

Proceedings of BledCom 2015  
Sleeping (with the) Media

SLEEPING (WITH THE) MEDIA  
PROCEEDINGS OF THE 22ND INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC  
RELATIONS RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM BLED COM

Bled, Slovenia  
3– 4 July, 2015

Editors: Dejan Verčič, Ana Tkalac Verčič and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh



University of Ljubljana  
Faculty of Social Sciences

**BledCom 2015**

22nd International Public Relations  
Research Symposium

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**BledCom**

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EDITORS:

Dejan Verčič

Ana Tkalac Verčič

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# 1. Introduction

## Dear Colleagues,

In spite of the testy relationship between the two, mass media are critical to public relations professionals. While mass media are extensions of our mind, our minds also operate as an extension of the media. However, it is true that whereas media are gaining in power, journalists have less and less of it.



Public relations has always been connected with media of all kinds: earned, owned, paid, social, live... In the US, there are three public relations practitioners to every journalist and they influence up to eighty percent of the mass media content. The rest of the world is moving in the same direction.

The International Public Relations Research Symposium (Bledcom 2015) explored how contemporary media shape our culture, lifestyle, everyday life, and social, economic and political systems. How is the world 'edited' to media consumers and to public relations professionals? What forces drive contemporary media and what is the role of public relations in that process? Nearly a century after the publications of Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion* (1922) and Edward Bernays' *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (1923) it was time to raise these questions again.

Some papers from the 2015 BledCom were published as a special section of the *Public Relations Review* (Vol.) co-edited by us, and we offer the remaining papers here. We believe these two publications make a valuable contribution to our understanding of the dialectic between the media and public relations.

**Prof Dejan Verčič**, PhD (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia)

**Prof Ana Tkalac Verčič**, PhD (University of Zagreb, Croatia)

**Prof Krishnamurthy Sriramesh**, PhD (Purdue University, USA)

## 2. Editors



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Prof. Dr. Dejan Verčič is a Slovenian public relations theorist and researcher. He is a Professor and Head of Centre for Marketing and Public Relations at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. He holds a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). In academic year 2013/2014, he was a Fulbright scholar at the San Diego State University, USA. Dejan Verčič has published 11 books. He has written more than 300 articles, book chapters, monographs, reviews, and conference papers. His recent books are Culture and Public Relations (2012), The Global Public Relations Handbook: Theory, Research, and Practice (2003, 2009), Public Relations Metrics: Research and Evaluation (2008). In 2000 and in 2010 he received special awards by the Public Relations Society of Slovenia, and in 2001 he was awarded the Alan Campbell-Johnson Medal for outstanding service to international public relations by the UK Chartered Institute of Public Relations (of which he is a Fellow).



**Krishnamurthy Sriramesh**

Prof. Dr. Krishnamurthy Sriramesh is a Professor and University Faculty Scholar at Purdue University, USA. He is recognized for his scholarship on global public relations. For two decades he has advocated the need to reduce ethnocentricity in the public relations body of knowledge. To that end, he has edited several books on global public relations including a book on Public Relations in Asia that remains the only book on the subject. His research interests also extend to public relations for development, corporate social responsibility and public relations, and the use of new media for public relations. His rich teaching experiences include teaching at 10 universities in four continents and won several teaching awards including the Charles W. Redding Excellence in Teaching Award (Purdue University) and Teacher of the Year Award (University of Florida). He has won several awards for research including the Faculty Research Award and the Golden Gator Award at the University of Florida and top-three papers at six international conferences. In 2004, he won the prestigious Pathfinder Award from the Institute for Public Relations (USA) for "original scholarly research contributing to the public relations body of knowledge." He also serves on the Editorial Board of several academic journals.



**Ana Tkalac Verčić**

Prof. Dr. Ana Tkalac Verčić is a Full Professor of Marketing communications and Public Relations at the University of Zagreb, Croatia, and visiting professor at the University of Lugano (Switzerland). She has authored, co-authored and edited numerous books including Public Relations Metrics: Research and Evaluation (with B. van Ruler and D. Verčić; Routledge 2008). Ana Tkalac Verčić is also a member of the editorial committee of the „International Journal of Strategic Communication“, and a regional editor of „Public Relations Review“. She has participated in numerous professional projects such as "Development of strategy for building the image of the Republic of Croatia", "Improving the capacity of the civil society". She was the head researcher on the project named "The development of the model of measurement and management of reputation of the University of Zagreb". She is the head of the CIPR program Croatia, a lifelong learning program in public relations conducted according to the program of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations. She is a member of the Croatian Psychological Association, International Advertising Association, International Communication Association and the Croatian Association for Public Relations (where she is currently the head of the certification body). She has been the member of the International Communication Association committee for the best master's and doctoral dissertation in the area of public relations. She is a former Fulbright scholar.

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He has spent 30 years working in and studying strategic communication and Public Relations. His 'first career' was as a broadcaster and Programme Director in UK commercial radio, which was followed by Public Relations practice where he was a Communications Director and latterly owner of his own consultancy. He has worked in public, private and third sector environments ranging from financial to public services. Adrian has also trained PR professionals and clients in Europe, the US and South America. He is currently Course Leader and Senior Lecturer for BA (Hons) Public Relations at London College of Communication (LCC), University of the Arts, London - Europe's largest university for art, design, media and communications education. Adrian's research interests include crisis communication and education for professional practice.





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Ph.D. and Institute of Educational Leadership (IEL) Fellow, is professor and chair of the Department of Communication, Indiana University Northwest. Dr. Neff is co-Editor of the Fourth Edition of Learning to Teach Public Relations text and the PRide award-winning theory text. She published nine journal articles and nine book chapters and served on two national public relations commissions on education. A founder & chair for the PR division of NCA, ICA, AEJMC, IIPRR, and, currently, IABD, she serves on four journal editorial boards. She chairs the Board of Directors of a Public Broadcasting System.



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She (PhD Istanbul/Istanbul University) is Assoc. Professor of Communication Science at Istanbul University, Turkey. She earned MA in General Journalism in the Social Science Institute at Istanbul University. After her graduation, she was appointed as a research assistant at the capacity of Communication Faculty, Maltepe University at the Department of Public Relations and Publicity in 2006. Mrs. Kaya Erdem got PhD in Journalism in the Social Science Institute at Istanbul University, Turkey in 2009. She had worked as an assistant professor at the Department of Television Reporting and Programming, Maltepe University. She has been working at Istanbul University Communication Faculty, Department of Journalism since 2012. Dr. Kaya Erdem's researches are within the fields othering and media (international communication in the context of East and West Dichotomy, critical media literacy, representation of activist groups at mass medias and orientalism). He has published several academic text books and articles in Al Jazeera, critical media literacy, orientalism and othering approach of medias.



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She is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at the Faculty of Economics & Business (FEB) - University of Zagreb. She received her PhD at the Università della Svizzera italiana on the topic of social media and relationship marketing. She teaches several marketing courses at FEB Zagreb including Marketing, Advertising, Marketing for nonprofits and Marketing Strategy. She is also a visiting faculty member at the Faculty of Architecture – School of Design (Zagreb, Croatia) and SDA Bocconi (Milan, Italy). Her primary research interests include digital marketing, social media and marketing strategy. She is actively involved in several research projects and collaborates with researchers from SDA Bocconi, Università della Svizzera italiana and UCLA – Anderson School of Management.

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He has been an academic in Public Relations & Advertising at Swinburne University of Technology since 2007. Rob completed his doctorate in 2006 on the theme “Employer of Choice and building a positive Corporate Social Responsibility reputation for the Australian Financial Sector.” Rob is a member of the Public Relations Institute of Australia and a graduate of the Corporate Public Affairs Institute residential program. He has more than 10 years experience as a communication manager in the fields of finance, tourism and state government. Prior to this, Rob spent 15 years teaching in Australia and internationally.



