empathetic, transparent and direct, and consider unique privacy needs.

Keywords: Ethics, Social Media, Publics, Qualitative

Introduction

Scholars argue that communication across both mediated and non-mediated channels is ethical if it maintains human dignity, seeks consensus, remains free of distortion or coercion, and promotes honesty (Fourie, 2017). On social media specifically, ethical communication must be responsible, nurturing, and compassionate (McCorkindale, 2017), while giving voice to all individuals (Sisson, 2017a). A lingering digital divide, however, has left marginalized (e.g. minority, low-income) publics out of engagement on social media (e.g. Micheli, 2016). Furthermore, hegemonic organizational practices have perpetuated power differentials, thus rendering marginalized individuals unheard because they do not represent a dominant consumer class or are not considered important to an organization's bottom line (Kennedy & Sommerfeldt, 2015). In light of such issues, scholars such as Kennedy and Sommerfeldt (2015) and Verčič, Verčič & Sriramesh (2017) have called for research that considers social media engagement, marginalized publics, and digital divides from a variety of ethical and strategic perspectives.

The purpose of this paper is to answer the calls by Kennedy and Sommerfeldt (2015) and Verčič, Verčič & Sriramesh (2017) to examine social media, ethical engagement, and marginalized publics. Whereas extant research has explored social media engagement with marginalized publics (e.g. Aviles, Larghi, & Aguayo, 2016; Geniets, 2016; Place, 2019), research has not yet delved into the specific ethical implications of such. Because public relations professionals are responsible for establishing mutually beneficial organization-public relationships, it can be argued that they also carry the ethical duty to understand, respect, and engage with even an organization's most marginalized publics. Therefore, this study addresses such implications in the following order: a) an analysis of extant literature on social media, ethics and marginalized publics, b) a review of methods utilized to collect and analyze data, c) a discussion of pertinent themes that arose from the analysis, d) and an analysis of implications and directions for future research and practice.

Literature Review

Social Media and Dialogic Engagement

Rooted in dialogic theory (Botan, 1997; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Pearson, 1989; Taylor & Kent, 2014) is the concept of engagement, which holds that organizations must consciously include their publics, interact in accessible and socially present ways, and "give their whole selves to encounters" (Taylor & Kent, 2014, p. 387). For ethical dialogic engagement to occur, organizations must consider publics as equal partners (Taylor & Kent, 2014; Pearson, 1989).

The past decade has witnessed myriad applications of the engagement concept to social media contexts in public relations. Early studies found that social media, unfortunately, were not utilized effectively for dialogic engagement or relationship building (e.g. Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Lee & VanDyke, 2015; Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton, 2012; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Taylor & Kent, 2014). Organizations traditionally utilized social media to distribute relevant, useful, or timely information and share hyperlinks or multimedia examples (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Lee & VanDyke; Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton, 2012; Men, Tsai, Chen & Ji, 2018; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). If and when social media does effectively engage individuals, research has found that users pay more attention to messages, share organizational posts within their own social networks, pose questions or respond to posts, and exhibit positive word-of-mouth behaviors (e.g. Men & Tsai, 2013).

Recent scholarship has emphasized how social media engagement is a psychological, emotional, and interactive process (Bowden, 2009; Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric & Ilic, 2011; Dolan,

Conduit, Frethey-Bentham, Fahy & Goodman, 2019) where individuals feel most engaged and empowered when they can actively contribute to conversations, have a sense of presence, or build social connections or awareness (Smith, Krishna & Al-Sinan, 2019). Men and Tsai (2016) similarly found that individuals are often motivated to engage with organizational representatives on social media to gain information or thought-leadership insights, find employment opportunities, or connect with others (Men & Tsai, 2016). Moreover, engagement on social media was found to especially involve individuals when it combined functional design with social interaction and when social media personalities used a conversational tone, appeared authentic or approachable, incorporated personal stories, provided listening and feedback features, and expressed emotion (Men & Tsai, 2016; Men, Tsai, Chen & Ji, 2008).

Ethical Engagement via Social Media

[Mediated] communication "is ethical if its content, form, style, and expression do not cause damage to human dignity" (Fourie, 2017, p. 122). However, research has found that early strategic use of social media was often overtly commercial and invasive of individual's privacy (Plaisance, 2013), intentionally deceptive or dishonest, failed to disclose paid sponsorships or endorsements, or failed to maintain dignity and respect of publics (Bowen, 2013). In some cases, public relations professionals were found to be uninformed or apathetic, particularly regarding transparency issues (Toledano & Avidar, 2016). Because social media are not sufficiently managed by codes of ethics (Toledano, 2017) or universal norms under a "single, idealized Habermasian public sphere" (Fourie, 2017, p. 115), there remains the potential for organizations to fail at fostering meaningful dialogic engagement, trust, or respect between organizations and publics (Bowen, 2013; Kennedy & Sommerfeldt, 2015).

Scholars have applied diverse philosophical approaches to the challenge of cultivating ethical social media engagement. Bowen (2013) applied a deontological perspective to critique classic social media cases, ultimately citing Starbucks' "My Starbucks Idea" initiative as an exemplar that a) maintained dignity and respect of publics by providing an accessible forum for open discussion, b) displayed moral good intention by acknowledging and listening to publics' suggestions, and c) encouraged a sense of community among Starbucks' publics. In contrast, Plaisance (2013) suggested that virtue ethics should guide social media engagement, particularly values focusing on authenticity, privacy, autonomy, exchange, and discourse. Citing Fraser (1990) he recommended that scholars apply a "discursive network" model of social media that would support moral agency, examine truth claims, promote engagement of multiple publics, and promote respectful dialogue and transparency (p. 100). Later, McCorkindale (2017) recommended a feminist ethic of care guided by the work of Gilligan (1982) and Tronto (1993). McCorkindale (2017) challenged communicators to engage publics on social media with compassion and empathy, be interactive and responsive, respect each individual's unique experiences, provide content that was appropriate and considerate. Lastly, scholars such as Verčič, Verčič and Sriramesh (2017) and Kennedy and Sommerfeldt (2015) have urged more nuanced ethical exploration of diverse publics and the digital divide. Kennedy and Sommerfeldt, (2015) applying a postmodern approach to social media, ultimately suggested that communicators have an ethical obligation to consider how social media contributes to power inequalities or hegemonic power structures that dismiss marginalized, unpopular, or non-dominant voices.

Engagement of Marginalized Publics via Social Media

Of the approximate 69% of the adult population in the United States utilizing social media (e.g. Facebook), marginalized individuals, such as low-income individuals earning less

than $30,000 a year, comprised 69% percent of those users in 2019 (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). Despite a majority of low-income or minority publics on social media, marginalized publics and social media-related inequalities in public relations contexts have received little, if any, scholarly attention. Although early use of social media represented one-way or broadcast informational techniques (e.g. Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Lee & VanDyke, 2015; Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton, 2012), social media do hold the capacity for effective dialogic engagement, relationship building, and expression of empathy, humility, or care (e.g. McCorkindale, 2017; Men & Tsai, 2016; Men, Tsai, Chen & Ji, 2008; Place, 2019). Place (2019), for example, found that public relations professionals utilized digital media to build networks and partnerships to foster a sense of trust, acknowledge digital divides and make accommodations, and communicate with humility and empathy with marginalized publics.

Extant research regarding marginalized publics' uses and perceptions of social media offer insights and implications for future inquiry. Complementing Pew's 2019 report on social media use in the United States reporting that 69% of marginalized individuals utilized social media (Facebook), previous work by Micheli (2016) found that low-income individuals utilize Facebook as a "port of entry" to the Internet (p. 575). Low-income individuals most commonly cited utilizing social media as a method to extend their personal networks, express emotion or find support, exchange information, or seek romantic relationships. Similarly, research by Aviles, Larghi and Aguayo (2016) and Rains and Tsetsi (2017) found that low-income individuals utilizing social media or social networking sites (SNS) perceived an increase in social mobility, social support, social capital, information literacy and participation in public dialogue. Interestingly, however, Geniets (2016), Church and de Oliviera (2013), and Place (2019) have found that mobile phone engagement was eclipsing traditional social media use due to capability to send video, texts, images, or audio content more instantaneously.

From the literature regarding dialogic engagement, social media ethics, and marginalized publics, the following research question guided this study: How do public relations professionals foster ethical social media engagement with marginalized publics?

Method

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative method was chosen for its ability to look at a phenomenon holistically (Patton, 1990) and offer "thick description" of experiences and contexts to allow practices, historical situations, and particular meanings to be understood (Hodder, 2003, p. 169). This paper addresses one section and research question from a larger, overarching study examining marginalized, low-income individuals and digital media.

Sampling and Recruitment

Upon receiving institutional review board (IRB) approval for all aspects of the study, public relations professionals representing diverse organizations serving low-income publics were recruited via purposive and snowball sampling methods. First, an e-mail recruitment letter was sent purposively to practitioners representing diverse organization types and expertise. Then, a snowball sampling method was utilized, as early interviewees then recommended additional public relations practitioners to receive a recruitment e-mail for participation in the study. Sampling and recruitment ended after a "saturation point" was achieved (common responses or themes began to emerge among participants) (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 145).

The resulting sample of participants included 39 East Coast and Midwestern public relations professionals representing agency (5), corporate (5), government (5), and nonprofit (24)

work environments. Twenty-four women and 15 men participated in the study. The majority of participants (24) represented the most senior- or executive-level position responsible for communications within their organization, such as Director of Communications, Director of Marketing and Public Relations, or Executive Director. The remainder (15) represented mid-level communications professionals who oversaw the public relations functions within their organizations, such as account executive, media relations coordinator, or public relations and social media specialist. Many participants' titles incorporated the words "communications," "social media," or "marketing;" however, these participants were asked to participate because they represented the point-person for public relations work at their respective organizations.

Procedure

Interviews were guided by a 10-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 pertaining to this study were derived from extant literature regarding social media engagement and dialogic communication, public relations (e.g. Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002) and social media ethics (e.g. Bowen, 2013; Kennedy & Sommerfeldt, 2015; Plaisance, 2013). Rapport-building questions, such as "What do you like best about social and mobile media?" were first used acquaint the participant to the researcher and the interview process. Next, open-ended questions were asked, such as, "How do ethics factor in the work you do for [organization]," "What ethical considerations do you make when engaging marginalized or low-income publics on digital media?" and "What are some ethical decisions you have recently made regarding social media and engaging your publics?" Probes and follow-up questions, such as "Why?" "How?" or "Please give me an example of…" were used to encourage participants to offer explanation or elaborate upon their initial responses. Interviews were audiotaped, conducted face-to-face or via telephone (only when geographic location or schedule dictated such), and ranged in length from 30 to 100 minutes.

Data Analysis

Interviews from the study were transcribed fully and analyzed for patterns and themes regarding social media and ethics using a thematic analysis approach (Boyatzis, 1998). First, the researcher read each transcript line-by-line multiple times to identify themes and patterns. Second, 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 analysis and coding process, the researcher remained mindful of how their identity or personal biases could have an effect on how the data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Additionally, e-mail or telephone member checks with selected participants (e.g. Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were utilized to validate or ask questions about meanings of particular passages.

Findings

Findings suggest that public relations professionals ethically engage marginalized individuals on social media by a) embodying an ethic of care emphasizing compassion and respect, b) considering marginalized individuals' unique privacy and anonymity needs, c) ensuring transparency and accuracy of messaging, and d) forging trusting relationships through an embodiment of authenticity. Evidence for each theme is provided below.

Ethic of Care

The strongest theme to emerge from the interviews indicated that public relations professionals apply an ethic of care (e.g. Gilligan, 1982; McCorkindale, 2017) to social media

engagement of marginalized individuals. Reflecting an ethic of care, a communications director for a national low-income assistance nonprofit shared how they engage marginalized individuals on social media "With love and respect. It's not because [organization] has the most amazing homelessness outcomes. It's not. It's the really deep relationships and…It's the ability to relate and connect with the people in the way that other organizations struggle with." Similarly, a social media manager for the same national nonprofit expounded upon how they apply an ethic of care emphasizing compassion. He explained:

> We get people who send us messages on Facebook asking us for help and asking us for things. So that's something that we have had to figure out. It's being compassionate to people telling you their hardships… you know, just being human, saying, 'We are so sorry that you're going through that and here's somebody that you can call for resources, that can help you find housing.'

Professionals expanded upon particular content creation and language use strategies they utilized to embody and ethic of care to their social media engagement. The principal of a public relations agency serving clients with low-income, urban constituents explained how she and her associates develop social media messaging to talk "with" marginalized individuals instead of talking "at" them. She added, "We've changed the tone of voice…So we are very first person using 'we' and 'you.' We try to keep that throughout all of our channels including social media. So we really target our posts in friendlier tone. We've seen an increase in engagement on posts that's more talking *with* versus *at* them." Likewise, the director of public relations and marketing for a national charity nonprofit explained how they carefully word their social media content to embody care and promote dignity and respect:

> It's being aware of wording a lot of times. You know…We don't say something like if you need *help*. We use the word *assistance*. Or, 'we're in this together.' We want to be careful to be respectful of people. Anyone can be in that situation. We've had people who have had great jobs, then they lose their job. And now, they're in a tough spot. So, we definitely try to be respectful in our wording. Even things like when we're working a hurricane. We don't necessarily call people hurricane *victims*. We call them survivors. I think that's important. It empowers the people that we're able to help. And they can then feel better about themselves: I'm not a victim. I'm a *survivor*.

Ultimately, the director of a national religious charity organization described an ethic of care and respect that encompasses all digital and face-to-face engagement saying, "The biggest thing that I can share is that we have to we have to remember that those we serve are human beings. You know you have to look at the person sitting across from you or the person that you're engaged with as yourself. Because that could be you. That could be your cousin. It could be your brother. People are more than just a statistic."

Privacy and Anonymity

Participant responses regarding an ethic of care often evolved into those regarding an ethical duty to respect marginalized individuals' needs for privacy and anonymity on social media. The director of communications for a governmental services agency shared how she works to ethically maintain the privacy of the low-income individuals, individuals with substance abuse, domestic abuse survivors, or those with immigrant status and focus ultimately on the organization's ethical mission to serve and rehabilitate. She explained:

> They're here for certain reasons. I ask, you know, 'Do you mind if I put that [post identifying you] somewhere on Facebook or Twitter?' and it's 'Yeah, I ***do***.'

> ‘Okay, no problem!’ Because maybe they don't want their family knowing that this is where they are, which is fine. The same thing then with external media coming in, I am protective of them, because I don't want them exposed to that. It can be really intimidating…They're here trying to get better, so the last thing I want to do is have a camera in their face.

Similarly, the director of a low-income community action nonprofit described engagement with marginalized publics as an “ethical balance” of ensuring that her organization seeks permission before posting identifying content or photographs on social media. She explained:

> We do have kids that cannot be photographed…so just honoring that and making sure that were not posting people stories, that they may not want out there. If we have a good story from someone that, unless they've expressly said, ‘I give you permission to share my name, ‘we will always change their name when we post it on social media. So it's just remembering to honor people's wishes, but at the same time trying to get their story out there the best we can.

Transparency and Accuracy

In addition to respecting privacy and anonymity, participants described how they adhered to ethical standards of transparency, truth telling, and accuracy when engaging marginalized publics. The director of communications for an archdiocese serving a large contingent of low-income, homeless, and immigrant individuals, illustrated her commitment to accuracy and honesty on social media, particularly as misinformation about the Catholic church was rampant. She explained:

> We are cognizant about delivering an accurate message, and not jumping the gun. You know, you can just take a picture on your cell phone and put it on Facebook. I come back to the office, look at the pictures, decide which ones accurately convey the story before I post it. And maybe that's defeating the whole purpose of Facebook in terms of its immediacy and it's expediency. But, I would rather err on quality, on accuracy, and on meaningful storytelling, or meaningful narrative.

Complementing the director of communication’s example, as well as the ethic of care theme, a chief communications officer for a government agency explained how he engages marginalized publics with truthful, transparent, and ethical dialogue, particularly when the organization is in error:

> You need to tell the truth and be transparent. And I think you have to, in some ways, use social media to demonstrate that you're human, that the place is run by human beings. Mistakes will be made, but you try your hardest to do what you need to do and that you don't live in a perfect world, and we are not a perfect society. And so, I think you talk to people in the ‘plain and simple’ - the way that you would if you had a clothesline in your backyard and they were your neighbor. Be straight, be legal, be ethical, be moral about it.