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He acquired a Professor of Slovene Language and Literature university degree, at Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor in 2007. He resumed his studies on the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science and acquired a bachelor's degree in 2009, where he attained the title of a Graduated Engineer for Media Communications. Denis Kalmar obtained a Master's degree in the title of Master Engineer of Media Communications in 2014. He also improved his knowledge abroad on the University of Bergen, Norway. Mr. Kalmar collaborated with the Institute for Media Communication, regarding the science-research work. He is resuming with the research work in the field of media and communications.



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She is an international strategist and lecturer specializing in the field of business application of the internet. She is a partner at the consulting firm PRpepper, an honorary judge of the SocialMedia Awards by the European Public Relations and Research Association (EUPRERA) and the Euroblog association. She is also a European jury member for the ICT award based in Luxembourg, as well as an honorary ambassador of the WebIT council of Internet practitioners of Southeastern Europe. Dragana is a consultant for strategic online communication and a researcher in the field of internet communication platform application in corporate communication. She received her master's degree from the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad, majoring in industrial engineering and management, and a Ph.D. candidate at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, Department of Industrial Engineering and Management, University of Novi Sad, Serbia.



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**Sun Young Lee,  
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She (Ph.D., the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill) is Assistant Professor of Public Relations in the College of Media and Communication at Texas Tech University. Her research interests include corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication, media relations, corporate reputation, public engagement, and crisis communications. Specifically, she has been investigating how public perception of CSR information differs when it is conveyed using different communication strategies, the effects of CSR practices on crisis situations, and communication strategies to engage the public with CSR activities. Her research has been published in the Journal of Advertising, the Journal of Business Ethics, and Public Relations Review.



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## 4. Papers



### Is the New Medium still the message?

### The effects of digitalisation on TV consumption behaviour

**Luca Brusati**, University of Udine, Italy

**Mario Ianniello**, University of Udine, Italy

**Silvia Iacuzzi**, University of Udine, Italy

**Paola Zambano**, University of Udine, Italy



#### ABSTRACT

Traditionally two main competing approaches in social sciences describe the relationship between society and technology and the processes of technological and social change: the diffusion of innovation theory (Rogers, 1995) and the social shaping of technology perspective (Mackay & Gillespie, 1992; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999; Williams & Edge, 1996). This paper, by adapting the technology acceptance model UTAUT (Venkatesh et al. 2003) to TV viewing after the digital switch-over in Friuli Venezia Giulia (Italy), approaches in an exploratory fashion the relationship between the adoption of new technologies and consumers behaviour. The results show that, with some limitations, the postulations of the main theories are generally confirmed, but further research would contribute to draw a more complete picture of the factors which influence consumer behaviour in the adoption of new TV technologies.

*Keywords:* Technological Innovation, Innovation diffusion, Domestication of Technology, Consumer Behaviour.

## 1 Introduction

When talking about “new medium” in the context of TV audiences, one most commonly refers to content available on-demand, accessible through a digital device, usually offering interactive user feedback and creative participation. It is now generally accepted (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2003; Huddon 2006) that technological change and social change go hand-in-hand and that users have a pivotal role in the adoption and use of innovative technologies. However, how this happens and which factors have an impact on this process is still widely researched. Starting from the literature on innovation diffusion and technology adoption, this paper will look at the impact of new TV technologies on audiences in the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia in Italy.

In 2012, two years after the switch-over to digital TV, a quantitative survey was run to understand the impact of this new technology on consumption habits. Digital TV allowed audiences not only to watch more channels, but also to access specialised channels and interactive services. The 2012 survey found that most people had not yet fully embraced the new technology. This paper will use bivariate and multivariate analysis to analyse that dataset in order to verify the postulations of traditional and recent theories as well as offer further evidence to better understand how consumers deal with technological change.

## 2 Theoretical background

Traditionally two main competing approaches in social sciences have sought to describe the relationship between society and technology, including new media technology, and the processes of technological and social change: the diffusion of innovation theory (Rogers, 1962) and the social shaping of technology perspective (Mackay & Gillespie, 1992; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999; Williams & Edge, 1996). The diffusion of innovation theory models the dynamics of technology adoption, including the rate of adoption and the eventual spread of the innovation in a social system (Rogers, 1995). A new technology, or other innovation, is introduced in a social group often by a few actors who are the first or early adopters. The success of the innovation often depends on their social status or influence. Other members of the group, who share similar interests, may be persuaded to adopt the innovation, and they in turn influence others. Successive waves of adoption continue until the innovation reaches a saturation point that varies depending on the characteristics of the innovation and the social system. The profiles of adopters (Rogers 1962) were originally specified as: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. Critics claim that the diffusion of innovation theory is technologically deterministic because it assumes that innovations are unitary, stable phenomena throughout the diffusion process and it focuses mainly on the effects of innovations in social systems. The typical assumption of technological determinism, influenced by McLuhan (1964), is that technological change is an independent factor, impacting on society from outside. The idea is well expressed in the motto of the 1933 Chicago World's Fair: “Science Finds - Industry Applies - Man Conforms”(Rydell, 1993). In contrast, the social shaping of technology emphasizes the influence of human choices and action

in technological change rather than the opposite (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999; Williams & Edge, 1996). The user is intended as having a dominant role in defining the nature, scope and functions of technology and it would be misguided to look at society and technology as independent from each other while, in fact, they are “mutually constitutive” (Mackenzie & Wajcman, 1999).

Under the umbrella of the social shaping of technology, Silverstone and Huddon (1996) propose a model of what they call “the design/domestication interface” based on the idea that technological innovation is not just a matter of engineering and production, since consumption and use are essential components of the innovation process itself. They explained the dynamics of innovation, focusing on the role and perspective of the consumer, so as to insert the particular characteristics of “use” into a process to highlight the activities and behaviours of consumers that both complete and rekindle the innovation cycle. “Design and domestication are the two sides of the coin of innovation. Domestication is anticipated in design and design is completed in domestication” (Silverstone & Huddon 1996).

Several models have been developed in order to show which variables influence the adoption and use of technology, in particular of emerging ICT, focusing on consumer's behaviour. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1989) suggests that when users have to deal with new technological devices, two main factors affect their decisions about how and when they will use them, notably: “perceived usefulness” (PU) and ‘perceived ease of use’ (PEOU) (Davis, 1989). According to TAM, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are the most important determinants of actual system use: both predict the attitude toward using the system, defined as user's evaluation of the desirability of employing a particular information system application. PU and PEOU are influenced by external variables, such as social factors, cultural factors and political factors (Davis, 1989; Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1989; Malhotra & Galletta 1999). The attitude to use is concerned with the behavioural intention defined as the measure of the likelihood of a person employing the application.

Venkatesh et al. (2003) developed The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as a comprehensive synthesis of prior technology acceptance research. UTAUT has four key constructs (performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions) that influence behavioural intention to use a technology and/or technology use. Performance expectancy is defined as the degree to which using a technology will provide benefits to consumers in performing certain activities; effort expectancy is the degree of ease associated with consumers' use of technology; social influence is the extent to which consumers perceive that important others (e.g., family and friends) believe they should use a particular technology; and facilitating conditions refer to consumers' perceptions of the resources and support available to perform a behaviour (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003; Brown & Venkatesh, 2005). According to UTAUT, performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and social influence are theorised to influence behavioural intention to use a technology, while behavioural intention and facilitating conditions determine technology use. Also, individual difference variables, such as age, gender, and experience are theorised to moderate various the relationships between theoretical constructs on the one hand, and intention to use and actual use behaviour on the other.

A more recent approach, named UTAUT2, complements the constructs in UTAUT adding three more variables: hedonic motivation, price value and habit (Venkatesh, Thong, Xu, 2012). However, for the purposes of this paper the original UTAUT model is comprehensive enough and offers a sufficient theoretical base for the analysis of the impact of new TV technologies on consumer behaviour in the dataset at hand.