Participants further meshed the transparency and accuracy theme with an ethic of care by explaining ways in which their social media engagement worked to avoid “othering” marginalized individuals or emphasizing a negative or sensationalized human image. The communications director for the national low-income assistance nonprofit shared their commitment to accurately representing the individuals serve by situating marginalized individuals stories within a larger set of socio-economic contexts:

> [It’s] by understanding their challenges and so really trying to make things not about *‘Peter is good or Peter is bad.’* Peter's here as a person doing their best and

> this is what they're doing. And this is how the conditions are in our community that contributed to this situation. And also we have clients tell their story again and we'll revisit in a year. Most recently, it was a formerly homeless woman named Christina. To check things with her…It's hard for her because it's a busy time in her life. That was very difficult, but she knows that her story will help other people.

Authenticity

On social media, commercial interests and surveillance opportunities often compromise the potential for genuine "human flourishing and our capacity for authenticity" (Plaisance, 2013, p. 98). Despite such challenges, participants of this study explicitly utilized the word "authenticity" to describe ways in which they ethically, genuinely, or "organically" engaged individuals on social media in alignment with their personal or organization's ethical values. A communications specialist for a regional health organization explained her social media engagement philosophy as, "It's got to come off as authentic. I think other organizations tend to be more market-driven. Authenticity is just being, it's being genuine. It's believing what you're putting out there. We have a lot of interaction on our social media, and in turn, it trickles down to [users'] friends and family. It's trying to make it welcoming." Likewise, the director of marketing and communications at the health organization explained their social media strategy as, "doing things for the right reasons…to help people," in alignment with their organizational mission. She added, "We like to make things happen and help people, rather than pat [organization] on the back… it just happens *organically*, and these [social media users] are part of our family, you know, just as much as anybody. It's just who we are." Interestingly, an account manager at a public relations firm lamented that client's demanding content calendar and legal oversight often inhibit organic, authentic, or caring two-way engagement on social media. She explained, "Everything we do has to go through legal. You write all these posts six weeks in advance and send them through legal and stuff. They have no spontaneity. There's none of that two-way communication then. Most of the authentic exchanges happen in the comments, not necessarily in the postings. So that's where the actual magic is happening, in that two-way communication."

Discussion

Answering the call for research regarding ethics and publics who are potentially disempowered by digital or socio-economic divides (Kennedy & Sommerfeldt, 2015; Verčič, Verčič & Sriramesh, 2017), this paper explored ethical engagement of marginalized publics on social media via interviews with 39 public relations professionals serving low-income, homeless, or minority individuals. Findings indicate that ethical social media engagement applies an ethic of care, while prioritizing authenticity, accuracy and privacy, empathy, and social presence in alignment with previous research (i.e. McCorkindale, 2017; Men & Tsai, 2016; Men, Tsai, Chen, & Ji, 2018; Place, 2019; Plaisance, 2013; Sisson, 2017b; Sisson & Bowen, 2017). Because social media engagement is a psychological, emotional, and interactive (Bowden, 2009; Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric & Ilic, 2011; Dolan, Conduit, Frethey-Bentham, Fahy & Goodman, 2019), it is especially important for public relations professionals to embody empathetic, genuine, and respectful social media engagement practices to ethically accommodate publics' needs.

This study is one of the first to offer empirical evidence illustrating the application of an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982; Tronto, 1993; McCorkindale, 2017) to social media for public relations and engagement. Passages particularly reflected McCorkindale's (2017)

recommendation for social media engagement to utilize empathy and consider an individual not as "an 'other' who is different, but rather someone who has unique experiences – therefore, people should be viewed as extensions of an 'us'" (p. 167). Quotations such as, "You know you have to look at the person sitting across from you or the person that you're engaged with as *yourself*" and "We use the word *assistance*. Or, 'we're in this together.' Anyone can be in that situation," exemplify ways in which participants put themselves in the shoes of the marginalized individuals they were serving and utilized language emphasizing "us" or "we" to foster a sense of empathetic connection. Moreover, participants' comments citing how they situated marginalized individuals' stories on social media in proper context of socio-economic or environmental circumstances, highlight how public relations professionals may best work to avoid the "othering" of individuals, demonstrate care, and maintain publics' dignity and respect (Bowen, 2013). Ultimately, findings indicated that ethical social media engagement applies an ethic of care *not* by focusing on organizational outcomes or metrics, but by focusing on the human relationship. As the low-income services non-profit professional explained, "It's not…the most amazing homelessness outcomes… It's the really deep relationships and…It's the ability to relate and connect with the people."

Findings add to our understanding of ethical social media engagement of marginalized publics by emphasizing the concept of one's right to be forgotten or "social forgetting" that prioritize an individual's inherent right to digital privacy (Plaisance, 2013, p. 98). Instead of using a marginalized individual's story to increase likes or click-through rates, ethical social media engagement should respect anonymity and maintain an individual's dignity by withholding a post or photo that might expose someone's income, relationship, health, or citizenship status. Such practice demonstrates true ethical intent or a morally good will (Bowen, 2013). At the same time, future research should explore ethical "gray areas" or contradictions that could occur on social media when professionals attempt to protect marginalized publics and respect privacy. When the community action non-profit professional cited changing individuals' names on social media posts, it considered an individual's wishes, but it did not represent a commitment to full transparency. A best practice may be to disclose to social media users that a pseudonym was used – or refrain from featuring that individual due to various privacy concerns that could amount even by posting an individual's image with a pseudonym.

Implications for Practice and Theory

Findings imply that commercial interests, stringent legal oversight, surveillance, and rigid, pre-planned content inhibit responsive, two-way, authentic dialogic engagement with diverse publics who need genuine public relations engagement the most. Plaisance (2013), for example, cautions that as long as commercial interests and surveillance capabilities on the "back end" are utilized, while "frontstage" behavior is restricted, digital communication prevent human flourishing and authentic, ethical engagement (p. 98). As many participants explained, organizations serving marginalized publics (such as low-income or homeless individuals) often use social media as the primary means to forge trusting relationships, foster dialogic engagement via Facebook instant messaging, or assist those asking for help. In order to ethically serve diverse publics, industry role designations must better define and empower professionals as ethically autonomous decision-makers (e.g. Bowen, 2004, 2006) who are capable of planning and developing content while nimbly responding to the needs of others with nuance, immediacy, respect, and honesty – off the script or schedule. Additionally, industry professional role designations must acknowledge that individuals managing social media must confront industry

or organizational assumptions that social media is only for broadcasting or surveillance in order to authentically, genuinely engage in respectful dialogue with all individuals. Only utilizing social media for promotional efforts or to advantage only organizational desires does not reflect a genuine ethic of care (McCorkindale, 2017) or a morally good will (Bowen, 2004; 2013).

Findings of this paper call attention to the myriad philosophical and theoretical approaches that can be applied to benefit public relations practice on social media. First, findings support the importance of an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982) that prioritizes empathy, interconnectedness of human relationships, and compassion while communicating via social media. Additionally, findings support deontological notions of ethics regarding duty, dignity and respect, ethical intent, moral goodwill (Bowen, 2004, 2006, 2013). Lastly, findings complement the call for a "discursive network" model of ethical social media engagement that eliminates "technological instrumentalism" and serves as a method for cultivating moral agency among diverse publics by emphasizing truthfulness and providing space for respectful dialogue and transparency (Plaisance, 2013, p. 100). Ultimately, such an ethical approach may link Plaisance's virtue ethics-based work emphasizing values of truthfulness, transparency, and free expression with the dialogic theory principles guiding social media engagement of mutuality, empathy, and commitment (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Taylor & Kent, 2014). Taken together, these values and principles present ways in which public relations professionals may address the complex, digital world in which we work – and further empower marginalized publics who have been rendered voiceless or unseen.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although limitations of the paper include inconsistent interview length and method (phone and face-to-face), it strove to explore ethical engagement of marginalized publics with depth and detail. Ultimately, this study suggests that public relations research and practice must continue to advance ethical social media engagement of all publics beyond mere codes of ethics or duty-based philosophies and relate to individuals on a human level, with compassion, empathy, and care. Further application of an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982) and virtue ethics (Plaisance, 2013) approaches to extant theorizing of social media ethics from deontological (Bowen, 2013) and postmodern (Kennedy & Sommerfeldt, 2015) approaches offers a fruitful path forward to best honoring all individuals. Future research must further explore why and how ethical engagement on social media does *not* occur. What cultural, industry, or environmental factors are pose ethical gray areas or prevent public relations professionals from true ethical social media engagement? Future research regarding social media, ethics, and marginalized publics representing exemplar organizations would also benefit scholars, students, and professionals alike.

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Connecting Intercultural Communication and Diversity Theory with PR Practice Theoretical Remarks and Results of a Picture-Based Content Analysis of 25 Corporate Websites on Five Continents

Marlena Pompino
Holger Sievert

Macromedia University, Germany

Abstract

Through intercultural corporate communication is a constantly growing field, understanding of it remains underdeveloped. This proposed paper tries to fill the gap between PR practice and diversity theory by looking at their theoretical foundations as well as applying them within a multicontinental imagery of content analysis of corporate communication websites.

Keywords: Corporate Communication, Public Relations

Introduction

Over the last few decades, the world has developed and, with the help of modern technology like the internet, managed to interact more intensely. Quick connections around the world, cultural exchange and immigration are advantages that this includes. Globalisation is the term that is used to describe this. For modern-time citizens it adopted the meaning of a complex system of interdependence in the economic, social and cultural fields. UNESCO, taking into consideration the debates regarding the correct definition of the concept of globalisation, has defined it as a multi-dimensional process that is characterised as follows:

- "The acceptance of a set of economic rules for the entire world designed to maximise profits and productivity by unavailing markets and production, and to obtain the support of the state with a view to making the national economy more productive and competitive.
- Technological innovation and organisational change centred on flexibilization and adaptability; the expansion of a specific form of social organisation based on information as the main source of productivity and power.
- The reduction of the welfare state, privatisation of social services, flexibilization of labour relations and weaker trade unions.
- De facto transfer to trans-national organisations of the control of national economic policy instruments, such as monetary policy, interest rates and fiscal policy.
- The dissemination of common cultural values, but also the re-emergence of nationalism, cultural conflict and social movements". (Urzua, 2000)

However, many different definitions, both newer and older, can be found, though they all agree that globalisation is the process by which national and regional economies, societies and cultures become more intertwined through the global network of trade, communication, immigration or transportation. Contrary to previous decades or even centuries, for individuals as well as communities, this process has been further accelerated by the brisk development of information technology. In addition, while in the past globalisation was mainly centred on the economic side of the world, the more recent focus on the term has been expanded to integrate a wider range of fields and activities such as culture, media, and technology plus socio-cultural, political and biological factors including climate change and inclusiveness. The expansion of focus allowed for new possibilities. Now people are able to exchange ideas, meanings and values around the globe with the means to extend and intensify social relations. This process, also called cultural globalisation, is marked by the common consumption of cultures and has been spread by the internet, modern and popular media as well as international travel. (Steger & James, 2010)

With a constantly evolving new world, through international and intercultural exchange, the business world has to follow and catch up. Organisations and companies cannot rely on usual or traditional business practice alone anymore, as, over the course of the last century, the economic, ecological and societal impact has grown enormously. Their growth needs to be balanced and further monitored, as their impact on society and the environment is sizeable. For instance, some firms like Apple Inc. have a tremendous influence on their customers, which can be compared to a fan-base of a popular celebrity and can therefore have massive influence on both customers and employees. Many people might choose not to buy or work for companies which, for example, are neglecting the environment or disregarding equality. To avoid this occurrence, various steps have to be taken. With the constantly rising cry for more equality,

inclusiveness and interculturality, companies must oblige to a certain extent not to lose customers, revenue, employees or all three. (Sijbesma, 2019)

The above describes how variable a proper representation of diversity is and how it affects people's thinking about and around the company. It will hence be used in this paper to check diversity in the images in connection with PR practice.

Problem statement aims and objectives

In the constantly developing corporate world, diversity, racial and gender equality are increasingly gaining recognition as instrumental in improving the firm's performance and are imperatives that organisations can no longer choose to ignore. Researchers have found that many small adjustments can help improve the company´s performance; one of the most important steps would be a thorough application of diversity in all areas. Companies nowadays need to adapt and react to the ever-changing external factors and demands voiced by the public as well as shareholders.

Furthermore, and connected to diversity and stereotypes, the subject of *Interculturality* is gaining attention in the international business world. *Interculturality* is a generic term for diversity and equality as well as inclusiveness. With cultures of the world gradually meeting, mixing and interacting more, due to increased transportation efficiency and advanced communication technology, it is a subject many internationally operating companies have had to make a top priority. Henceforth, *Interculturality*, as the term to unite all, is becoming increasingly important, especially in the business community. (Fenell, 2019; Mayhew, 2013)

With that in mind, companies are now trying to improve their public image regarding inclusiveness, diversity and, ultimately, equality. Yet, this alleged diversity that companies display is not always fully representative or even right in their corporate content communication. The potential for wrong representation, usually displayed as stereotypes, is not only inappropriate but also deceptive towards the company itself, potentially leading to wrong conclusions about the company and its image. In this paper, the connection between Intercultural Strategic PR and Diversity Theory will be analysed, particularly the potential of missing proper diversity representation within the corporate visual communication of 25 companies from five different countries. It illustrates how the companies display themselves regarding diversity and stereotypes, and to which extent there are distinctions between companies from various nations.

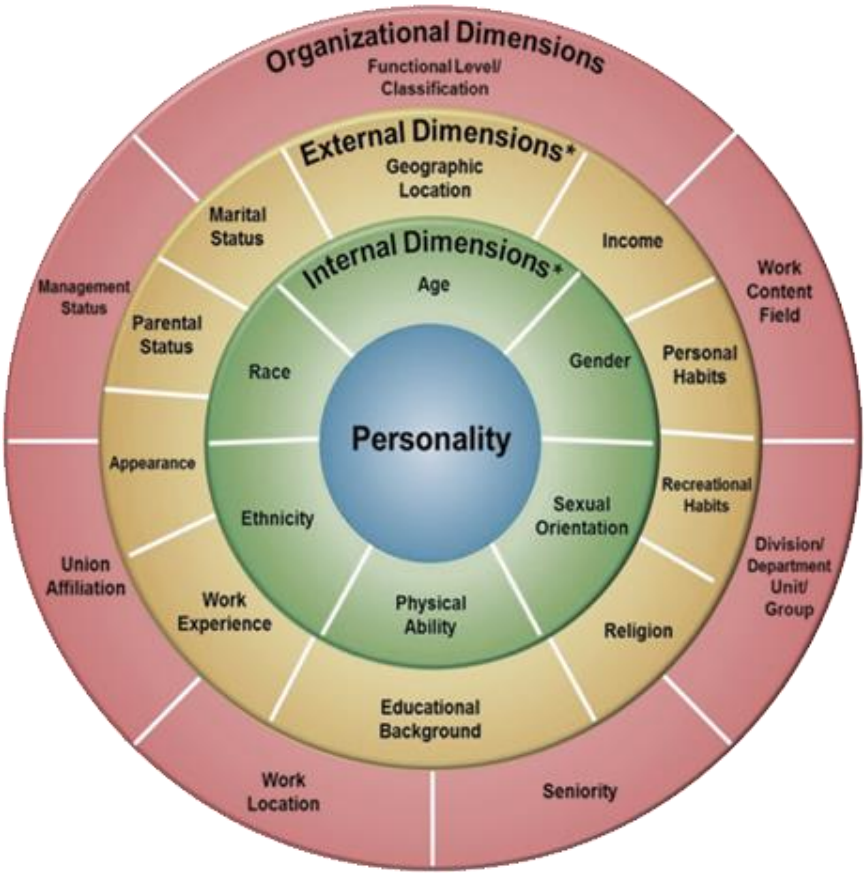
Theoretical Foundation and State of Research

Diversity Theory

Diversity is defined by Cambridge University as multiple and different types of things or people being included in something. In general, it is a wide range of various things or people with different ideas or opinions about something (2019). This means recognising, accepting and understanding individual differences despite race, gender, age, class, ethnicity and physical ability as well as sexual orientation and religion (Business Dictionary, 2019). Yet, diversity is classified into three separate dimensions. The first dimension, called the internal dimension, includes the main and most obvious differences between individuals like age, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and physical ability. Those primary differences serve as leading filters through which people view the world, as they are self-evident on initial encounters and effortlessly recognisable. The secondary dimension, known as the external dimension, is

somewhat less noticeable and includes religion, education, geographical location, income and more. These qualities cannot only change throughout but are also only noticeable after interactions between individuals (Fourie, 2010, Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2002).