### 3 Methods

In Friuli Venezia Giulia the digital switchover process was completed in December 2010. Approximately 480.000 households were involved in the transition from analogue to digital television. Two years after completing the digital switch-over process, INFORMEST, in the framework of the Digi.TV project, commissioned the Laboratory for Research in Economics and Management (LAREM) at Udine University to conduct a quantitative survey among the inhabitants of Friuli Venezia Giulia in November-December 2012. A questionnaire was administered through computer-assisted telephone interviews to a stratified random sample of the local population. For sampling purposes the inhabitants of Friuli Venezia Giulia above the age of 18 were divided into six strata according to data on gender and age from the 2011 census by ISTAT, the Italian National Institute for Statistics. Overall 737 valid questionnaires were administered.

This paper will first present a descriptive account of the key results of the 2012 survey in order to find evidence for the diffusion of innovation and the domestication of technology theories (Silverstone & Huddon 1996). Multivariate analysis will help reveal underlying patterns among individual variables.

In a second instance, the analysis will attempt to better explain what determined the adoption by users of the digital technology in Friuli Venezia Giulia using an adapted version of the UTAUT model (Venkatesh et al., 2003). As done for other surveys (Freeman & Lessiter, 2003; Sapio et al., 2010), most questionnaire items were recoded into the UTAUT's constructs and moderating factors, even though the data in the 2012 survey do not include all constructs used by the original model. In particular, there are no questions on the "intention of use" and on "social influence". Therefore, these categories are not present in the model to be tested.

As far as statistical modelling is concerned, the analysis will use logistic regression for multivariate analysis since, provided the dependent can be dichotomised, logistic regression allows for independent variables at different levels of measurement and it is a statistical technique which entails a minimum of statistical bias in non-linear relationships<sup>1</sup>.

1 For a more in-depth discussion of the advantages of using logistic regression see: Walsh A. (1990), Statistics for the Social Sciences, pp.322-328.

## 4 Results

The results of the survey carried out in late 2012 among the inhabitants of Friuli Venezia Giulia confirm that the sample is representative of the region's population in terms of age and gender. A comparison with the 2011 census<sup>2</sup> shows minor differences explainable within the margins of sampling error, rather than indicating a biased sample.

	Cases	%	Census %
18-29	95	12.9	12.6
30-39	108	14.7	15.9
40-49	101	13.7	19.3
50-59	130	17.6	15.9
60-69	150	20.4	15.3
70+	153	20.8	21.0
Total	737	100.0	100.0

Table 1: Age structure

		%	Census %
Male	340	46.1	48.2
Female	396	53.7	51.8
Total	736	100.0	100.0

Table 2: Gender

### 4.1 Availability of Technology

The digital switch-over process implied a complete and irreversible switch-off of the previous analogic signal and, consequently, the necessity of adapting or replacing the old TV devices in order to make them suitable to receive the new digital signal. The survey reveals that nearly half the respondents (48%) had equipped their old television with an external decoder, while more than two out of three (67%) had purchased a new television with an internal decoder which implies a larger investment (Figure 1). Some households have evidently both old and new TV sets.

2 Census' results are available on the website of the National Statistical Institute (ISTAT): [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it).

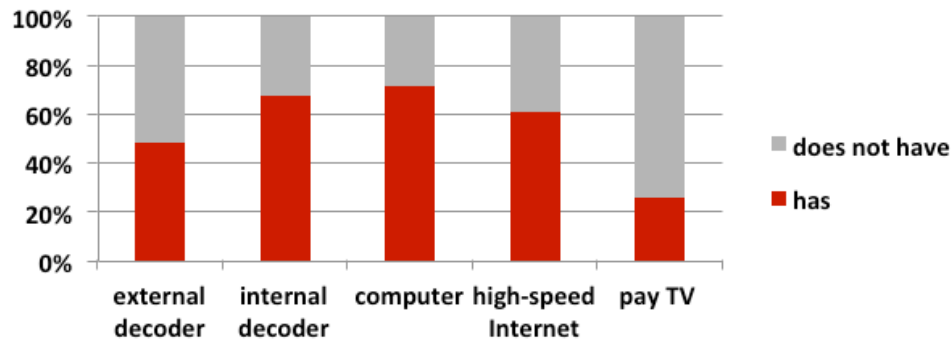


Figure 1: Which of the following devices do you have at home? (main home) (Q1)

The relatively low penetration of computer (72%) and high-speed internet (61%) confirms that Italy is still behind many European countries as far as technological adoption goes. Moreover, only one in four respondents (26%) purchases pay TV services. Thinking of pay TV services as a precursor of digital innovation, such a small number may suggest that the majority of people in Friuli Venezia Giulia were not familiar with TV interactive services before the digital switch-over.

#### 4.2 TV Usage Patterns

Overall, 650 out of 737 interviewees (88.2% of the sample) watched TV: 87 respondents, that is 11.8% of the population, did not (Figure 2). The second section of the questionnaire aimed at collecting information among TV users in order to understand how their TV usage patterns had been influenced by the switch-over and, in particular, by access to a wider range of channels and interactive services.

##### 4.2.1. Average Daily TV Usage

In 2012 most TV users in Friuli Venezia Giulia spent at least one hour a day on average watching TV (Figure 2). The majority of respondents (57%) watched TV from one to three hours a day, while 18% of them watched TV more than three hours a day. Moreover, three out of four (78%) claimed to watch TV the same amount of time as before, so it could be argued that in general a wider choice of channels following the digital switch-over did not impact the time spent on average watching TV. Also TV users seemed to have maintained their channel-choosing patterns, since the number of channels they watched on a regular basis was still limited to a narrow range of options (Figure 3), despite the fact that the number of alternatives had considerably increased after the digital switch-over: almost 90% of the respondents watched no more than five channels (46% watched from one to three channels and 40% watched four of five channels). Only 13%, those who watch six or more channels, seemed to appreciate a wider range of alternatives.

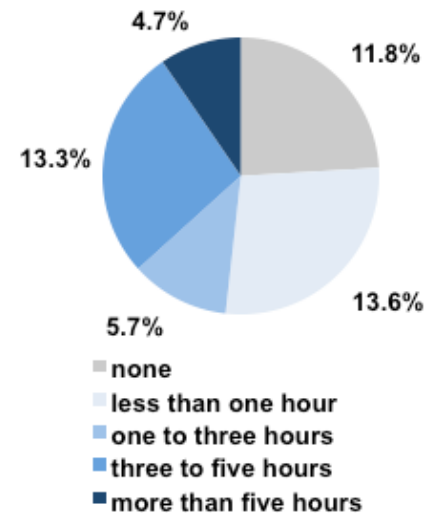


Figure 2: How long do you watch TV on average in a day? (Q2.1)

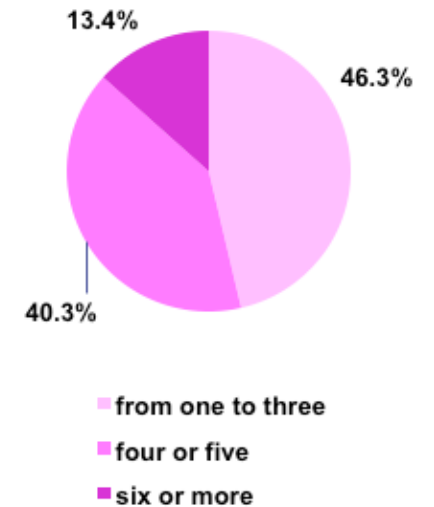


Figure 3: How many channels do you watch on a regular basis? (Q2.9)

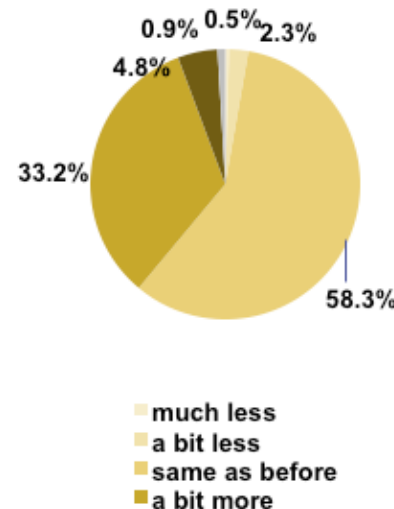


Figure 4: Do you watch more or less channels following the switch-off? (Q2.10)

Indeed in 2012 almost 60% of the respondents watched the same number of channels as before (Figure 4). However, there was a considerable minority (38%) who watched more channels than before the digital switch-over: one in three (33%) just a bit more than before and almost 5% much more than before. This might support the hypothesis of domestication over time (Silverstone & Huddon 1996), in the sense of an upward trend in the number of channels watched that will probably be matched by an increase in the appreciation of a wider range of alternatives only over time.