The third dimension is the organisational dimensions of diversity and focuses on aspects of the work environment. Issues like work content field, functional level or classification as well as management status and work locations are affected in this dimension as *figure 1* shows.



Nowadays, globalisation provides more than ever before in human history increased interaction amongst people from various cultures, backgrounds and countries. People and their attitudes have developed, evolved and are presenting themselves as more open-minded. This does not only apply to the marketplace, as competition for jobs and for companies, but to every aspect of life. This worldwide phenomenon needs a proper representation, and it is asking for diversity. Therefore, it can be a matter of discomfort as well as a solution, for the organisation especially. For companies it similarly generates benefits and creates disadvantages. Henceforth, to improve an organisation and enhance the numbers and the strength of its people, a balance of the right amount of diversity and strategical management is necessary. The situation outside the corporate world is about the same, as the issue of diverse representation is omnipresent and can be as dangerous when handled wrongly, as can occur in a company. (Dike, 2013; Mazur, 2010)

Diversity literature acknowledges the difficulty organisations face when attempting to create the conditions in which employees have the opportunity to be and to express all relevant aspects of themselves. Therefore, modern management should not only need to show a passive tolerance for diversity but also should be prepared and capable of actively supporting and stimulating rising heterogeneity. Observed in further depth, diversity theories distinguish between two main areas of research: one is the moral-ethical perspective of diversity studies. The focus there is on social inequity and aims to achieve a more socially just situation where everything, functions and positions, are spread evenly over the different groups. The purpose of this area of research is not only to identify discriminatory practices in the workplace, including subjects like wage differences and segregation, but also to evince the dangers and problems different norms and values have when they are misinterpreted regarding the effects of diversity. The second string of researchers are studying diversity from the organisational and economical perspective. There, the effects of diversity on work-related outcomes and the benefits for organisations are the research´s focus. Milliken and Martins examined the relationships between value diversity and conflict. These are cognitive heterogeneity and problem-solving capabilities that the company is losing as well as the argument in favour of the companies risking money by paying too little attention to diversity in their policies. This string of research has diversity categorised into cultural, functional and historical dimensions. (Janssens & Steyaert, 2003)

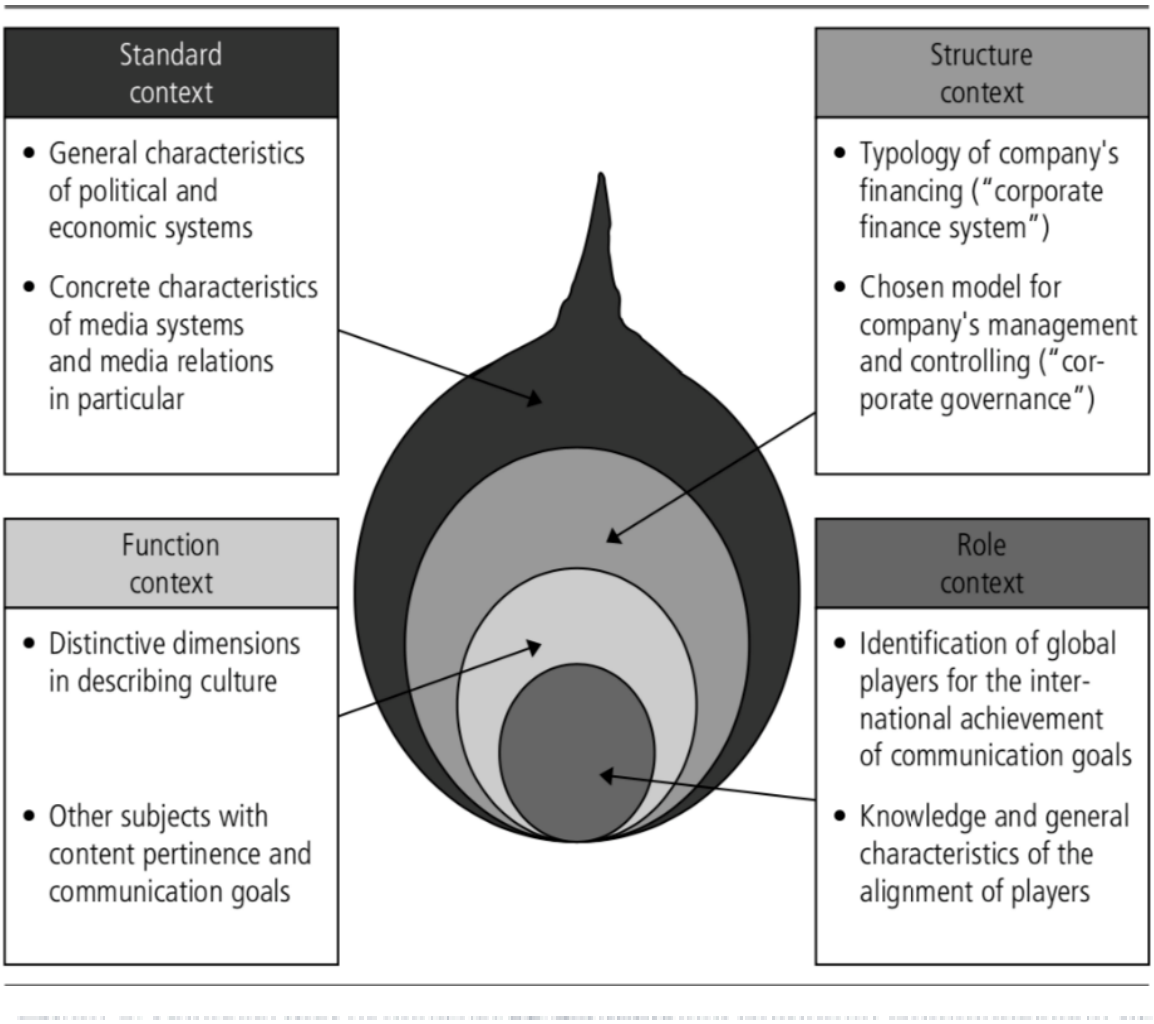
According to Pollar and Gonzalez, cultural differences are religion, age, ethnicity and language ability, whilst historical differences are family make-ups. Political opinions, intergroup relationships and functional differences refer to the differences in the way we learn, think, process information and deal with authority. The functional differences are the part that differentiates the moral-ethical perspective from the organisational, economical perspective of diversity. It is added to the different ways to look at diversity, as it specifically focuses on the differences that relate directly to the organisational context (1994). In Gardenswartz and Rowe´s model, it is called the organisational dimension.

Another distinction can be made between functional and representative categories and focuses on the functional characteristics of diversity. However, scholars in the field argue that the focus on representative diversity, such as demographic characteristics, is mainly driven by a juridical point of view. The juridical argument seeks a balanced representation of diverse groups among organisation workers, while being less effective for the organisation to achieve its objectives. This juridical perspective, however, requires further categorisation of the functional types of diversity, such as access to networks and physical sources because the concerns are the differences in knowledge, values and personality.

An additional focus on the functional differences is the matter of observability and measurability of the sources that produce said differences, while some characteristics can simply be observed and reasonably and accurately guessed, such as the individuals´ age, gender or ethnicity. Other characteristics, like skills, values and personal styles, are harder to determine because of the need for frequent interaction or the usage of tools (Janssens & Steyaert, 2003). This difficulty in determining characteristics makes this specific area of research, observability and measurability significant for this paper.

Intercultural Communication Theory

Besides the diversity theory, for the theoretical part, this paper will further focus on intercultural PR theory as, for example, proposed some years ago by Siramesh and Vercic or Sievert (both 2009). Sriramesh and Vercic differentiate for global communication between the three dimensions of infrastructure, culture and media relations. Sievert distinguishes normative, structural, functional and role contexts of international corporate communication. In both approaches, diversity is only a role-related side aspect.



In considering the normative context as proposed by Sievert (as this paper will also focus on this model also shown in *figure 2*), helpful stimuli can be found in the fields of political science and general communication theory. Over time, two important specific models have been developed in these disciplines that integrate a political and economic perspective in relation to a description of various types of media systems. Their authors are Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini as well as Roger Blum. Hallin and Mancini (2004) developed a total of three media and political models that rest principally on specific indicators. For countries like France, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, they established a polarised pluralistic model. Great Britain, Ireland,

Canada and the United States are assigned to the liberal model. And the media systems in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Austria and Switzerland are seen as democratic and corporatist.

Blum (2005) distinguishes among six models, three of which roughly correspond to Hallin and Mancini´s distinctions. Particularly noteworthy are the East European shock models (Russia, Turkey, Iran), the Arab-Asian patriotic model (Egypt, Yemen) and the Asiatic-Caribbean model (China, Vietnam, Burma, Zimbabwe and Cuba). Taken together, both approaches offer an outstanding opportunity for communication professionals to adjust at a system-wide level to the dialogue country of their communications and thus prepare three subsequent analytical steps. The systems of journalism and their political backgrounds are similar in the countries the researchers assigned to a single media system model, so the way in which media relations can (and must) operate, as a part of corporate communications, can be assumed. Analogously, journalism and PR in these countries differ substantially from journalism and PR in countries assigned to a different model of media systems.

When the issue is better communicative understanding of a specific foreign corporation, economics and business administration in particular are interdisciplinary sources of insight. An understanding of the legal system can contribute interesting perspectives as well, particularly where it goes beyond generalities about legal standards in the dialogue country and looks into their implementation in corporate reality. If the goal is to understand a specific corporation and its communicative behaviour, that will not be possible without at least basic knowledge of financial structures and the cultural implications associated with them. Within corporate finance, Erik Berglöf (1997) has developed an interesting approach that describes models of venture capital finance. For the Corporate Governance Context, Cynthia A. Williams and John M. Conley (2005) begin their analysis with the classic distinction between the Anglo-American outsider and the Continental European insider systems. Alongside these two types, Christine A. Mallin (2006) distinguishes two other groups: A Central and East European one marked by the privatisation of the 1990s, and a much less uniform Southeast Asian system with a great deal of state influence.

For the functional context, Greet Hofstede, among others, identified four different dimensions to describe cultures (Hofstede, 1980), to which he later added a fifth (Hofstede, 2001). Despite some shortcomings, his findings provide helpful cultural insight and awareness which can be considered when producing PR content. Within classical management studies, Charles Hampden-Turner and Fons Trompenaars (2000) have established an alternative distinction centred around six basic conflicts with regard to communicative dialogue contents in management.

Last but not least, the role context of the actors involved, and especially their dialogue actors, must be considered. For this purpose, e. g. data from journalists worldwide such as presented by Weaver (1998) or the Asia-Pacific, European, Latin American or North American Communication Monitors (Zerfass et al. 2019).

Further research will show to what extent this International Corporate Communication can be used for the interdisciplinary purpose of this paper. The main question will be how perhaps the different models of Corporate Communication in the countries analysed will also influence the way diversity is displayed on multiple levels.

Current State of Research

Research on diversity as well as on stereotypes is a challenge to review and gather, as it is spreading over multiple disciplinary boundaries; it determines the effects of various types of diversity and stereotypes, concentrates on many different dependent variables of both and engages broad types of groups and settings. The subjects of diversity and the connection to stereotypes have been present and increasingly become so in a multitude of scientific fields.

Diversity is a concept that evolved into a different meaning over time. While diversity just describes a wide range of different things or the state of being diverse, the meaning has been adapted to multiple different fields of research, the same as stereotypes have been. Diversity in media, cultural diversity, law, diversity within social groups and of course within companies is known and important. (Dovidio et al., 2010)

Diversity research hence is highly diverse and profound. In recent years, diversity has gained remarkable popularity. With the ongoing increase of globalisation and the blending of cultures, diversity has become a subject present in nearly every part of modern life. Diversity is a phenomenon appearing in education, the workplace, group relations, language and all everyday interactions between humans. Besides a mention, some sort of definition of diversity is nowadays available from every company, non-profit organisation or any kind of club. Scientific papers and theories are as plentiful. Areas here include language diversity (linguistic diversity by Daniel Nettle, 1999), human diversity (human diversity by Bernard Davis and Patricia Flaherty, 1976), genetic diversity (genetic diversity by Lidija Bitz, 2017), politics and diversity (democracy and diversity by Anna Elisabetta Galeotti, Enrico Biale and Federica Liveriero, 2018) and currently most important nowadays, workplace diversity. However, the listed areas are just samples, as there is a whole variety of authors writing about the same subject with his or her unique twist on it.

Concerning workplace diversity, a wide range of studies from different perspectives has been carried out, such as the effects that diversity has on organisational groups, which for example was written by Frances J. Milliken and Luis Martins in 1996 examining the effects of different types of diversity in group compositions. Later, Barbara Mazur conducted a study about cultural diversity in organisational theory and practice showing arguments in favour of and against diversity in organisations. This study, although coming more than ten years after Milliken and Martins, holds valuable findings. Others analysed what and how organisations are affected when their workforce is highly diverse, as Priscilla Dike did in her paper ‘The Impact of Workplace Diversity on Organisations’ in 2013. In it she explored how companies are managing workforce diversity and its consequences for the company’s condition. Furthermore, she examined how companies deal with challenges that come with employees from diverse cultural backgrounds. While analysing the state of diversity research, it is plain to see that almost every scientific field mentions diversity in some way.

Modern societies, constantly changing as they are, clearly need diversity in all areas of social life, medicine, government, technology and, in particular, the areas of education and media in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. To evolve and keep with the times, modern societies are trying assiduously to include diversity in everyday life and to avoid stereotypes. In

corporate environments, gender, racial and cultural diversity are three subjects analysed by researchers. The research is not only focused on the work body of the organisation but also on corporate communication, in particular on annual reports. Aminah Nalikka for instance, in 2009, analysed the impact of diversity on certain parts of corporate annual reports. Corporate communication was also the subject of a study earlier in 2002 by Richard Bernadi, who researched image management in corporate annual reports with a focus on gender diversity. Of course, several works about different kinds of diversity in the workplace in corporate marketing (Wæraas from 2008 and Mishra & Modi from 2016) and other fields of communication exist as well.

The subject, however, has not just captured the attention of the scientific world but also of the public. Internet platforms, YouTubers and Social Media Influencers have picked up on the subjects of diversity and stereotyping on multiple occasions. YouTuber Ryan Higa speaks out about being Asian in the American public eye; another influencer, Patrick Starr, is breaking the barriers of diversity and stereotypes by speaking out about it. All over the world, people are involved in the subject, its development and its general increase in importance. This shows how this subject has evolved into a public concern and interest.

Nevertheless, the existing works about diversity and stereotype on display are rather limited, and ample room for advancements in that scientific field is open for scientific discussion. The following work, taking advantage of the research gap, is an analysis of visual communication inside corporate digital communication.

Methodology

Pictures have become enormously popular in recent decades due to their enhanced display and omnipresence in media and everyday life. Their popularity has become an important object of research in a variety of scientific disciplines and areas. The humanities, as well as the social sciences, today concentrate intensively on the subject, each at times with very different focal points of the pictures. General images sciences, as mentioned above, undertake the basic understanding of the phenomena of pictures in general and hence develop ontological and epistemological foundations. Yet, the following work is focusing on one specific type of image: the motionless media image and its display of diversity and stereotypes on corporate websites. Therefore, the focus is, while on diversity and stereotypes, on visual communication in a quantitative way. Images are an essential part of our everyday lives. One encounters pictures daily in many media contexts, constantly and in all forms of expression. The range of said visual capabilities is extensive: visual elements can provide illustrations for verbal text, be entertainment, be design or decoration elements and independently transmit information. They can also present something unspeakable in a vivid way (Lobinger, 2012). This list of capabilities can be extended at will to endless amounts according to Knieper (2005). Yet, while there is another theory branch to explore, the study focussed on a quantitative content analysis of visual images.