#### 4.2.2. Types of Channels Watched

After the digital switch-over there has been a significant increase not only in the number of channels available, but also in their content specialization with many new channels dedicated to specific subjects such as sports, movies, hobbies and leisure time activities. The old typology of channels consisted in “general purpose” channels and “local” (community) channels targeted to the people living in the area of Friuli Venezia Giulia.

The 2012 survey shows that digital TV had only partly modified the users’ channel-choosing patterns. Indeed, an overwhelming majority of TV users (96%) watched “general purpose” channels and almost 80% of them continued watching that type of channels the same amount of time as they did before (Figures 5 and 6).

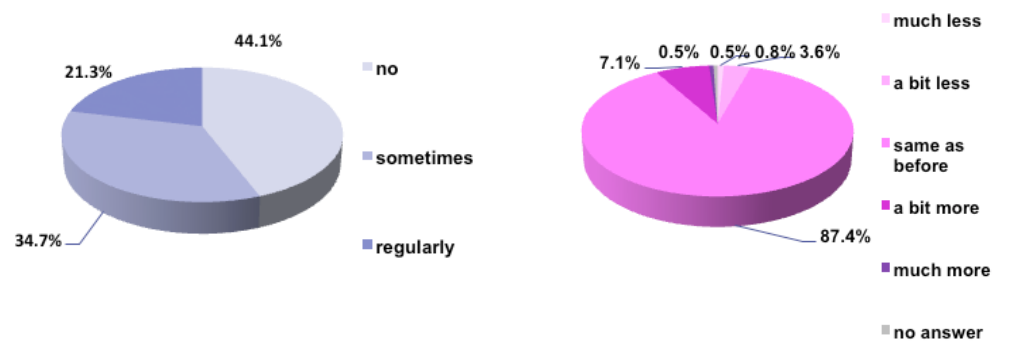


Figure 7: Do you watch “local” (community) channels? (Q2.7)

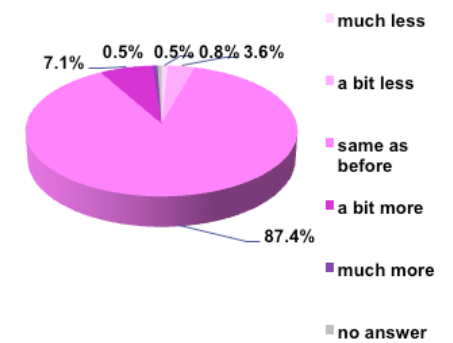


Figure 8: Do you watch more or less “local” (community) channels following the switch-off? (Q2.8)

However, when it comes to “specialised” (thematic) channels, almost two out of three respondents claimed to watch them and more than 60% had increased the amount of time they spent watching those channels after the switch-over (Figures 9 and 10). This seems to indicate that there was a group of “innovators” and “early adopters” (Rogers, 1995) that had embraced the new technology faster than the rest of the population of Friuli Venezia Giulia. Over time, there may be an upward trend in the appreciation of “specialised” channels, but in 2012 the majority of TV users maintained their channel-choosing patterns and continued watching “traditional” ones.

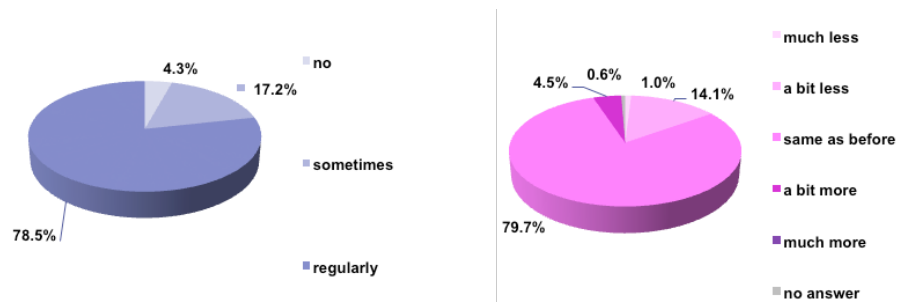


Figure 5: Do you watch “general purpose” channels? (Q2.3)

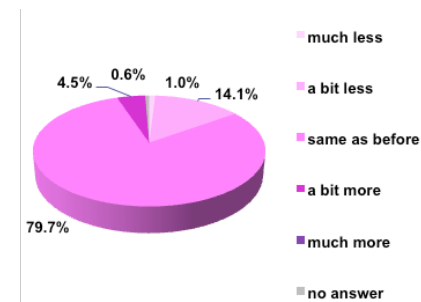


Figure 6: Do you watch more or less “general purpose” channels following the switch-off? (Q2.4)

Local channels were watched by much less people (56%), but again a high percentage (almost 90%) continued watching that type of channels as long as before (Figures 7 and 8).

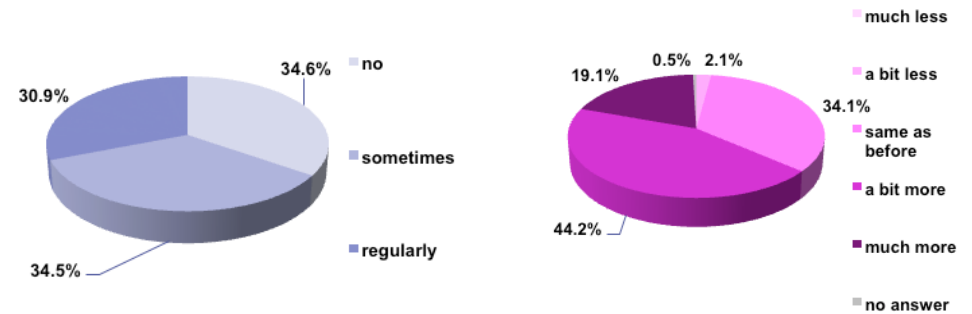


Figure 9: Do you watch “specialised” (thematic) channels? (Q2.5)

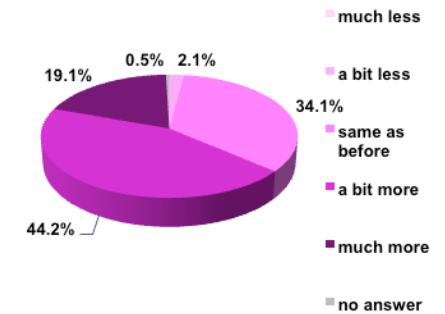


Figure 10: Do you watch more or less “specialised” (thematic) channels following the switch-off? (Q2.6)

The hypothesis that adoption of technology is a relatively complex process is confirmed by further analysis of the 2012 data. For example, simple correlations show that overall people who watched regularly one type of channel, tended to watch regularly also the other types. Therefore, it is not the case that more “specialised” channels substituted traditional “generalist” channels. However, multivariate data reduction statistics, such as factor analysis, reveal new trends in usage patterns. Factor analysis is “a technique for deriving underlying dimensions from a data set” (Walsh 1990: p.363). In practice, factor analysis extrapolates components whose items are highly correlated and that are as independent of one another as possible. Thus factor analysis can be used to understand whether the underlying principles behind the adoption of technology were indeed related to the characteristics of digital TV (namely, more channels, more specialization and more services).

Running a factor analysis among the effects of the switch-over on viewing frequency in Friuli Venezia Giulia confirms the hypothesis of the existence of a group of “innovators” who embraced the new technology more promptly than others (Table 3). As a rule of thumb characteristics cluster together in a factor if their absolute value is at least greater than 0.4 and their correlation is significant if the absolute value is greater than 0.5. Hence, looking at Table 3, watching more TV channels loads with watching specialist channels more and generalist ones less (component 1); while watching more TV is correlated to watching more generalist channels (components 2)

After the switch to digital TV, ...	Component	
	1	2
(Q2.2) ... do you spend more, less or the same amount of time watching TV	-.068	.787
(Q2.4) ... do you spend more, less or the same amount of time watching “gen-eralist” channels?	-.633	.513
(Q2.6) ... do you spend more, less or the same amount of time watching “spe-cialised” channels?	.744	.231
(Q2.8)... do you spend more, less or the same amount of time watching “local” channels?	.382	-.265
(Q2.10) ... do you watch more, less or the same number of channels?	.616	.498

Table 3: Factor analysis - Change in watching patterns (shading indicates a significant correlation between variables)

### 4.3 Usage of Interactive Services

Overall respondents divided themselves almost evenly among those who appreciated the benefits of switching to digital TV (54%) and those who thought it was not worth the effort (46%).

#### 4.3.1 Frequency of Interactive Services Usage

As it has been mentioned above, only one in four respondents (26%) purchases pay TV services, which implies that the majority of people were not familiar with interactive services before the digital switch-over. Indeed, the level of interactivity in TV usage appeared to be rather low: 60% of the respondents did not use the service that allows to access programme information (such as film plot, director’s name and actors’ name), while the percentage of those who did not watch movies listening to the original track and of those who were not interested to express opinions by pressing a button when watching a programme rose to 90% and 97% respectively (Figure 11).

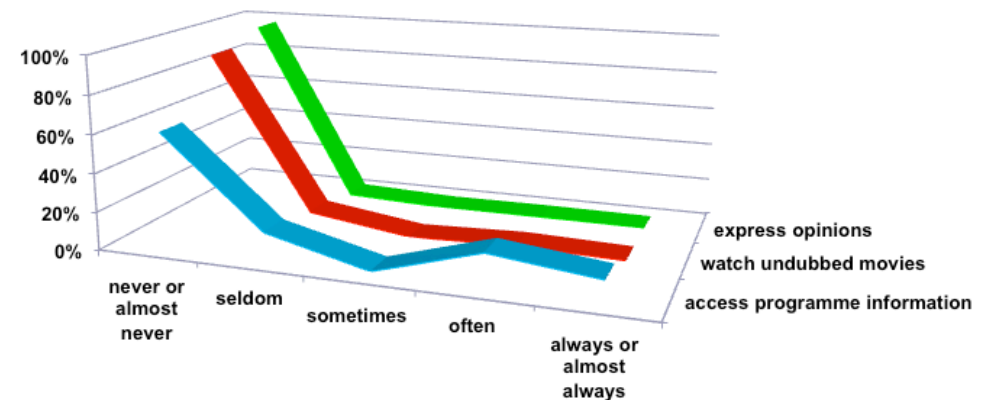


Figure 11: How often do you use the following services? (Q2.12, Q2.13, Q2.14)

Such a low level of interactivity might be related to little interest or to some dissatisfaction with the services provided, but also to a low level of awareness of the recent technological innovations.

#### 4.3.2. Usefulness of Existing Services

Respondents to the 2012 survey felt that either the 3D option or the possibility to express their opinion by pressing a button when watching a programme were not useful (Figure 12): 85% of the them did not appreciate the first service, probably because few 3D movies were available on TV, while three out of four did not show interest in the expressing opinions.

However, more than 50% thought that the high definition feature, the possibility to access programme information and the additional number of channels were useful. The appreciation for the increased number of channels supports the upward trend in the number of channels watched, especially “specialised” ones (Figure 10).

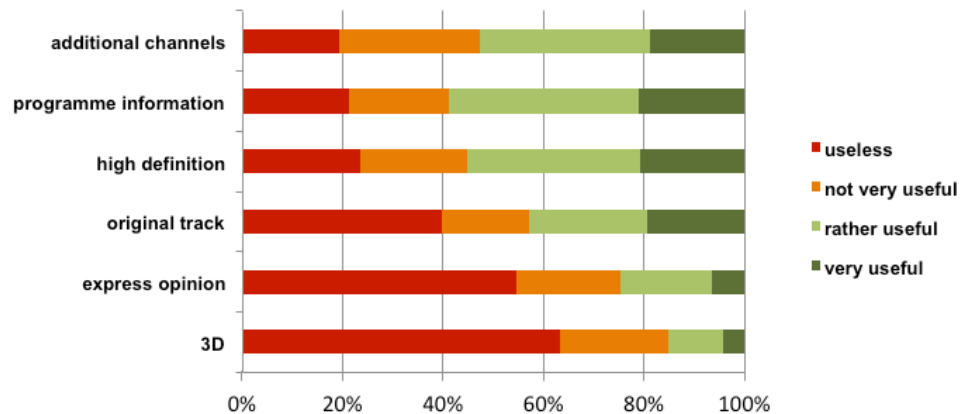


Figure 12: What is your view about the usefulness of the following services? (Q3.2, Q3.3, Q3.4, Q3.5, Q3.6, Q3.7)

Rather surprisingly, even though some of these services were little used (Figure 11), almost 60% of the respondents felt, for example, that the interactive service which allows to access programme information was useful. Probably people thought the services might be useful to others, but not to them, or they were not aware of it and thought that it could turn useful in the future.

Similarly, 43% felt that the service that allows watching a movie listening to the original track was useful, even though the vast majority did not use it. Probably, they did not understand any foreign language well enough to listen to an original track, but thought other people might be able to do so and find the service useful.

These findings support once more the theories of diffusion of innovation and domestication of technology: over time more people will use a technology as they will domesticate it and make it theirs.

#### 4.3.3. Usefulness of Expected Improvements

As far as the future is concerned, a large majority of the respondents (81%) felt that an increase in the number of channels would not improve the quality of the service, while the same percentage (81%) would favour a further specialization of the existing channels (Figure 13).

Furthermore, future diffusion of the digital technology is confirmed by the fact that, although in 2012 the level of users' interactivity was rather low, more than 40% of the respondents appreciated the possibility that more interactive services (such as booking a movie or recording a programme on an internal hard-disk) would be offered in the future. Moreover, one in two respondents would like to be provided with other "community" services such as the possibility to book medical care services, consult transportation timetables or shop opening hours

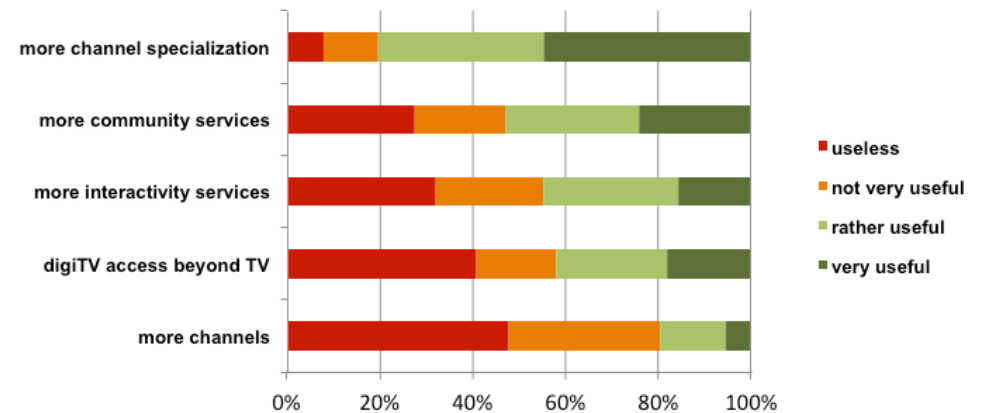


Figure 13: What is your view about the usefulness of the following expected improvements? (Q3.9, Q3.10, Q3.11, Q3.12, Q3.13)

Therefore, domestication of technology is further corroborated by the fact that while a large majority of the respondents did not use interactive services (Figure 11), at least half felt that some of those services were useful and appreciated the possibility that more interactive services would be offered in the future (Figures 12 and 13).