The quantitative content analysis, as the method applied in the analysis, is the most used method of visual communication research, and is, according to Rössler (2005), contributing to a better understanding of media reports. Therefore, it is not surprising that Lobinger's paper includes more than one chapter on quantitative content analyses, each in connection with another

part of the visual communication research. For instance, quantitative content analysis is especially suited to analysing a multitude of images, as it examines media patterns rather than individual images or individual visual texts. Nonetheless, with its perfect fit and ability to comment on a high number of images, it can be said that a content analysis can never prove how spectators understand or evaluate what they see in the images. However, it can identify those contents which take high priority and those which do not. It also reveals which agendas run in the analysed media and the visual strategies used to present them. The subject area that is often examined with this quantitative image analysis is the representation of individuals in the media.

The study aims to elaborate on the diversity display and potentially stereotypical display in companies' imagery to see how and if companies are displaying diversity on their websites. The presentation of the theoretical foundations concerning diversity and stereotypes in organisations and the current state of research makes the relevance of this study obvious. Thus, this specific topic of diversity and stereotypes in corporate websites' imagery and their website as a whole is a relatively under–researched area and hence of great interest. This following study's objective is to point out the way companies present themselves on their websites regarding diversity, particularly, whether companies are showing diversity or stereotypes in their webpages' imagery. The analysis shows how companies show diversity and stereotypes on their pages in comparison to their actual stand on real diversity. Additionally, the study wants to examine if there are stereotypical representations in the companies' display and their presentation of such diversity with regard to their stand towards diversity. The work found answers to the following objectives and research questions: RQ1: Are companies showing diversity in their webpages' imagery?; RQ2: How do companies show diversity on their pages?; RQ3: How do companies use diversity or are they showing stereotypes and providing initial insights by presenting an overview of the status?

Selection and perimeter of the data (countries, companies, perimeters)

As globalisation strides forward so does the corporate world, especially in the areas of international relations and global trade. In particular, the economically strongest and biggest companies in the world spiked the idea of the selected data pool. Hence, the analysis focussed solely on the five biggest companies from each country. In addition to the further globalisation of the issue at hand, five companies were chosen from five countries to represent all areas across the globe.

The countries that were chosen for the analysis are in parts of the world which are economically strongest and in parts to represent all habitable continents of the planet. Hence, the Focus Economy list of economically strongest countries was consulted. According to this list, the United States of America (USA) is the strongest, followed by China, Japan and Germany (Focus Economy, 2018). As they are the strongest countries in their respective regions, the USA, China and Germany were selected to represent America, Asia and Europe. For the last two continents, being Australia and Africa, each other's economically strongest countries were chosen. For Australia, the question is redundant about the country. However, for Africa, South Africa was chosen as currently the overall strongest country. Fully aware that one continent was not considered in the continent representation, South America's economic analysis leaves much to be desired. After thorough research, a recent list of the economically strongest countries in South America showed Chile to be the economically strongest country. Yet information regarding Chile's biggest companies, for instance, could not be determined for the last six years. Therefore,

the 25 countries were chosen because of their international area of trade and revenue size, this being the reason for listing in each country's top companies. Every company, even though adjustments had to be made, is among the top ten strongest companies in the country in revenue terms.

The images under analysis, of the companies' usage of diversity, are evaluated under the just sorted categories of diversity elaborated out of the theory. The important questions here are 'Is diversity displayed?', 'How is diversity displayed?' and 'How is diversity used or are the companies using stereotypes?' There, the subcategories are defined in a multitude of ways. The succeeding question to define and sort the images correctly is 'what level of diversity is used?' These pertain to the variables of age, gender, race and physical ability, where each is further broken down into subcategories. Age is split into five ranges of age, gender into women and men ('other' was excluded as visual representation is not possible), race is split into the previously defined categories and physical ability was defined as disabled and able. These coding instructions, fully developed out of the theoretical framework, served as a guideline for the selected data. To answer the previously defined research questions and attached hypotheses, a variety of variables and code were necessary to make reliable statements. To explore the results properly, the coded data was subsequently transferred into the SPSS program, where tables and figures as for instance diagrams, were constructed and appraised.

Selected Results

The number of images that were found on the chosen corporate websites, even within the perimeter of just the first navigation level, is plentiful: they were counted and set at 629 images. Through the initial filter, it settled at a total of 564 images, as some where put together as one. Additional to the established considerations of a multitude of the same image, another point is to be mentioned. All images, albeit their multiple usage, were included in the analysis and therefore the coding. This means that images, like for example the Sasol main head image, was analysed and regarded the exact amount of times it was found on the first navigation level. This is applicable for all images of all companies as stated in the *table 1*.

Australia	**China**	**Germany**	**South Africa**	**USA**
1. Wesfarmers Ltd.; 2. Commonwealth Bank of Australia 3. BHP 4. Westpac Bank 5. Tino Tinto plc/Ltd	1. Sinopec 2. CNPC 3. CCEC 4. Ping An Insurance 5. SAIC Motors	1.Volkswagen AG 2. Daimler AG 3. BMW AG 4. Siemens AG 5. Robert Bosch GmbH	1. Sasol Ltd 2. MTN Group 3. Standard Bank 4. Naspers Ltd. 5. FirstRand Ltd	1.Walmart Inc.; 2. Exxon Mobile; 3.Apple Inc. 4. Amazon.com 5. AT&T International Inc.
105	28	108	121	188

*Table SEQ Table * ARABIC 1: Selected companies by size ranking and number of pictures by in the general sample structure for this paper*

The question whether diversity is being shown can be easily answered positively as all companies, despite being not nearly on the same level, show diversity on some of the levels previously defined, demonstrating the mainstream importance diversity and stereotypes management gained. Yet, it shows a clear difference in the countries chosen. Every country has their own society, history and future focus giving them each a unique way of handling their affairs when it comes to people, politics and business, as every country has their own culture. Therefore, it is unexpected to see that every country and every company has reacted to global trends like diversity in their particular way. Altogether, it is surprising that all companies chosen are showing diversity, even though it is a relatively modern concept that in recent years started increasing in importance and relevance on a global level. Certainly, diversity in companies in the Americas and in generally developed countries was to be expected, yet such high levels of visual diversity in companies from developing countries like South Africa was not just unexpected but also unpredictable and is consequently a highly interesting outcome.

	Australia	China	Germany	S. Africa	US	Total
female	86,7	31,0	51,9	62,0	68,7	64,5
male	69,5	47,7	79,6	69,4	64,3	68,0

*Table SEQ Table * ARABIC 2: Gender representation in percent of all country images; n= 564; Cram*
Significance = 0,034.

Significance = 0,034

Another unexpected fact was that as *table 2* shows gender diversity has spread far enough to be, though only visually displayed, on an almost equal level worldwide with some exception for China and Germany. As mentioned before, gender equality has been a subject for a very long time. Moreover, while equality has increased with time, there are still plenty of companies and countries paying women less or which lack respect towards females. However, in these analysed images, multiple companies presented a significantly higher number of images showing women than men. Hence, it can also be seen in the country representation.

But what if you like not only for the gender diversity, but also for race and age diversity as well as for showing also people with and without visible special physical abilities directly on the same picture? *Table 3* shows some results in this context. The US are therefore leading in showing different levels of diversity – and it's even the only country doing so. Far behind can be found China where on the company diversity on the same picture is nearly an exception. All others are around the average percentages of around 25 percent for race, gender and age diversity, but normally no values for disability diversity.

Table 3: Diversity issues in the same picture in percent of all country images; n= 564; multiple respons

Significance = 0,034

	Australia	China	Germany	S. Africa	US	Average
Race Diversity	24,7	5,7	25,8	25,9	47,7	26,0
Gender Diversity	29,0	6,0	25,1	28,2	44,4	26,5
Age Diversity	26,6	6,9	21,8	23,8	39,9	23,8
Disability Diversity	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	2,1	0,4

Diversity, as stated in in the model of Gardenschwartz and Rowe, is composed of different areas, yet it is clear that more visual diversity is displayed, whatever its kind, when, for

instance, additional diversity is addressed on the webpages. Furthermore, the more diversity is addressed on the pages, the fewer the number of stereotypes that can be found, functioning as a filter for stereotypes whereby, through the addressed diversity, fewer stereotypes find their way on to the pages as demonstrated in table 4.

		Levels of Stereotypes				
		no stereotypes found	hardly any stereotypes found	predominantly stereotypes found	plenty of stereotypes found	Total
Levels of Diversity	not addressed at all	17,9	6,2	0,9	0,0	**25,0**
	hardly addressed	39,5	8,7	3,2	0,4	**51,8**
	predominantly addressed	5,5	2,8	0,7	0,0	**9,0**
	clearly addressed	8,9	3,5	1,8	0,0	**14,2**
Total		**71,8**	**21,3**	**6,6**	**0,4**	**100,0**

However, if one doesn't look only for diversity within the same picture (or direct picture assembling), but for overall diversity addressment within the analysed webpage imagery and the written elements of the webpage, the ranking would be a bit different (cf. *table 5)*. Here, Germany would be leading, this time followed by the US and Australia. In other word: German companies are best in writing and indirectly showing diversity, US companies are best in representing it directly on one and the same picture. But especially in the US, but also Germany big differences between companies can be observed.

Overall, the study's results are showing that diversity has become an international topic that is of universal interest and importance giving companies an additional challenge that needs to be taken into consideration in all departments of the company. All companies chosen are at least somehow showing diversity, even though it is a relatively modern concept that in recent years has started increasing in importance and relevance on a global level. Nevertheless, there is still a lot of room for improvement within Corporate Communication on a global, but also national diversity scale – especially if companies want to appear more attractive, for one, and want to reflect on the actual circumstances of the companies' situation, presenting two reasons why these diversity level differences exists, might be even growing and offering unique opportunities, but of course also some challenges.

Table 5: Very first qualitative assessment of overall addressment of diversity incl. written statements on webpages by country and company.

Table 5: Diversity levels in comparison to stereotype levels on images in percent of all cases; n= 564; Cramer V=0,103; Significance = 0,034

Countries	Companies	Levels of Diversity
**	1. Walmart Inc.;	*
	2. Exxon Mobile;	**
	3. Apple Inc.;	***
	4. Amazon.com;	**
	5. AT&T International Inc.	**
USA		
***	1. Volkswagen AG;	**
	2. Daimler AG;	****
	3. BMW AG;	****
	4. Siemens AG;	***
	5. Robert Bosch GmbH	****
Germany		
*	2. CNPC;	**
	3. CCEC;	*
	4. Ping An Insurance;	*
	5. SAIC Motors	*
China		*
**	1. Wesfarmers Ltd;	**
	2. Commonwealth;	**
	3. BHP;	**
	4. Westpac Bank;	***
	5. Rino Tinto plc/Ltd	**
Australia		
*	1. Sasol Ltd.;	*
	2. MTN Group;	*
	3. Standard Bank;	*
	4. Naspers Ltd.;	**
	5. First Rand Ltd.	*
South Africa		

*not addressed at all; ** hardly addressed; *** predominantly addressed, **** clearly addressed

Conclusion

This analysis was made by analysing a number of images from companies' webpages that are displaying people to see if these companies show real diversity. The answers found have been not just surprising at times, ranking Germany one of the least diverse countries when it comes to diversity in images and, at the same time, one of the highest in regard to diversity that has been addressed in writing on the webpages.

In conclusion, this study presents the potential to be impactful for the modern-day corporate environment and especially for Corporate Communication practioners. The subject of diversity is of great also ethical importance nowadays and with a focus on the corporate environment and a specification on corporate communication, it has become a more specialised research perspective. By looking at the images on the webpage, companies are not able to hide behind false statements but are exposed on a visual level. It gives a new perspective on the topics and their appreciation, compliance and usage by the companies. This study shows further clear differences in diversity between not just the companies but also the countries the companies come from. Additionally, with 20 variables selected and hence coded, many more cross correlations could have been made. Yet, the study mainly shows the importance of inclusion on all levels, not just diversity in race but also age, disability and gender, providing an environment, albeit just through images on the page, that is safe and tolerant of the growing heterogeneity. The analysis does not just contain multiple and goal-oriented future prospects but limitations which need to be addressed.

If one combines this diversity theory-based approach with the presented model on International Corporate Communication and combines the found results with the Corporate Communication of each country, it is obvious why the US or South Africa are much more careful with their usage of diversity in the imagery than e. g. China or Germany; they are therefore more prominent in their diversity display, taking into account the other standard context of basic ethical understanding or the functional context with some variables. That's important factor to be taking into account while communicating across country borders.

The direct communication one image is presenting has two very important limitations, as no study comes without its limitations and hence has potential for future prospects in the area. A number of limitations give suggestions for future steps that should be taken in the right direction: an expansion of perimeter to not limit the study and a multimethod procedure that would allow for a more detailed look can then be transferred to future prospects for the subjects. Furthermore, the general objectivity and the choice of setting the perimeter of just looking at the first navigation level and the landing page of the website are important to consider. And also, the theoretical context could be elaborated much more than as limited here to word number restrictions.

The study established a hopefully useful base for future studies into the direction of Corporate Communication, PR and diversity. Thus, the mentioned limitations should be kept in mind, as they provide a path forward for future analyses.

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All the World's a Stage
What the Study of Theater and Acting Bring to The Effective Practice of Public Relations

Stacey Smith
Jackson Jackson & Wagner

Sean Williams
Laney Borchers
Bowling Green State University

"My whole business these days (books, keynotes, workshops and consulting) is centered on using lessons from show business to help people succeed in their business." – Respondent #9128

Abstract

Public relations professionals draw from many fields of study to hone the skills they need to be effective in their work. One field that has not traditionally been considered is Theater. What elements of coursework and practical experience in the field of acting and theater could enhance public relations practice and education? What skills can be applied to designing tactics and motivating behaviors of key audiences? This paper explores this question with the public relations professionals who have background in studying theater or who have practical acting experience.

Introduction

There are many fields of study from which public relations professionals draw knowledge and skills in order to be effective -- psychology, sociology, anthropology, speech, political science, etc. A field that has not been yet been explored in detail is that of theater. This is curious because many public relations professionals, it turns out, have theater experience -- whether in high school, college, amateur or professional.

We suggest that theater/acting experience or training can help build stronger public relations professional skills in four key areas:

1) **Acting** – the skills learned to be effective on stage in front of an audience can prepare the professional to be successful in front of media, employees, leadership and community.

2) **Character Development** – The work an actor does to understand the motivations for a character to behave in a particular way are directly transferable to a professional's skills in understanding stakeholder(s) behavior and motivations.

3) **Storylines** – The act of dissecting a play, understanding what the playwright is trying to communicate, the arc of a story to keep interest and move emotion is the same skill base professionals need to craft messages and stories that will grab and keep stakeholder attention, be memorable and meaningful over time.

4) **Staging** – The environment in which the action is taking place is critical to the theater as it is in public relations. What unnamed influences are there in the make up of the environment in which communication is happening? A public hearing? An open house? A round table discussion? Everything, including costuming (clothes), light, sound, etc. are key to the overall ability to communicate well. Theatrical training may help to bring that skill to the forefront.

Theater programs may be a great way to expand both student and practitioner skill base -- and fun at the same time. And, schools with strong theater programs may be another source for recruiting future public relations talent as well.

Literature Review

There is little scholarship to be found about the relationship and use of theater techniques specifically in communications or public relations practice. We find, however, many studies on the use or impact of theater and its techniques in business literature. A number of studies have explored techniques the theater world uses to determine if they would be applicable and/or effective in improving skills of business professionals, and several could apply directly to public relations professionals. For instance, Brennan & Pearce (2009) conducted a study on educational drama, where two individuals participated in role-playing scenarios for which attitudes are the prime concern. They found that this method of learning could aid in presentation skills, team-working skills and illustrating real-world business issues.