Moreover, running a factor analysis on the appreciation for present and future services reveals two types of viewers (Table 4): those who appreciated services related to basic TV watching (more channels, high definition, 3D), and those instead who appreciated more innovative services (non-dubbed movies, expressing opinions, channel specialization, interactive and community services not only through a TV set). This seems to show that technology diffusion had happened by 2012 for those aspects which were easier to domesticate; more innovative services would require more time to be widely adopted.

	Component	
	1	2
(Q3.2) To what extent do you think it is useful to have access to additional channels?	.183	.755
(Q3.3) To what extent do you think it is useful to watch high definition programmes?	.237	.715
(Q3.4) To what extent do you think it is useful to watch 3D programmes?	.074	.758
(Q3.5) To what extent do you think it is useful to have access to programme information?	.489	.421
(Q3.6) To what extent do you think it is useful to watch undubbed movies?	.535	.422
(Q3.7) To what extent do you think it is useful to express opinions?	.689	.064
(Q3.9) Do you think it would be useful to have access to more channels in the future?	.219	.679
(Q3.10) Do you think it would be useful to have more channel specialisation in the future?	.587	.077
(Q3.11) Do you think it would be useful to have more interactive services?	.720	.287
(Q3.12) Do you think it would be useful to have access to more community services through digital TV?	.745	.185
(Q3.13) Do you think it would be useful to have access to DT services through other devices than a TV set?	.567	.440

Table 4: Factor analysis - Appreciation of present and future services (shading indicates a significant correlation between variables)

#### 4.4 Applying the UTAUT Approach

As mentioned before, the framework of the UTAUT model can be used to extract further meaning from the 2012 survey, even though the model needs to be adapted to the circumstances and the data available. In other words, an adapted UTAUT model was used to better understand which factors influence the adoption of digital technology (“use behaviour”). Digital technology in Friuli Venezia Giulia meant access to more channels, in particular thematic channels, and to innovative services. In order to identify within the sample of the 2012 survey a number of “innovators” large enough to allow for bi- and multivariate analysis, the following construct was used to create a dichotomous variable for “use behaviour = DigiTV adoption”:

- Q2.9 Number of channels watched regularly = 4 or more; and
- Q2.5 Frequency of viewing of thematic channels = “regularly”; and
- Q2.12 Frequency of accessing programme related information = “always” or “often”.

The sample was therefore split into: 156 “DigiTV adopters”, 494 “Other” and 87 missing cases, that is people who did not watch TV at all. Given the low level of adoption of other innovative services, other variables (such as “watching movies with original track” or “expressing opinions”) were left out to avoid narrowing down the subsample to a too small base for any meaningful analysis.

The newly created dependent variable was then tested against the moderating factors and the variables related to “performance expectancy”, “effort expectancy” and “facilitating conditions”. The UTAUT’s postulations were confirmed already by bivariate analysis. For example, a simple independent-samples t-test revealed important differences between the ages of people with different usage patterns: people who watched more TV and more local channels tended to be older; on the contrary, people who watched more specialised channels, watched them more after the switch-over, and used and appreciated innovative services, tended to be younger.

In order to better understand the active relations among the variables, a regression analysis was applied according to the UTAUT reference model using “use behaviour” as the dependent and a selection of the other factors as predictors. Including all variables identified as construct or moderating factors would have led to much less meaningful results because of the large number of variables and their different degree of standardisation. Thus, the predictors were selected as follows:

UTAUT MODEL	2012 SURVEY
Performance expectancy:	Usefulness of innovations through digital TV (Q3.1)
Effort expectancy:	Benefits vs. efforts of switch-over (Q3.8)
Facilitating conditions:	Only external decoder, only integrated, both (Q1.1. and Q1.2)
Age:	Age (Q4.1)
Gender:	Gender (Q4.2)
Experience:	Pay TV (Q1.5)



	$\beta$	S.E.	Sig.
Usefulness of innovations through digital TV (Q3.1)	.325	.142	.022
Benefits vs. efforts of switch-over (Q3.8)	.219	.146	.134
Pay TV (Q1.5)	.911	.256	.000
Only external decoder (Q1.1, Q1.2):			.008
Only integrated decoder vs. Only external decoder	.729	.249	.003
Both vs. Only external decoder	.209	.331	.528
Age (Q4.1)	-.033	.006	.000
Gender (Q4.2)	.103	.208	.622
Constant	-2.028	.517	.000
N=737, included in analysis 573 Cox & Snell R Square = .119, Nagelkerke R Square = .176			
Table 5 Regression analysis (Shading indicates a significant effect on the dependent)			

The results were as follows:

Each b score represents the amount by which a variable affects the likelihood of a respondent being a “DigiTV adopter” controlling for the effects of all variables among each other. As a rule of thumb a standard error has to be less than half of its b value for the latter to be significant. Hence, as shown in Table 5 above, set “DigiTV adopter” as dependent variable, all coefficients with the exception of “effort expectancy” and “gender” were significant. Therefore, the more people perceived that the innovation brought about by digital TV were useful, the more they were already initiated to this type of technology through pay TV, the more they had substituted all their old TVs with TVs with integrated recorders, and the younger they were, the readier the adoption of digital TV, understood in this case as watching more channels, watching thematic channels regularly and accessing innovative services such as programme related information.

However, the R2 values for the regression in Table 5 are rather low. R2 is a goodness-of-fit measure and indicates how much of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by all independent variables together. Thus the adapted UTAUT model explains between 11.9% and 17.6% of the variance in “DigiTV adoption”. These low values indicate that the adoption of digital TV is driven by many other factors. Nevertheless, this approach has allowed to partly verify the UTAUT model and to identify some of the variables which have influenced the adoption of digital TV technology in Friuli Venezia Giulia.

## 5. Conclusions and further research

This paper has confirmed the main postulations of the more traditional as well as the more recent theories on the adoption of technological innovations. A group of “innovators” and “early adopters” as described by Rogers (1995) was identified among those people who adopted and appreciated digital television: they watched more channels than before, they watched thematic channels regularly and they used the interactive services that digital television offers. However, it was not possible to identify the other categories described in the theory, because digital TV technology is multifaceted, bringing along an increasing complexity and such a variety of services that it would be difficult to describe consumer behaviour using the strict ranking that the theory implies.

Moreover, this paper found evidence for the basic elements related to the domestication of technology theory (Silverstone & Huddon 1996). The case of digital TV in Friuli Venezia Giulia confirms that there is a progression in the adoption of technologies following their actual use, i.e. they are not adopted just because they are new but consumers chose which one to adopt following individual preferences and needs. Unfortunately, the data set at hand did not allow assessing how the use of the technology is modified by the consumer.

Finally we were able to verify some of the postulations of the UTAUT model (Venkatesh et al., 2003). In particular, experience, performance expectation, facilitating conditions and age have an impact on the use of new technologies. However, the sample was not large enough to allow further explanation and the final model explains only very partially what influences the adoption of innovative technologies. Further research would be necessary in order to draw a fuller picture. It should consider larger samples, because, as Rogers (1962) found, innovators are only a small proportion of the population, and it should include more predictors as identified by the more recent UTUAT2 model (Venkatesh, Thong and Xu, 2012) in order to enlarge the scope of the research and better explain what influences the adoption of technological innovations.

## Acknowledgement

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 2

## Reconceptualising 'crisis' in crisis communication: a typology of research to date and directions for the future-eco-systems, consciousness and communities

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### Abstract

The paper conceptualises what a 'stakeholder turn' might mean in crisis communication and, further, what that might mean for conceptions of 'crisis' in crisis communication research, traditionally defined as non-routine events, especially linked to media high-interest. To do so, we firstly trace the development of crisis communication research to date using an integrative narrative review of the literature, noting how the body of 'crisis knowledge' has developed from informal beginnings through empirically-driven, theory-based research. We visualise our review across several spectra. We then question how well served by current definitions a true 'receiver' focus in crisis communication research is. We suggest that terms such as crisis consciousness, contagion and communities be introduced into the 'receiver-focused' research agenda and introduce the notion of a crisis eco-system. Finally, we offer a conceptual map of existing and potential stakeholder crisis communication research - again using a spectra approach - to provide clarity for both our own longer term project and for those who similarly may be seeking to contribute research focused on the 'receiver' in crisis.

Key words: Crisis, crisis management, crisis communication, stakeholder, receiver, crisis consciousness, crisis communities, crisis contagion, crisis eco-system

### 1. Introduction

Research into 'crisis' and 'crisis communication' has attracted growing interest in the Public Relations and strategic communication fields over the last 20 years from practitioners and academics alike (Brown & Ki, 2013). Within this literature, terms such as 'crisis', 'crisis management' and 'crisis communication' are often used interchangeably. This conceptual paper aims to provide a framework for contextualising the field to provide clarity, aid understanding and focus the direction of future research, particularly that which might have a 'receiver' focus.

Modern notions of crisis in relation to organisations have been largely focused on heightened media and stakeholder expectations of organisational performance and behaviour in situations where 'non-routine' events occur. Until fairly recently, 'crisis research' has largely focused on the organisation in crisis and how it might recover from an operational or reputational incident that may threaten its existence in some way, by using actions and words. This has prompted many 'to do' lists and 'best practice' guides, according to crisis type and notional responsibility attribution. The rise of online channels of communication may contribute to increased expectations and therefore to the requirements for additional research.

A recent 'stakeholder turn' has placed the focus on non-organisational actors who experience crisis situations, often in relation to their emotions. We agree that crisis research benefits from a re-appraisal from the perspective of the stakeholder involved in the 'crisis' and argue this requires a full re-conceptualisation of how we view and label 'crisis' from a stakeholder perspective.

We suggest that the focus of crisis communication research to date, including that new direction which might be termed a 'stakeholder' or 'receiver-oriented' approach remains narrowly focused on organisational response to a heightened media interest event that may impact public opinion and threaten organisational reputation. Further, we argue that this narrow focus has resulted in a conceptual shortcoming of crisis communication that has been hampered by the conflation and confusion of terminology (e.g. 'crisis management' v 'crisis communication') in research to date.

Using insights and inspiration from two well-known international/national financial crisis situations, we examine crisis from an individual stakeholder perspective (i.e. defined as a crisis by the stakeholder regardless of whether it is media- or social media-led, or regardless of whether the organisation acknowledges the crisis). In doing so, we re-conceptualise crisis as a turning point in an Organisation-Public Relationship (OPR) in favour of the stakeholder and consider the consequences for organisational crisis communication (to date considered as a mediated instrument of gaining organisational privilege). In particular we are concerned with those crises that may not previously have been recognised as crises either because they lack media involvement, have been labeled crisis because of heightened media interest but which stakeholders do not consider to be so, or where the original subject of the crisis no longer exists.

We describe a direction for preliminary and exploratory research we are designing (based on our relational-oriented perspective on complex crisis communication situations) and the approach we are taking to fill the gaps detected in the theoretical framework of crisis communication developed to date. In doing so, we consider the concept of the crisis eco-system in relation to crisis consciousness within crisis communities.

## 2. Discipline creep and the interchangeability of terms

Analysis of any textbook or handbook of crisis communication results in the observation that the field, often presumed a subset of the wider Public Relations field, has borrowed from and encroached upon other disciplines. This is particularly noticeable in the interchangeability of terms used, such as 'crisis', 'crisis management' and 'crisis communication', as if they were all the same.

By conflating terminologies, the Public Relations literature could stand accused of appropriating the field of crisis research, whilst simultaneously disengaging from the debate about 'crisis' in other disciplinary areas. As a result, recommendations for communicating in a crisis may have had limited exposure in the management literature where the debate about crisis and risk management continues often without guidance on communication and conversely, the findings in the management literature sit equally in isolation.

The task of planning for a crisis should be considered the over-arching activity that organisations will need to consider, acting in conjunction with counsel from their senior communicator(s) about the type and level of communication required in a crisis. Thus, our intention is to provide definitional clarity between these two concepts even though ultimately they must be considered together. Our natural inclination, rooted in the Public Relations discipline, is to argue explicitly for a senior role for communication managers during crisis. This may (still) not always be the case, depending on the 'schema for Public Relations' (Grunig & Grunig, 1992: 300) present within organisations.

We thus believe it unhelpful for texts primarily focused on crisis communication to suggest to communicators they may have an undisputed role in 'crisis management' unless the schema for Public Relations (as imagined by the dominant coalition and hired business consultants alike) enables it, and unless the communicator has demonstrated an ability to act strategically. It is far better for communicators to understand the tensions that may exist within business functions (in no small part prompted by understandings from their own disciplinary literature) that may impact their ability to operate in the way the crisis communication text books claim.

Thus we consider it important that terms such as 'crisis management' and 'crisis communication' should be understood as potentially distinct terms and communicators should understand that

they may have to compete for a leadership role in communication during crisis.

The purpose of considering this is to highlight how conflated terminology may be problematic, and where or how discipline creep may occur (or may not) that may be more or less helpful to advancing study, or to highlighting where interdisciplinary conversations might occur.

## 3. Definitions of crisis

Definitions of crisis in the Public Relations or crisis communication literature attempt to differentiate between disasters and other organisational crises. 'Other organisational crises' are often then subdivided according to their accidental or intentional nature and according to the level of involvement of the organisation involved.

More recently, Coombs has further narrowed the definition of organisational crisis according to operational and reputational crises (2014: 3) and indeed whether the 'unpredictable event' may be deemed a crisis at all – or an incident (2015: 4).

Central to the notion of crisis in this literature is the way that news of the 'crisis' may spread (or arise) in traditional news and newer forms of online media such that more stakeholders are exposed to it. Coombs has also suggested a framework for understanding social media crises, some of which he considers not to be crises at all, but 'like a crisis' – a paracrisis - especially those which may be deemed 'customer relations' in nature (Coombs, 2014: 7).

A crisis is further defined as 'perceptual', meaning that 'if stakeholders believe an organisation is in crisis, a crisis does exist' (Coombs, 2015: 3). Not before time then that we should see a recent 'turn' towards understanding stakeholder reactions in a crisis.

'Crisis' as it is used and intended in the Public Relations and crisis communication literature is thus a modern phenomena related to organisational survival through adversity in mediated environments, but the term has a history in a variety of other disciplinary fields such as medicine, psychology, sociology, political theory, economics, and latterly those business study areas related to organisational management and risk. Its etymological roots can be traced at least as far back as Ancient Greek where κρίσις (krisis) referred to 'separating, the power of distinguishing, decision, choice, election, judgement, dispute' and κρίνω (krinō) meant to 'pick out, choose, decide, judge'. Hippocrates (1983) related the term krisis to medicine, defining it as the turning point of a disease; between certain recovery or certain death. It is important to recognise here that in this usage, the term 'does not simply refer to "hard times"' (Holloway, 1992: 146).