Lesavre (2012), reflecting on the growing field of corporate training, found that the theatre has also become relevant in management training. His study was deemed "successful" due to informing participants on self-awareness, public speaking abilities, creativity, catharsis and body professional memory. More recently, Munro, Lemmer & Pretorius (2019) argued that acts of relational communication form the foundation of much theatre work. Actors preparing to play the characters convincingly have to go through training methods and skills development that could also be beneficial for those tasked with effective communication within the workplace. Their results indicated that theatre-based strategies in management development can successfully

help employees build their emotional intelligence skills. In 2005, Steed focused research on the window or mirror method in theatre-based training, which involves a manager reflecting on their own behaviors and those of their own organization and employees to see how those behaviors can be changed to achieve more positive results (Steed 2005).

With interactive drama in leadership development, the audience is invited to engage with the players in the scenario who stay in character. He found that interactive theatre-based training allows participants to open their mind and hearts to have a better understanding on scenarios presented to them (Steed 2005).

Scholars have found other key learnings applicable to professionals. Lindenberger (2009), discusses Aristotle's goal in the *Poetics* to describe the ideal way of composing a tragedy to stimulate catharsis. Neuroscience, he says, shows that the emotional disruptions we experience from the arousal of pity and fear are sent to specific locations within the brain. He goes on to explore how music and drama can perform this same function, and are processed in the same areas as say, drugs, food and sex. They tap regions that also play a role in the empathy we exercise in everyday life.

Auvinen, Aaltio & Blomqvist (2013), conducted a study and concluded that storytelling in leadership is an effective way to build trust between managers and their employees, especially when the manager places themselves in a position that may involve vulnerability. Edmond and Tilley (2002), argue that the use of theatre among employees will advance their training and communication skills, and enable a successful employee communications program. They also mention a case study where a mining company used the cultural skills of oral storytelling, song, dance, chanting, music and metaphor to enhance interpersonal communication, and participate successfully in their roles.

As early as 1993, Golden-Biddle was examining how theater can influence and support the emotional growth of managers and leaders. She writes, "Theater invites us to actively experience, to probe and analyze the issues about society disclosed through performance. This heightened consciousness can generate a new awareness of how societal issues relate to personal and work situations and experiences, and occasionally, can generate the will to change existing beliefs and practices" (Golden-Biddle, 1993, p. 40). All this from merely observing a play! Imagine if the "student" is not just watching but performing a part.

Brennan and Pearce (2009) focus on measuring university marketing students' attitudes towards educational drama by a quantitative approach. Educational drama can be defined as an act where two individuals participate in roleplaying scenarios where attitudes are the prime concern. In order to conduct this study, Brennan and Pearce had student participants from an Australian university engage in a three-hour drama workshop every week throughout the semester. At the end of the semester, the students completed a survey about their experience in the course. Educational drama was the highest scoring learning technique; students believed that the method could aid them in their presentational and teamworking skills, and in illustrating real world business issues.

Fan (2013) argues that applied theatre in corporate training can improve leadership, communication, creativity, team building and emotion management within a business setting. Fan gives an overview of what applied theatre in corporate training entails along with mentioning other methods utilizing in different settings. Within applied theatre in corporate training, leadership is viewed as the conductor of the performance in order to keep the flow consistent. In order to effectively communication, roleplaying is a technique utilized to enhance how coworkers can detect emotion among others. To maintain creativity and team building,

improvisation is utilized for coworkers to have trust and understanding. Lastly, applied theatre training can assist with emotion management in order for coworkers to distinguish between personal and professional obligations.

Examining a French company, Friefeld (2014) observes that problems and concerns among employees were addressed through narrative, acting, improvisation and roleplaying. Two formats were generated during the training, improvisation wrestling and cabaret. After the training, employees were encouraged to reflect in order to assist in creating an action-plan to address the concerns at hand.

Finally, on most actor's shelves, lives a copy of *"Creating A Role"* by Constantin Stanislavski. He writes, "The director and the playwright can suggest their wishes to the actor but these wishes must then be reincarnated in the actor's own nature so that s/he becomes living, creative desires on the stage embodied in the actions of the actor, they must have become a part of her/his very self" (Stanislavski 1961, p. 50).

Method

The sample consisted of members of the Public Relations Society of America who self-identified as having theater experience by responding to a call for participation posted on two MyPRSA message boards: College of Fellows and Open Forum. The request sought professionals who currently or previously were involved in theater, whether formally trained or not. Some responded themselves, some directed the researchers to reach out other professionals they knew but who might not have seen the posting. Twenty-one public relations professionals, academics and practitioners, completed the survey. Nineteen respondents completed the survey online and two respondents completed the survey through a phone interview. The data was collected using SurveyGold© Software. Two researchers then independently analyzed the responses and classified the content under several themes, loosely applying the techniques from Braun & Clarke (2012) in abbreviated form. Review the data, determine initial themes, classify data accordingly and write the report.

Demographics:

Female	60%
Male	40%
66 years of age and older	43%
41-65 years	43%
40 and under	14%
Undergraduate	48%
Master's	33%
Ph.D.	14%
Some college	5%
Tenure in Public Relations 30<	57%
Tenure in Public Relations 29>	43%
Amateur actor	85%
Professional actor	15%

See Table 1 in Appendix for Detailed Description of Research Subjects

Respondents said their path into public relations was typical. They either started in communications or came in through journalism. Respondents have a variety of theater experience, from high school plays to community buskers to equity performances.

Results

Overwhelmingly, respondents felt that the skills and techniques taught and practiced in theater and acting are invaluable to the practice of public relations and should be encouraged for students to broaden their professional talents in many ways. Though they spent much time focusing their comments on the skills and techniques useful in terms of acting, there was also much reflection on skills learned for messaging/story and motivation/behavior understanding. But what are the specific elements of the theatrical skill base that have the most impact?

Acting

Many respondents spent significant time discussing and attributing their comfort and effectiveness in addressing others, small or large groups, to their acting experience. They felt that the practice of being up in front of people and the training they received made them faster on their feet, more skilled at reading an audience and responding to nuanced reactions to what was being presented. Comfort on camera and with media was a valued result of their theater experience. Other benefits of acting training included the ability to remain calm and think on their feet when faced with stressful situations, and comfort in public speaking as a business product.

"As a professor and administrator I use[d] acting/directing skills everyday." Respondent #9136

"Being able to perform in front of audiences enabled me to be better in making pitches, presentations and teaching. I feel as though I've been "acting" most of my career." Respondent #9137

"The ability to communicate in a way that was effective, as learned in theater, has absolutely helped me in my career." Respondent #9140

"Theater gave me the courage and confidence to stand up before people or cameras and succinctly deliver a message." Respondent #9139

"It helped me to present workshops on PR, leadership, communications. I now speak about 10x/yr often getting paid as a speaker." Respondent #9138

"The art of persuasion, the use of timing, projection and articulation are tremendously important in communicating a message." Respondent #9131

Figure 1: Frequency of mention of attributes of acting in general. Larger is more frequent.

Respondents were asked about specific acting skills that were valuable that might be recommended to students and professionals. Some specifics offered included: finding your breathe, verbal tone, cadence, strong voice, hand gestures, planting your feet, eye contact, facial expressions, pacing, poise and, perhaps most importantly, finding and knowing your objective.

"Awareness of self (character) while performing; consistent evaluation and adaptation" Respondent #9136

"Being very aware of your surroundings and when to speak or not speak is vital in this situation" Respondent #9148

"When you are in theater they give you energy, draw from them" Respondent #9133

"I do media/spokesperson training, and many theater techniques such as cheating toward the audience, finding your breath and strong voice, using appropriate hand gestures, dressing the part, etc. all come from theater and help to engage audiences." Respondent #9129

"Using verbal and non-verbal skills to deliver messaging to a target audience. Tone, inflection, cadence for verbal. Non-verbal: eye contact, facial expressions, and even eyebrows can talk." Respondent #9133

"It teaches you how to be authentic even if the setting is anything but. Stakeholders want to hear from an authentic, empathic, passionate voice and

while someone in the C-suite may be all these things, if they don't display them correctly a message can miss the mark." Respondent #9127

Figure 2: Frequency of mention of specific words. Larger is more frequent.

Storyline/Messaging

To be a good actor, one must study and dissect the script in order to understand what the playwright was trying to say, how they wanted it communicated, how the language fit the character, the story, and the audience (Stanislavski and others). Respondents felt that these elements taught them to be better writers and orchestrators of storylines that connected with the audience. The "craft of the language" is appreciated and studied in theater in order to communicate pain or pleasure, needs or wants. A good writer, a must in the field of public relations, should understand the arc of a good story and the best language to tell it in. Studying it in a theater setting helps understand the highs and lows that can be achieved with the language and story line in order to engage and move an audience/stakeholder to feel, and thus to behave.

"Public relations seemed like a creative outlet to tell stories" Respondent #9126

"Persuasion is part of drama and it is the core of PR" Respondent #9143

"You 'have' the audience when we are invested and interested in the story you are telling. It is the same with public relations" Respondent #9127

"I wouldn't be as good a writer without the theater experience" Respondent #9147

"Analyzing a script to draw out the richest meaning and the playwright's intent is akin to strategic message development to ensure the achievement of precise shared meaning among all publics involved. Respondent #9132

Figure 3: Frequencies of mention of message/storyline attributes. Larger is more frequent.

Character Development

To truly *act* authentically, respondents suggested, one must do the work of understanding the character they are to portray, what motivates them, what has happened to them before to bring them to this point, to understand why they behave in a certain way. In addition, respondents are keenly aware of the need to keep the audience in the forefront of their performance, making changes, tweaking actions to bring them in and connect with the story.

Additionally, the audience becomes another actor in the story, an important element to understand, to gauge reaction and make changes to achieve results. The skills taught in theater on how to understand/dissect a character is essential to understanding any stakeholder group, and actors learn early on that understanding one's audience is crucial to making the emotional and intellectual connections sought. This is nearly always a feature of every strategic communication planning methodology in the history of public relations.

"The need to truly figure out a character is much like focusing in on a new stakeholder to see where that relationship will go in terms of cultivation." Respondent #9148

"Character development, studying people from other lands and cultures, and reading background on characters helped me gain a mindset of the character." Respondent #9139

"Studying fictional characters in plays (i.e. motivations, fears, weaknesses, needs, wants, etc.) made me more interested in the lives of stakeholders and constituents. When I am communicating with an audience, I try to start with what stakeholder wants/needs from me. This has sometimes helped me break down barriers in communicating with diverse groups of people." Respondent #9130

"Knowing how to read an audience; knowing how an audience may react to this or that is vital in PR" Respondent #9127

"Skills from theater experience helped analyzing and understanding an audience's needs, empathy" Respondent #9128

"As a result of my theater experience, I'm more tuned into audience responses and, in many cases, have learned to anticipate and prepare for those responses. I feel I can engage with an audience more effectively" Respondent #9132

"Knowing your audience, their expectation and their experience is very important in both storytelling and fact delivering" Respondent #9127

"Analyzing and understanding an audience's needs, defining my purpose (or "want") in any interaction, listening, empathy" Respondent #9128

"As an actor, you are concerned about your characters needs/wants and how to get them via actions - not emotions - driven by the text. As a PR professional, if I think about what my constituents want/need from me and how that connects to what I want/need from them, then there is a more clear path to meet goals/objectives on a given project." Respondent #9130

Figure 4: Frequency of mention of character development aspects.

Staging

Staging is the act, process or manner of putting a play on stage (Dictionary.com). From setting the scene through lighting and sets, to costumes, audio, and blocking (the planned movement of actors onstage), staging is the box in which everything happens. This is also true in public relations, and is important to successful communication outcomes, respondents averred. Communication about budget cuts to employees emanating from a board meeting held at a fancy resort is just as contradictory as a play about a garden taking place without any flowers. Respondents share that the environment in which we communicate is critically important to address, and that theater training can help raise awareness of its role and plans for it.

"We do a lot of public meetings, and having a sense of timing, holding interest, having strong visuals, and not keeping audiences too long all seem to be lessons from good theater." Respondent #9129

"Extremely valuable in event planning. Attention to every detail: the flow and energy of an event, sightlines, visuals, sound, scripts, rehearsals for participants, printed materials and more. "All of those elements impact how an event will be received by stakeholders." Respondent #9134

"Proper staging in the theater translates to the effective planning and conduct of significant events for PR practitioners" Respondent #9132

Figure 5: Frequency of mention of staging elements and their impacts.

Recommended Acting/Theater Training

Respondents recommended a variety of skills that can be developed and/or improved with focused training. They are not beholden to theater training as the only way to achieve this learning, but recognized that the approach that theater offers covers a wide swath of benefits for public relations professionals, including performance skills, story development, character analysis and staging.

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*"If not acting per se, **debate, extemporaneous speaking, oral interpretation** is all good because they force you to get outside yourself AND they teach you how to present yourself with confidence." Respondent #9143*

*"There is the opportunity for **speaking skills, poise, voice projection and reading situations** that is very helpful." Respondent #9148*

***"Vocal training** would be beneficial for almost every professional. I think that breathing and relaxation exercises would be extremely valuable too." Respondent #9134*

*"I think being trained in **forensics** (as I was) and/or **basic acting** helps build confidence and helps us connect better with audiences." Respondent #9137*

*"I think every person in every profession should take **improv classes**. They help you become a better listener, a more effective communicator, a more reliable teammate, and a better, more empathetic person." Respondent #9128*

***"Role playing** is theater -- give people characters to be and let them work on them and create scenes; think about crisis communication, mergers and acquisitions, all the things we have run across and who would be the characters you would build and if you put them around a table what would happen; role palying in a no harm no foul environment." Respondent #9147*

"I have long expounded upon the benefits of theatre training for all types of communication professionals. The training, dedication, repetition, focus and more are all areas that can be applied professionally throughout one's career. Additionally, the ability and willingness to step out of a comfort zone is beneficial to relate to stakeholders." Respondent #9142

"So many of today's young communicators want to hide behind texts and emails. Public relations is a full contact sport that requires us to "get within sniffing distance" of the other person, as Patrick Jackson used to say." Respondent #9135

Figure 6: Frequency of mention of how acting training can impact PR professionals

Specific suggestions on where to acquire acting and theatre training included:

A college theater class (along the lines of an acting for non-major course)
Local community theater
Live theater
Books on acting
Read scripts
Go to shows
Any acting books, videos, etc.
Any basic Intro to Acting class
Try auditioning for fun
Supporting local community theatre
Avoid Dale Carnegie or Toastmasters -- that's all formulaic.
Find a coach
Community theater classes
Film studies, public speaking and listening courses and speech class.
A class at your local community college
Improv Classes
Join a local production in some capacity - even chorus work is beneficial.

Specific reading recommended by them included:

Alan Alda *"If I understood you would I have this look on my face?"*
Author Patrick Lencioni book *"5 dysfunctions of a team" "death by meeting"*
An Actor Prepared
Talk Like TED, by Carmine Gallo
Story, by Robert McKee
Audition, by Michael Shurtleff
Act Like You Mean Business, 11 Deadly Presentation Sins, and Unleash the Power of Storytelling, all by Rob Biesenbach

Discussion

There is overwhelming consensus from this, albeit a small sample, that the tools and techniques learned as an actor in the theater can help public relations students and professionals be more successful in their work.

The skills learned in being an actor -- presence on stage, projection, movement, breathing, quick thinking, authenticity, listening -- can strengthen a public relations professional in their interaction with all stakeholders, from internal leadership and front-line staff to media, customers, community, influencers and others.

The techniques used to dissect and understand a character – delving into background, barriers to behavior, empathy, sensitivity – can be applied directly to developing an understanding of our stakeholders and why they are behaving the way they do.

Studying the arc of a play, its characters, storyline and construction – even the language used to communicate themes and dialogue – can be instrumental in helping professionals become stronger writers. Developing and creating messaging that will resonate with audiences and move them to emotional depths are critical elements for driving behavior change.

Theater looks holistically at the entire relationship between play, actors and audiences, and how it is presented to build a situation that reinforces credibility, believability and trust. This is a critical aspect of public relations practice and an ongoing issue in the industry.

Limitations of this Research and Next Steps

The small sample of professionals, though overwhelming in their consensus, limits the predictive power of this small study. Those without the theater/acting bug simply might not gain the learning that someone who has the pre-inclination or love of theater does. We maintain, however, that we have demonstrated the possible value of even basic theatrical training for public relations professionals. We recommend expanding this research and testing these assertions further.

"When pr students asked what in my background was most valuable. My answer? Acting. With the exception of dramatic literature, virtually all substance of MA and PhD courses became obsolete over time; not so the essentials of acting." Respondent #9136

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Appendix

Table 1: Description of Research Subjects

	Respondent ID	Gender	Age Range	Level of Education	Amateur/Professional Theater Experience
1	9126	Male	41-654	Graducate Degree	--
2	9127	Female	21-40	Undergraduate Degree	Amateur
3	9128	Male	41-65	Undergraduate Degree	Professional
4	9129	Female	41-65	Undergraduate	Amateur
5	9130	Female		Graduate Degree	Amateur
6	9131	Female	66 or older	Graduate Degree	Amateur
7	9132	Male	66 or older	Ph.D. or other	Amateur
8	9133	Male	66 or older	Graduate Degree	Amateur
9	9134	Female	66 or older	Undergraduate Degree	Amateur & Professional
10	9135	Male	41-65	Ph.D. or other	Amateur
11	9136	Male	66 or older	Ph.D. or other	Amateur
12	9137	Female	66 or older	Undergraduate Degree	Amateur
13	9138	No response	41-65	Some College	Amateur
14	9139	Female	66 or older	Graduate Degree	Amateur
15	9140	Female	21-40	Undergraduate Degree	Mixed
16	9141	Male	41-65	Undergraduate Degree	Amateur
17	9142	Female	41-65	Undergraduate Degree	Both
18	9143	Female	66 or older	Graduate Degree	Amateur
19	9146	Male	41-65	Undergraduate Degree	Amateur
20	9147	Female	66 or older	Graduate Degree	Amateur
21	9148	Female	41-65	Undergraduate Degree	Amateur

An Examination of Environmental CSR on Skin Care and Cosmetics Brands' Websites

Ruoyu Sun
Michelle I. Seelig
Huixin Deng
Sanchary Pal
University of Miami

Abstract

Personal hygiene and toiletries brands often claim that they engage in production practices to reduce their environmental impact. Drawing from stakeholder theory and the MECCAS model, a content analysis was conducted to examine how CSR is presented on skin care and cosmetics websites and to what extent these environmental practices are truly green.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, environmental messaging, web communication

Over the years, research has found that more brands and companies make known details about how their brand or specific product is made to protect the environment included as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Bortree et al., 2013; Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Dahlsrud, 2008). Brands and companies look to CSR to build a positive relationship with stakeholders (e.g., employees, suppliers, customers, and communities) about their social or environmental commitment to behave ethically (Basil & Erlandson, 2008; Chu & Lin, 2013; Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011). However, research mostly has shown that brands and companies communicate their CSR to maneuver public relations that boost a company's image and reputation as well as profits, not necessarily about an ethical or moral commitment to the environment (Basil & Erlandson, 2008; Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Brown, 2008). Past research also found CSR traditionally limited to press releases or included in both print and web annual reports but evidence indicates this is changing as brands and companies recognize the power of their websites to directly share information with a receptive public looking for brands supporting ecological values (Biloslavo & Trnavčevič, 2009; Chang & Insch, 2012; Insch, 2008; Garcia & Greenwood, 2015; Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011). To explore this further, the present study considers how CSR presented on the web informs stakeholders about safe environmental practices held by a particular brand or company.

The current research focuses on skin care and cosmetic brands given that personal hygiene and toiletries brands often make claims that products are made from all-natural ingredients, avoid harmful chemicals, and they engage in production practices that lessen their environmental impact (Bigné-Alcañiz et al. 2012; Bom, Jorge, Ribeiro, & Marto, 2019; Chu & Lin, 2013; Seelig, Sun, Deng, & Pal, 2019). This research draws on stakeholder theory, which posits that a company or brand takes into consideration the relationship between a "group or individuals that can affect, or are affected by" a particular company or brand (Freeman, 2010, p. 25). Research also has analyzed environmental message elements using a modified version of the Means-End Conceptualization of the Components of Advertising Strategy (MECCAS), which captures the extent greenness is communicated in messaging across five criteria: environmental claim, executional framework, product life cycle, driving forces, and leverage point (Gephart, Emenike, & Bretz, 2011; Grillo, Tokarczyk, & Hansen, 2008; Wagner & Hansen, 2002). Therefore, this study evaluates how brands and companies practice environmental responsibility and to what extent they are truly green according to the MECCAS model.

Literature Review

Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory asserts that a brand or company takes into account the individuals or groups with a vested interest in a company [or brand] as well as who may benefit or be harmed by their activities (Freeman, 2010). This premise favors the belief that corporate entities have a responsibility to behave economically, ethically, legally, as well as socially and environmentally responsible to society beyond just making profits (Dahlsrud, 2008; Elving, 2013; Garcia & Greenwood, 2015). This is in contrast to traditional business practices focused on economics such as shareholder worth and maximizing the value chain for greater competitive advantage (Freeman, 2010). Subsequently, CSR as a business concept emerged in the 1950s as a public relations strategy directed at stakeholders that communicated how these entities express their concern for the greater good (Brown, 2008; Carroll & Shabana, 2010). This was also an opportunity to enhance a brand or company's image and reputation after several entities were exposed in the news media for their unethical treatment of employees, environmental hazards, as

well as consumer rights, and other social issues. Yet, despite efforts to report environmental information as part of a brand or company's CSR to stakeholders, this type of messaging is often unclear as well as misleads the public about a brand's environmental stewardship (Elving, 2013; Gephart et al., 2011; Mögele & Tropp, 2010; Oyedele & Dejong, 2013).

A growing body of research has materialized that found brands and companies are making efforts to disclose to stakeholders the ways CSR favors environmentally sustainable business practices (Beauchamp & O'Connor, 2012; Bom et al., 2019; Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Insch, 2008; Lee, 2017). Research identified several different types of CSR that organizations can engage in: cause promotion (e.g., sponsorship of community events), cause-related marketing (e.g., company teams with a cause or non-profit), corporate social marketing (e.g., marketing campaigns that generate awareness of social issues to enact some type of behavior change), corporate philanthropy (e.g., volunteerism, monetary donations to charities), and socially responsible business practices (e.g., employment welfare, health and safety policies ensuring safety of those in surrounding communities) (Basil & Erlandson, 2008; Bortree et al. 2013; Chang & Insch, 2012; Garcia & Greenwood, 2015; Seelig et al., 2019). Empirical evidence suggests that when brands and companies sincerely engage in ethical business practices and uphold environmentally friendly policies, consumers show their support by paying a higher price for these goods and services as well as exhibit customer loyalty (Bigné-Alcañiz et al. 2012; Chu & Lin, 2013; Heo & Muralidharan, 2017). However, this research also found that even when consumers report being ecologically conscious, some perceived green products made of eco-friendly materials less superior to those that are not and thus reluctant to buy products claiming eco-friendly.

MECCAS

Another approach to analyzing environmental messaging is the Means-End Conceptualization of the Components of Advertising Strategy (MECCAS), a typology of message elements associated with communicating *greenness* (Gephart et al., 2011; Grillo et al., 2008; Wagner & Hansen, 2002). According to the MECCAS, greenness consists of five items: *environmental claim* (e.g. keywords or headline emphasizing an environmentally related message such as natural, organic, eco-friendly, sustainable); *executional framework* (e.g. website, advertisement, product packaging "looks green" such as colors and imagery associated with nature or eco-friendly); *product life cycle* (e.g., messaging describes an organization's internal technology, production technique and/or disposal method that yields environmental benefits); *driving forces* (e.g., communication promotes basic values such as promoting planet preservation, animal life or personal health, sustaining our forest, responsibility to the future), and *leverage point* (e.g., text informs of action brand or company engages in to protect the environment such as use of recycled paper packaging). Scholars use the MECCAS typology to assess the extent greenness communicates a brand or company messaging consistent with pro-environmental stewardship.

Skepticism persists, however, as research has demonstrated a mismatch between what a company or organization's CSR and greenness conveys, when in reality, many of these entities mislead or exaggerate what they actually do (Beauchamp & O'Connor, 2012; Gephart et al., 2011; Oyedele & Dejong, 2013). The result is that consumers have become extremely cautious about various forms of green messaging and express distrust toward green brands as well as suspicious of anything implying eco-friendly. Therefore, researchers have cautioned if stakeholders perceive negative motives about a brand or company's CSR and greenness, this likely influences their "attitude towards the company as well as their intent to purchase the

company's products or services" (Elving, 2013, p. 278). Nonetheless, CSR is not universally put into practice and greenness often alludes to environmental responsibility, not necessarily about how these entities undertake protecting the environment.

It is thus imperative for a brand or company to cultivate a positive relationship with stakeholders especially interested in knowing more about CSR activities and the various ways greenness is communicated that may sway purchase decisions (Biloslavo & Trnavčevič, 2009). This easily can be accomplished when brands and companies disclose CSR as part of their web-based communication (Basil & Erlandson, 2008; Bortree et al., 2013; Seelig et al., 2019). To this point, literature supports that the Internet is effective for strengthening stakeholder's awareness for brands and products as well as aides in decision-making (Argyriou, Kitchen, & Melewar, 2006; Da Silva & Alwi, 2008; Ibeh, Luo, & Dinnie, 2005). This includes creating a strong presence online promoting environmentally responsible behaviors as well as for communicating extensive information on product ingredients and product benefits not bound by space limitations of traditional media (Chu & Lin, 2013; Biloslavo & Trnavčevič, 2009; Seelig et al., 2019). Accordingly, the specific research questions explored in this study are:

RQ1: Do skin care and cosmetic websites include CSR messages on their websites? And, what types of CSR is more prevalent on these websites?

RQ2: To what extent are skin care and cosmetic websites truly green according to MECCAS? And, what is the relationship between environmental messaging and CSR?

RQ3: Are skin care and cosmetic websites environmental messaging consistent with product sustainability?

RQ4: What specific communication tools (e.g., email, blog, social media) do skin care and cosmetic brands' use to interact with stakeholders about their CSR and environmental messaging?

Method

To answer the specified research questions, a content analysis of skin care and cosmetic websites was conducted. To narrow the scope of skin and cosmetic brands available in the marketplace, a purposive sample of 127 skin care and cosmetic websites was compiled from Skin Care Ox's (skincareox.com) listing of the best skin care and cosmetic brands and products proclaiming ecological qualities that translates to positively caring for nature and the environment and cross-checked with leading industry reports,[14] duplicates were eliminated (Krippendorff 2013). Skin Care Ox is the leading skin and cosmetic watchdog group that voluntarily screens ingredients in skin care and cosmetics for harmful ingredients and production practices.

A codebook for analysis was developed based on past research that examined CSR in print and on the web (e.g., Basil & Erlandson 2008; Bortree et al., 2013; Chang & Insch, 2012; Garcia & Greenwood, 2015; Insch, 2008), and evaluated greenness in environmental messaging (e.g., Gephart, Emenike, & Bretz 2011; Grillo, 2008; Wagner & Hansen, 2002), product sustainability (Peattie & Belz, 2010), and communication items (Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011). Recording units included the following:

(1) *CSR activities*: cause-related marketing, sponsorships, charitable donations, employee volunteerism, code of ethics, environmental policy, and health and safety.

[14] For more information see https://www.forbes.com/sites/bridgetarsenault/2018/02/04/the-latest-and-greatest-in-vegan-and-organic-beauty/#6bf8d1051bfb or https://www.crueltyfree kitty.com.

(2) *MECCAS*: important environmental claim, executional framework, product life cycle, driving force, and leverage point.

(3) *Product sustainability:* product creation, raw materials, production process, protect packaging, and consumption.

(4) *Communication items:* contact information, e-newsletter, chat/discussion area, blog, and presence of social media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook),

(5) *Other items*: about us/mission statement; list and type of ingredients found in products; product type (skin care and/or cosmetics), type of ingredients, search engine for website and sitemap.

The unit of analysis was the entire website. Coders started on the homepage of each website and clicked hyperlinked items to determine the presence or lack of an item when not evident on the homepage (e.g., mission statement, CRS activity, ingredients). Two graduate students were trained on a sample of skin care and cosmetic websites not included in the study. A few adjustments were made to the coding guide to minimize confusion. A check of intercoder reliability was conducted using Holsti's Method on approximately 10% of the sample and yielded acceptable intercoder reliability of .83 or above for each unit, items below .70 were dropped from the study (Krippendorff, 2013). The remaining websites were coded for all items.

Results

In total, 127 skin care and cosmetic websites were coded. The findings of this content analysis of websites demonstrates environmental messaging evolving as an opportunity to enrich relationships between brands and stakeholders promoting business practices beneficial to caring for the environment. Nearly all websites included a mission statement and/or information about the brand (94%) and include search engine (81%) and sitemap (89%) on website as well as listed product ingredients or made claims about the type of ingredients found in products (94%); and, 54% were strictly skin care and 46% were a combination of skin care, cosmetic, and hair care websites.

Research question one asked whether skin care and cosmetic websites represent CSR messages on their websites and what CSR is more prevalent. Results indicated that almost half (43%) of the skin care and cosmetic brands included CSR on their websites. Of the brands providing CSR, 16% of brands reported one type of CSR, 11% of brands claimed partaking in two types of CSR, 13% of brands engaged in three types of CSR, whereas only 2% brands engaged in four types of CSR, and less than one percent of brands (0.8%) engaged in five different types of CSR. None of the brands engaged in all seven CSR activities at the same time. As shown in Table 1, the most prevalent CSR was code of ethics (28%), followed by environmental policies (27%), charity donation (17%), and health and safety policy (13%). However, few skin care and cosmetic websites included cause-related marketing (6%), employee volunteerism (0.8%), or sponsorship of events (0.8%). Figure 1 shows an example of a cosmetic brand's presentation of their code of ethics.

The second research question sought to determine the extent in which skin care and cosmetic websites are green according to the MECCAS. As shown in Table 2, half of the websites conveyed greenness (51%) based on the MECCAS typology, while 26% of the websites were either green or light-green. Additionally, the most frequently included individual items of the MECCAS was product life cycle (89%) and important environmental claim (83%) (see Table 3). Next, we examined the relationship between CSR and MECCAS by creating composite measures and thus used to determine their relationship. An aggregate measure was computed by summing the seven individual message elements of the MECCAS (important environmental

claim, executional framework, product life cycle, driving force, and leverage point). Websites ranged from zero to five, where a website with a zero was absent of any environmental messaging and thus not green; one or brown represented insignificant greenness; while five qualified as extra-green and considered the highest level of greenness that could be present on skin care and cosmetic websites (see Figure 2). All CSR items were summed to represent a CSR score ranging from 0 to 7. Results indicated a positive relationship between CSR and MECCAS ($r = .43$, $p < .001$) suggesting greener skin care and cosmetic brands also provide details about CSR activities on their websites. Findings from a correlation analysis between CSR and individual message elements of the MECCAS revealed a positive correlation between CSR and pro-social driving force ($r = .44$. $p < .001$) as well as a positive modest relationship between CSR and important environmental claim ($r = .27$, $p < .002$) and a positive modest relationship between CSR and product life cycle ($r = .24$, $p = .007$). Also, we conducted a ^{2}test confirming that brands providing more CSR messages on their websites are also greener. Among 72 skincare and cosmetic brands that did not provide any CSR information, 46% of these brands are green (11%) and extra green (35%). For the 20 skin care and cosmetic brands that only included one type of CSR, 75% of these brands are green (25%) or extra-green (50%). Among the 14 skin care and cosmetic brands that included two types of CSR, 93% of these brands are extra-green, 17 skincare and cosmetic brands reported three types of CSR, 100% of these brands are green (24%) or extra-green (77%). For the three skin care and cosmetic brands that reported engaging in four types of CSR, 100% of these brands are extra-green. However, only one skin care and cosmetic brand proclaimed embracing five types of CSR and this brand was extra-green (see Figure 3). Thus, a chi-square test of association indicated that differences in CSR exist among 0, brown, green-brown, light-green, green, and extra-green brands (^{2} (25) = 40.57, $p < .05$).

Research question three examined whether or not environmental messaging is consistent with product sustainability. To answer research question three, an aggregate product sustainability measure was constructed by summing the five production practices (product creation, raw materials, production process, packaging, and consumption) (Peattie & Belz, 2010). Overall, data confirmed that more than half of skin care and cosmetic (60%) brands do not use harsh chemicals when creating products. Furthermore, the majority of brands (78%) said products are derived from allowable raw materials (e.g., certified wood or forests) and 53% of brands declared product packaging is recycled. However, only 40% of brands included production process information on their websites and less than half of skin care and cosmetic brands (39%) shared information about product decomposition (e.g., low-emission or biodegradable products). Regarding production creation, we found that most brands reported products are cruelty-free (82%) and free of artificial and/or synthetic (72%). Additionally, half of the brands made claims on websites that products are vegan (51%), while 35% of the websites said products are GMO-free and less than half (35%) sell organic products. Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between environmental messaging and product sustainability. Results indicated a positive relationship between environmental messaging and product sustainability ($r = .63$, $p < .001$). This finding indicates that brands presenting more environmental messaging on their websites also produce more sustainable products.

Research question four asked what specific communication tools do skin care and cosmetic brands use to interact with stakeholders about their CSR and environmental messaging given that research shows the web is a great opportunity for corporations to enrich and improve relations with stakeholders (Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011). As shown in Table 4, skin care and cosmetic brands interact with stakeholders mostly through communication tools such as contact

information (97%) and an e-newsletter (89%). While half of the brands (55%) used a blog and only few of the brands interact with stakeholders through a chat or discussion area (12%). Regarding the social media adopted by skin care and cosmetic brands, Facebook (93%), Instagram (87%), and Twitter (79%) were the most common and nearly half of the brands used YouTube (45%) but none used Snapchat.

Discussion

Many companies today communicate about their CSR initiatives to inform stakeholders about their contributions to society and protecting the environment. Effective CSR can benefit companies' financial performance, lead to better brand recognition, and elicit positive consumer attitudes toward the company (e.g, Basil & Erlandson, 2008; Bortree et al., 2013; Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). Yet, despite the growing attention for brands and companies to engage in CSR, we still know little about how personal hygiene and toiletries brands communicate their CSR initiatives. Recognizing that personal hygiene and toiletries brands often make claims that products are made from all-natural ingredients, free of artificial and synthetic ingredients, and they engage in production practices that lessen their environmental impact (Chu & Lin, 2013), the current study examined the presentation of CSR on skin care and cosmetics websites and to what extent they are truly green according to the MECCAS model.

Nowadays, a brand or company's website is the main vehicle to inform stakeholders about brands and products as well as how they engage in environmentally responsible production practices, therefore we expected skin care and cosmetic brands to outwardly express how they engage in CSR on their websites (Basil & Elrandson, 2008; Biloslavo & Trnavčevič, 2009; Chang & Insch, 2012; Ibeh et al., 2005). Yet, based on the findings of this study, almost half of the skin care and cosmetics brands reported engaging in CSR on their websites. However, we expected to find more brands expressing CSR on their websites. This result may be interpreted in two ways. First, many skin care and cosmetics brands did not practice any form of CSR activities. Second, some skin care and cosmetic brands engage in CSR but they are not compelled to include this information as part of their web-based communication. Given skin care and cosmetics brands make claims their products are beneficial to protecting the environment (Chu & Lin, 2013; Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012), we believe to help construct a corporate image of social and environmental responsibility, skin care and cosmetics brand should ethically practice CSR activities and proudly declare this information on their websites. Furthermore, our findings indicated that skin care and cosmetic brands also interact with stakeholders through other communication channels such as email, e-newsletters, blogs, and social media (Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011). This finding suggests brands and companies are taking advantage of the variety of communication tools available to improve stakeholder relations. The results also indicate very few brands interact with stakeholders through a live chat on their websites. Therefore, to promote an online two-way communication between brands and stakeholders, companies should develop the live chat function on their websites to initiate real dialogue, particularly about production practices beneficial to protecting the environment.

Consistent with past research, our findings also found code of ethics and environmental policy as the most important implementation of CSR on skin care and cosmetic websites (Basil & Erlandson, 2008; Seelig et al., 2019). This indicates that skin care and cosmetic brands exerted more effort on outlining their set of ethical policies (see Figure 2) and minimizing adverse environmental impact that positively benefit the natural environment. According to Basil and Erlandson (2008), both code of ethics and environmental policy belong to internal CSR and used more often because internal CSR requires relatively low-cost of implementation, does not

involve an outside entity, and can address stakeholders with an increased attention on business ethics and moral duties for the greater good (Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011; Mögele & Tropp, 2010). Similar to past studies, the environmental protection initiative is one of the most widely used and emphasized CSR dimension as many companies are engaging in various environmental activities to leverage a green CSR image (Garcia & Greenwood, 2015; Seelig et al., 2019)

The results of this study also indicate that most skin care and cosmetic brands are either extra-green or green (see Figure 3). This finding was not surprising given that the skin care and cosmetic websites analyzed in this study was drawn from skin care and cosmetic watchdog group Skin Care Ox and cross-checked with leading industry reports that list these brands are either organic, vegan, cruelty-free, and/or natural. Findings also confirm that skin care and cosmetics brands that present more CSR on their websites are greener. This suggests that skin care and cosmetic brands together use environmental messaging with CSR to communicate their commitment to protecting the environment. Thus, as many consumers seek out brands and products aligned with their ecological ideals (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Chu & Lin, 2013; Heo & Muralidharan, 2017), complimenting environmental messages with CSR exerts a synergetic effect appealing to environmentally consciousness consumers.

The positive relationship between environmental messaging and product sustainability also suggests the veracity of the environmental messaging presented on skin care and cosmetic brands' websites. Since this current study explores the representation of environmental messaging on brand websites, companies can certainly self-present environmental protection behaviors without actually practicing them. In other words, brands' environmental claims may not necessarily reflect the sustainable attributes of their products (Gephart et a., 2011). Previous research has suggested consumers are skeptical about brands' environmental claims when there is a mismatch between what they claim and what they actually do (Beauchamp & O'Connor, 2012; Oyedele & Dejong, 2013). As such, the positive relationship between environmental messaging and product sustainability helps lend credibility to environmental claims on skin care and cosmetic brand websites.

While the findings of this study are informative, several limitations of should be addressed. First, the selected skin care and cosmetic brands analyzed in this study are not representative of all skin care and cosmetic brands. Therefore, future research can extend this study to analyze a larger scale of skin care and cosmetic brands that may provide more insights. Second, the specific coding units adopted in this study – presence or absence, could be a concern because some detailed information may be overlooked. Third, our results cannot answer the question of whether brands' CSR efforts and level of greenness are related to company success. Given the strategic value of CSR and consumers' tendency to process environmental messaging as authentic (Lee, 2017; Oyedele & Dejong, 2013), it is important to understand how CSR and green messaging are associated with company success. Future research can also explore how CSR initiatives and level of greenness vary among budget, mid-range and luxury brands, which will provide a more nuanced look at CSR communication and environmental messaging on skincare and cosmetics websites.

With these limitations in mind, our study provides a comprehensive assessment of how skin care and cosmetic brands practice social responsibility and to what extent they are truly green according to the MECCAS. The findings show skin care and cosmetic brands integrate CSR initiatives and environmental messaging to establish environmental brand identification and promote ecological stewardship on their websites. Although our results indicate that many skin care and cosmetics are green, the commitment to CSR initiatives remains insufficient. We expect

more brands will behave in a socially responsible manner and provide such information on their websites to address the increased concern of consumers on business ethics and environmental protection.

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Table 1. Frequencies and Percentages of CSR Activities

	Frequencies	Percentages
Environmental Policies	34	27
Code of Ethics	35	28
Health and Safety	16	13
Employee Volunteerism	1	.8
Charitable Donations	22	17
Sponsorships	1	.8
Cause-related marketing	7	6

Table 2. Frequencies and Percentages of MECCAS

	Frequencies	Percentages
None	4	3
Brown	16	13
Green-Brown	8	6
Light-Green	17	13
Green	17	13
Extra-green	65	51

Table 3. Frequencies and Percentages of Individual MECCAS

	Frequencies	Percentages
Important Environmental Claim	105	83
Executional Framework	100	79
Product Life Cycle	113	89
Driving Force	76	60
Leverage Point	81	64

Table 4. Frequencies and Percentages of communication

	Frequencies	Percentages
Contact information	123	97
E-newsletter	113	89
Live chat	15	12
Blog	70	55
Facebook	118	93
Instagram	110	87
Twitter	100	79
YouTube	57	45
Snapchat	0	0

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70%+ CERTIFIED ORGANIC
Farm to Face®
FARM TO FACE®
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ANTIOXIDANT ENRICHED
TSA
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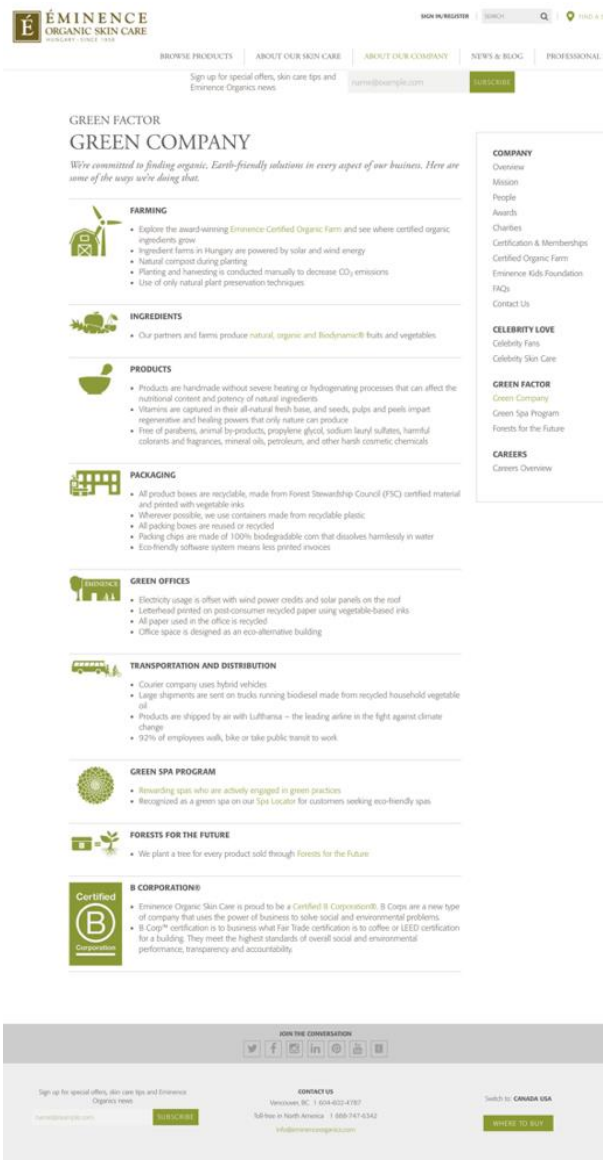
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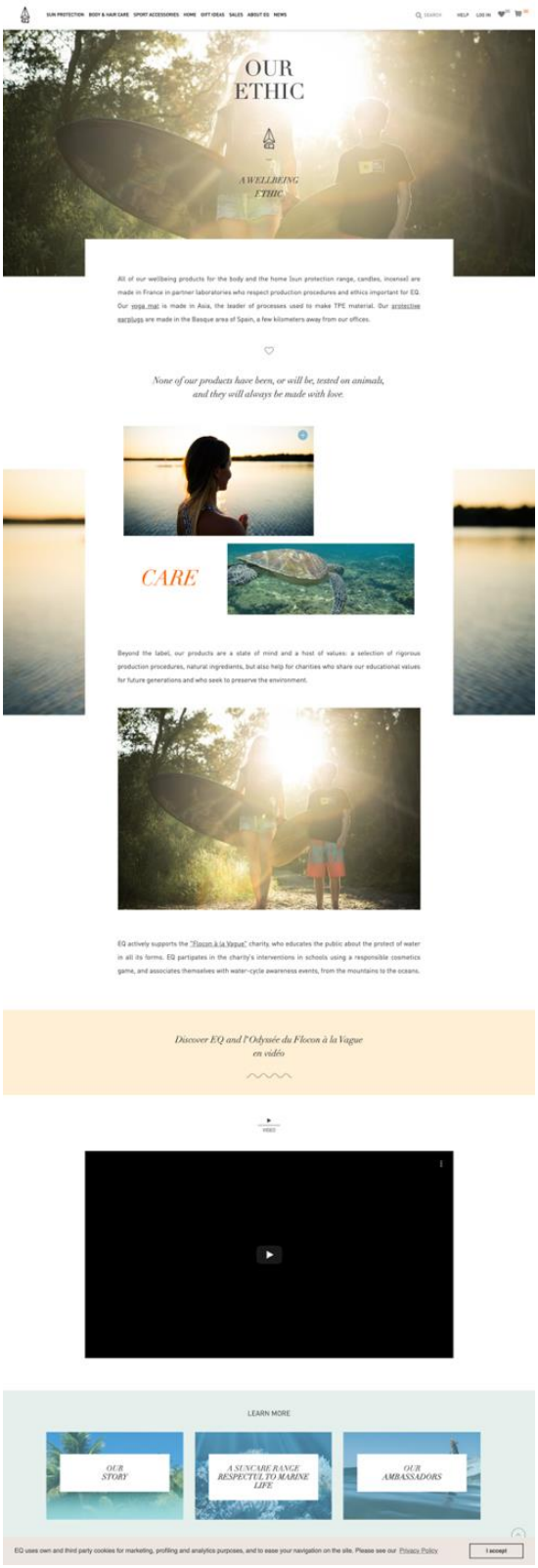
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Japanese PR Practice through the Eyes of Expatriate Practitioners

Koichi Yamamura
TS Communication, Japan

Xue (Yuki) Dou
Ritsumeikan University, Japan

Abstract

The research aims to identify characteristics of PR practice in Japan through the eyes of expatriate practitioners in major Japanese corporations. By doing so, we aim not only to find out what native practitioners often overlook, but also to find out how practitioners and corporations can overcome cultural barriers.

Introduction

Global public relations involves various aspects of public relations in different countries and there is a paucity of empirical research that link public relations in a country from all key aspects (Sriramesh, 2020). Public relations practice in Japan also suffers from a dearth of literature written in English (Yamamura, Ikari, & Kenmochi, 2013). Of those there are, many focus primarily on the history of modern day public relations in Japan (ex. Yamamura et al. 2013; Yamamura, Ikari, & Kenmochi, 2014; Kunieda, Yamamura, & Miyabe, 2019), media and social environment (ex. Kelly, Masumoto, & Gibson, 2002; Cooper-Chen & Tanaka, 2008) or the combination of both (ex. Inoue, 2009). Some researches employed survey in Japanese language with a purpose of unpacking the nature of Japanese public relations practice (ex. Sriramesh, Kim, & Takasaki, 1999; Watson & Sallot, 2001). However, as the number of literature in this domain is limited, little is known about how public relations is being handled in Japan and what are the uniqueness of Japanese public relations practices.

For non-Japanese researchers, studying public relations practice in Japan is difficult. In addition to the language issue, the lack of PR education and professionalization (Inoue, 2009), mainly due to the unique job rotation system in Japan, makes it difficult to conduct a research built upon shared meaning among researcher and research subjects. In order to overcome this problem, more literatures are needed in English that articulate the uniqueness, strength, and weakness of Japanese public relations practices.

The current study tries to look at Japanese public relations practice through the eyes of expatriate practitioners who work for large Japanese corporations. We chose to interview expatriates because those expatriate public relations practitioners, if not all of them, would have good understanding of Euro-American public relations practice, and therefore interviewing them could help us to articulate unique Japanese practices that "unconsciously carried out" or "too obvious to mention" by Japanese natives. By looking at public relations practice in Japan from inside with external perspective, the authors hope to uncover the current environment of Japanese public relations and contribute to the literatures in the domain global public relations.

Literature review

Expatriate practitioner

Expatriate means a person who lives in a foreign country (Expatriate, n.d.). Expatriate manager usually refers to the employees of multinational corporations (MNC) assigned to overseas unit, but here we refer to senior managers who have non-Japanese background, in terms of cultural heritage and the environment in which they grew up. Expatriates are boundary spanners whose main function is "to deal with and *balance* the multidimensional *tensions* and *contradictions* that are characteristic of the modern MNC" (Mense-Petermann, 2018, p. 19).

According to a survey of 136 large Japanese companies conducted in 2017, non-Japanese (by nationality) comprise 4.5% of board members, 4.3% of executive officers, 0.6% of senior managers and 0.5% of managers in the headquarter (Human resource strategy and productivity innovation committee of Japan Association of Corporate Executives, 2018). Since it is not uncommon to invite overseas scholar, investor and corporate executive as outside board director, and companies often include the head of overseas operation as executive officer, it is only reasonable to assume that, at manager and above level, non-Japanese employees comprise below 1 % of all the employees. These numbers suggest that the presence of non-Japanese managers is not something ordinary for Japanese companies.

Human resource management (HRM) of large Japanese companies

Employment practice in Japan has long been membership oriented rather than job oriented. In this membership employment system, companies hire new graduates every year upon their graduation and they are not assigned to a job based on their skill or educational background. The employment is not based on particular skill or knowledge, rather, it is based on their capability to learn and handle various types of jobs that they may need to engage in. They acquire business skills through job rotation and on the job training (Hamaguchi, 2013). In many cases, they are hired either in one of the two categories: engineering and administrative. The majority of public relations managers are not employed as public relations professionals or recruited based on prior public relations training or experience (Miyabe, 2019a). Some of them continue to rotate among various jobs as they climb up the corporate ladder, and some others at some point narrow their focus to stay within certain fields.

Public relations education in Japan

Universities in Japan do not provide systematic public relations education (Ibuki & Kunieda, 2020). They are often offered in schools of management or sociology with only one course as an elective (Ibuki, 2019). In 2005, 22 schools and colleges offered 25 public relations courses at undergraduate level, 6 graduate schools offered 12 courses and one junior college offered one course (Wada, 2015). Since then, one professional graduate school that offer master's degree in public relations and information was established, targeting current corporate and government employees working in the communication related fields (The Graduate School of Information and Communication). Other than that, the situation hasn't changed much.

Global public relations and expatriate

If expatriates are boundary spanners (Mense-Petermann, 2018), the role of expatriate public relations practitioners in MNC headquarters are more likely to be in the field of global public relations. "International public relations is about balancing central authority (not necessarily control) and local independence" (Vercic, Zerfass, Wiesenberg, 2015, p. 791), and "expatriates have the potential to play key roles in MNCs because they are able to act as the links through which subsidiaries can connect to the host countries to obtain useful resources" (Thomas, 1994. as cited in Au, & Fukuda, 2002. p. 285).

A public relations practitioner who had studied cross-cultural interchange and/or had personal or professional experience travelling abroad would be better-prepared for professional international situations (Freitag, 1999. as cited in Freitag & Stokes, 2009).

Japanese culture

Of the five key variables - political system, economic system, culture, media, and activism - that affect how global public relations is practiced, culture is the least studied (Sriramesh, 2020), however, communication is a fundamental component of culture and differences among cultures affect human communication patterns and processes (Freitag et al., 2009). An overt act seen from one cultural perspective can have an entirely different meaning when seen from another cultural perspective (Hall, 1977/1989).

Japanese are "high-context" and they have extensive information networks among family, friends, colleagues and clients and they are involved in close personal relationships. Because of this, they do not require much in-depth background information in daily life (Hall, & Hall, 1987). Japanese are also polychronic, who do many things at once, consider time commitments an objective to be achieved if possible, are committed to people and human relationships, change plans often and easily, and more concerned with those who are closely related. Interpersonal contact is valued more than anything else (Hall, et al. 1987).

In terms of Hofstede's dimensions of culture, Japan stands towards extreme on uncertainty avoidance at 11 to 13th among 76 countries (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).
RQ1: What are the backgrounds of expatriate public relations practitioners in Japan?
RQ2: What are the strength and weakness of public relations practice of Japanese corporations?
RQ3: How is the public relations practice in Japan different from Euro-American practice?
RQ4: What roles do expatriate public relations practitioners play in Japanese corporations?

Method

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six senior public relations managers of large Japanese companies. One of the researchers had met five of the six participants, four at a Page Society event in Tokyo, and one at a global PR Agency Tokyo office event. One of the participants was introduced to the researcher by another participant. Two of them were female and four were male. Two from the U.S., two from England, one from Canada, and one from Australia. Four interviews were conducted in the meeting rooms at participants' office, one in a meeting room of a share office that the researcher use, and one over the phone because the participant had left the company for his home country by the time of the interview. With the consent of the research participants, name and brief explanation of the companies that research participants work(ed) for are listed below. One of the participants asked to keep the company anonymous as he was set to move to another company within weeks of the interview.

Table 1. Companies that research participants work(ed) for

Company name	Industry	Est.	Employee	Other
Mitsubishi Heavy Industry	Machinery	1884	80,744	A key member of Mitsubishi group of companies
LIXIL	Housing equipment	1923	74,598	Grew rapidly since 2000 through M&A including American Standard and GROHE
Otsuka Pharmaceutical	Pharmaceutical	1964	5,713	
Nikko Asset Management	Finance	1959	880	
Rakuten	E-commerce/finance	1997	20,053	Manages an online commerce platform and owns online banking and stock trading businesses
Unnamed	Automotive parts	2009	30,000+	Subsidiary of a large group that was established in 1910

A convenience sample of six may not seem representative of the population, but one of the participants said there are about 10 to 15 non-Japanese senior PR managers in large Japanese corporations and a few others that the researcher had a chance to ask this all agreed to her notion. Interviews were conducted by one of the authors for about an hour with preset questions, but participants were allowed to divert if interesting discussions were anticipated. In order to make sure participants can speak freely, the researchers promised to keep them anonymous.

The company data in Table 1 were obtained from company websites (on May 25, 2020).

Findings

Background

Two of the participants came to Japan on the Japanese government sponsored JET program[15] with which young foreigners are dispatched to local governments to work either as assistant English teacher or international relations coordinator. In many cases, they have opportunities to work closely with governors or mayors. One of the participants had studied Japanese studies at university before coming to Japan, and decided to stay after the JET program term was over and worked for two global PR firms before moving to the current position. The other one had studied human geography and international relations at a university in his home country before coming to Japan on the JET program. While in university, he also studied Japanese a little. After the JET program, he went to graduate school in Asia Pacific and studied international communication, during which he worked for a local PR agency and did an internship at a PR firm in Tokyo. He moved to Tokyo after finishing his master's program.

Tow others had come to Japan as high school exchange student. The experience led one of them to be interested in cultural differences and he studied Asian studies including Japanese language at university. He went to a graduate school in an Asian country and studied intercultural communication. He worked for a PR agency in Korea for two years and seven years for an international PR agency in Tokyo before moving to his former[16] position at Japanese company. The other person, before coming to Japan as a high school exchange student in Japan, had earlier visited her grandparents in Japan who were stationed in Tokyo working for a local government in Australia. She wanted to study communication, but from her experience in Japan, she thought she would be respected more with qualification. Therefor she studied law in Australia and became a qualified lawyer. While in university, she came back to Japan a couple of time to do working holidays. After graduation, she came to Japan and worked for media in Tokyo including radio and television before she was recruited by the Australian Tourist Commission to help promote Australian tourism in Japan. From there, she moved to her current position.

Another participant first visited Japan on his way to Asian countries and Soviet Union as a part-time tour guide. He got interested in Japan and studied Japanese at a university in the U.S. and came back to Japan to work for a British company. Then moved to a global pharmaceutical company in Tokyo and New York offices, then to the World Bank, back to the pharmaceutical company, then to a global PR company Tokyo office before assuming his current position.

Above mentioned five can be called "self-initiated expatriate" who came to Japan on their own will. The other person called herself a "company-initiated expatriate" without any attachment to Japan in particular. However, interestingly, she had studied Japanese in high school in the U.S. She started as a lobbyist in the U.S., but left the job as her husband got a job in Singapore where she joined a global public relations firm's local office. Then she assumed the head of regional (Asia) public relations position for three different companies, and global head of public relations for another company before she was recruited by her current employer as head of communication. In her previous corporate public relations jobs, Japan had always been an important but very difficult market.

Five of the six participants have experience working for public relations firms. One of them said that one of the firms he worked for in Tokyo offered public relations courses for its

[15] JET program is a Japanese government sponsored program which aims to promote internationalization in Japan's local communities by helping to improve foreign language education and developing international exchange at the community level. Participants engage in one of the following assignments in a local community. A) Assistant language teacher (English), B) coordinator for international relations, or C) sports exchange advisor. The program started in 1987 and currently there are 5,761 participants from 57 countries. [The council of local authorities for international relations, no date]

[16] At the time of the interview, he had left Japan and was in his home country working for another company.

employees. Others said they learned public relations from senior employees in the office or staff from head office who they worked with. Many of the employees of these public relations firms have had public relations education. The one who have never worked for a public relations firm said she also learned public relations from her boss in her previous job who had public relations and journalism background. She also learned from people in other offices, many of who also had public relations and journalism background.

Strength of Japanese public relations

One of the strengths of Japanese PR practice that three of the interviewees mentioned was the knowledge of the company and its technologies. It is related to another strength all those three mentioned, the network Japanese practitioners have within the company and the industry, and the relationship building capability both internally and externally that results in the excellent network. Being in the company for a long-time means being in the industry for a long-time, and job rotation provides opportunity to learn about the company and its technology from different perspectives and it also helps build personal relationships with people in the company.

Two of the interviewees mentioned teamwork and collaboration as their PR department's strength. It seems to fit with the position Japan holds on Hofstede's "individualism vs collectivism" dimension being in the middle. Also, under long-term employment with job rotation, people in and out of a department have a bigger chance of having known each other longer, and high likelihood of being (stuck) together for a longer time onward, which will make collaboration a better choice.

One of the participants also mentioned that, "once they know what the direction should be, whey will go and do it. And they are very, very good at doing it once they know what to do." Access to senior management was also mentioned. Linked to this was the resources management provide such as their willingness to act as spokesperson with the media when needed.

Weakness of Japanese public relations

Two participants pointed out internal communication as weakness. One of them said, before he changed it, "internal communications, for example, had previously sat with HR, and there was not a lot of information provided to employees, particularly information related to developments with the business." The other participant said that internal communication need to be different, very strategic and work closely with the executive committee rather than focusing on traditional things like internal newsletter. It needs to closely align with the CEO and support organizational transformation.

Another thing mentioned as weakness was, over emphasis on conventional approach to communication with traditional media, which is now fragmented and ending in part. This may be a reflection of what one other participant said. He said that what he mentioned as strength, the deep knowledge of the company and the technology, is also the weakness. Because of the knowledge the Japanese public relations practitioners have, they don't think about other new things. They are not good at thinking outside the box and bringing new approaches to things. He tries to give other teams of the department a new approach because otherwise they would just do the same thing every year.

Lack of accountability and discipline, and poor planning were also mentioned by one participant as weakness. She thinks it is because, in lifetime employment, there is no consequence to poor performance. Lack of shared strategy was also mentioned. She thought the team needed to have opportunity to clarify the department strategy and share it with the rest of the team members.

Public relations practice in Japan: comparison with Euro-American practice

Two of the participants mentioned the slowness of the process. They pointed out risk aversion, aspiration for perfection, and call for truth to back up claims, can sometimes end up sacrificing a vision. This is in line with Japanese' "uncertainty avoidance" nature as Hofstede made clear [Hofstede, et al., 2010]. One also pointed out the complexity of internal processes including the need for multiple approvals and the existence of bureaucratic rules and regulations.

Another thing mentioned was the importance and power of traditional media – mainstream media and trade publications – in Japan. The flip side of it was also mentioned – that Japanese companies need to learn and catch up in the areas of communication technology, data analytics, and insights.

While public relations practitioners in the U.S. are more focused on their own communications career, the lack of recognition as profession and the lack of mindset to pursue communications career affects the whole public relations department, resulting in the scarcity of public relations professional as executive officer on the board and the organization being a quite a tactical one. Another difference is the less reliance on external agencies in Japan, thus having more internal staff to run events and develop materials for public relations.

Another thing mentioned by one of the participants was that, in his company, the U.S. staff understand technique of communication but do not understand the company culture.

Roles of expatriate practitioners

The roles of the participants varied widely. One participant who was responsible for the entire communication function, said his role involved English-language content development and international media relations. The other, who was responsible for the communication function of one of the two business domain of the company, said he spent surprisingly large amount of time reviewing and translating content for the company and its group companies. Interestingly, he also brokers investor stock outside of Japan.

Others assume somewhat wider role. One who is responsible for global communication said, her team's role tends to be facing outside of Japan, talking to stakeholders outside of Japan, media, and to some extent employees and other companies, with focus on three areas – owned and social media, new brand and services including company purchase, and CEO and executive visibility. Another one whose position is the head of global communication assumes much wider role including, to increase the awareness and understanding of the company in countries outside of Japan, to set up a global function for communications, and helping other subsidiaries of the company communicate with their overseas branches.

One participant who is responsible for the entire communication function of a company that is going through corporate transformations works closely with the executive team, supporting them develop business strategy through communication including internal messaging, executive communication, and contents creation for employee education. Another participant is a senior executive overseeing wide area including communications and she spoke about the role of the head of communications and corporate responsibility team, who is also an expatriate, that his role is to set strategy, build the right team, and understand the connection between the corporate strategy and what communication need to be doing both internally and externally.

Conclusion

This study looked at public relations practice in large Japanese corporations through the eyes of expatriate senior managers to obtain a view from inside with outsider's perspective. The interviews supported this view as all of them had knowledge of Euro-American public relations

practice either through their work experiences at global public relations firm or non-Japanese organizations.

One of the strengths of Japanese public relations practice is the knowledge of the company and its technology, backed by the network they have in the company and the industry. This, the authors believe, is the fruit of Japanese system of life time (or long term) employment and job rotation. Teamwork and collaboration were also mentioned as its strength, which reflects Hall & Hall's notion that Japanese are committed to people and human relationship, more concerned with those who are closely related, and interpersonal contact is valued more than anything else (1987).

As weakness of Japanese public relations practice, internal communication was mentioned. It lacks information related to businesses. This could be a reflection of Japan's high-context culture in which much of information is conveyed implicitly rather than explicitly. Another weakness is over emphasis on conventional approach to traditional media, which still remains strong in Japan.

In comparison to Euro-American public relations practice, process in Japan is slow, reflecting Japan's "uncertainty avoidance" culture. Japanese public relations practice also needs to catch up in the areas of communication technology, data analytics, and insights.

Those expatriate's roles vary widely, from overseeing entire communication function to handling external (out of Japan) media relations. Some of them spend a lot of time on English language content creation and translation, while some others help build global communications capability of the company and its subsidiaries.

Interestingly, five out of six participants were self-initiated expatriate, that is, they came to Japan on their own will before assuming the current position. The company-initiated one, who was recruited by the company while she was working in a foreign country, happens to have studied Japanese in high school and have overseen Asian public relations function and Global public function in four different companies, in all of which Japan was one of the important markets. Although the result of just six interviews is not generalizable, the fact that five were self-initiated and the other had extensive exposure to Japan, may imply the difficulty for non-Japanese to acculturate to Japanese culture and successfully conduct public relations activities in Japanese companies.

The current study contributes to theory building in global public relations by focusing on expatriate practitioners as boundary spanner who can bridge between the local perspective and the Euro-American perspective that is still dominant in public relations research. By looking from inside with external perspective, things that are taken for granted and often neglected can be highlighted. The current study also contributes to the practice by helping future expatriate public relations practitioners better prepare themselves for the work in Japanese corporations. It can also help Japanese corporations identify expatriate practitioners who can fit in the boundary spanning role as public relations practitioner.

The authors hope that our endeavor to look at public relations practice from inside with external perspective will stimulate further examination of Japanese public relations practice and that this method can be tested critically in other markets.

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