In practice, the crisis viewed as a major 'hard times' event requiring exigent organisational

resource and attention has provided a rich seam of material for mining by consultants, conference organisers and book publishers that has ‘become more than a cottage industry’ (Heath & Millar, 2004: 1) with a common stated aim of reclaiming the high ground for the organisation (Tyler, 2005) after the unexpected, or the ‘predictably unpredictable’ (Heath, 2004: 33) has occurred, as it surely must in an increasingly complex and chaotic world (Beck, 1992).

#### 4. Crisis management

Crisis management has been defined as ‘a set of factors designed to combat crises and to lessen the actual damage inflicted’ (Coombs 2015: 5). We believe this definition is inclusive in that it makes clear that a ‘set of factors’ is involved and assists crisis communicators understand that these ‘factors’ may create tensions between organisational sub-systems.

Crisis management thus involves the identification of patterns of behaviour which are to be deployed when a ‘predictably unpredictable’ event develops into a situation which the organisation, the event itself, or pressure from stakeholders or media defines as appropriate to do so.

Approaches to crisis management have largely involved case study observation and have progressed historically from informal to more formal research approaches. They have largely resulted in check-lists of ‘how to manage a crisis’ and organisations have been encouraged to perform practice exercises and prepare crisis manuals. In many cases, crises do not occur in the way the organisation practised, or some other important factor has been overlooked (Valvi & Fragkos, 2013).

##### 4.1 Crisis management spectra

Our integrative narrative review of the literature for crisis management and crisis communication has adopted a purposeful selection of articles according to their relevance to the field. In each case we have grouped the research across broad spectra of activity. We have considered approaches to crisis management taking place on three broad spectra (fig. 1) – from human to technical; psychological to sociological; and from what might be termed ‘conflictual/destructive’ or ‘institutional’ (according to the organisational culture i.e. a ‘chaotic crisis generator’ or a well-rehearsed and aware organisation that integrates procedures into everyday operating practice). The dyads of each spectra should not be considered exclusive, nor binary, but as broad, grouped fields in which crisis researchers have worked.

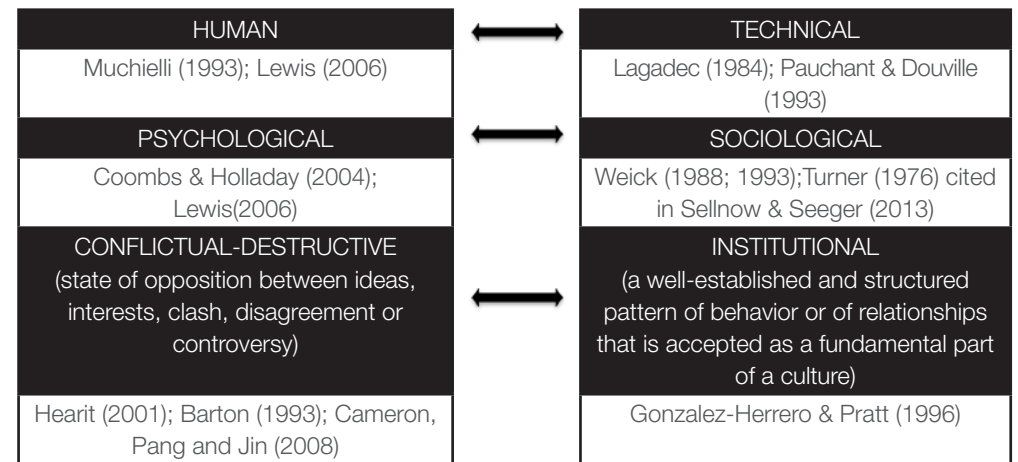


Figure 1. Spectra of approaches to crisis management and some illustrative authors

#### 5. Crisis communication

In contrast, crisis communication is that set of activities deemed necessary to engage communicatively with certain individuals or groups that may be considered to have been (by the organisation) or who have been (defined by the event or by the stakeholders themselves) affected by the ‘crisis event’. This may be directly observable (by the organisation, the event, the stakeholders or the media) or indirectly so (by the stakeholders themselves). But, in all cases, crisis communication involves the organisation communicating TO (almost always a broadcast model is adopted to begin with) and later perhaps WITH (as a crisis dialogue develops) stakeholders.

Crisis communication has been ‘defined broadly as the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation’ (Coombs, 2012: 20) or as ‘a complex and dynamic configuration of communication processes – before, during and after a crisis – where various actors, contexts and discourses (manifested in texts) are related to each other (instructing, adjusting and internalising)’ (Frandsen & Johansen, 2007: 3-4).

Whether crises are naturally occurring or occur as a result of some form of actor-intervention (including intervention by the organisation itself), the core of most crisis communication research is focused on assisting under-pressure organisations whose plight is likely further amplified by traditional and newer forms of media channels to communicate through a crisis ‘event’ to achieve a return to ‘business as usual’ operations as soon as possible.

### 5.1 Crisis communication research spectra

Like Public Relations research itself (Dühring, 2015: 7), crisis communication and crisis management research has until very recently focused on ‘the functional corporate’ approach. Approaches to crisis communication, also like that of crisis management, have largely involved case study observation and have progressed historically from informal to more formal considerations of communicating in crisis. Like the crisis management manuals organisations planning for crisis are encouraged to produce, crisis communication research has largely resulted in ‘how to’ check-lists and organisations have been encouraged to practice interactions with the media and to prepare materials that may be deployed during a crisis.

More recently, crisis communication academics have called for a more stakeholder-focused approach to crisis communication research (Lee, 2004). By this, we understand a focus on the ‘object’ of crisis communication attempts. We are thus at the beginning of what we might term a ‘stakeholder turn’ in crisis communication academic research whereby the perspectives of those outside the organisation that may be exposed to a crisis event are privileged during the crisis communication phase (Fediuk at al., 2012) including understanding their emotional reactions (Jin & Pang, 2012).

We have chosen to illustrate crisis communication research to date across two main spectra (fig 2.)

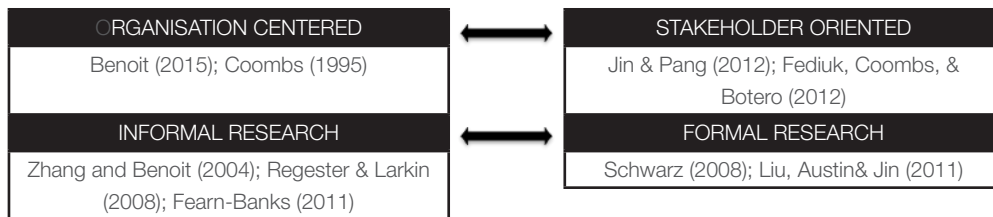


Figure 2. Spectra of crisis communication research approaches and some illustrative authors

### 5.2 Crisis communication theory spectra

In academia, a number of crisis communication theories have formed the basis of recent, more formal, study. The most significant can be grouped in four main areas:

- Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 1995, 2004, 2005, 2015)
- Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs 1995; Coombs & Holladay 1996; Schwarz 2008)
- Contingency Theory – applied to crisis communication (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot & Mitrook, 1997; Jin & Cameron, 2006, 2007; Jin, Pang & Cameron, 2007; Cameron, Pang & Jin, 2008;

- Hwang & Cameron, 2008; Pang, Jin & Cameron, 2012)
- Rhetorical approaches to crisis communication – inc. Discourse of Renewal (Hearit, 1994, 1996, 2001; Heath & Millar, 2004; Seeger et al, 2005; Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2012)

Specifically, we believe that theories of crisis communication therefore may be considered across four main spectra (fig. 3) - from structure/process/form oriented to symbolic/content oriented; from sender oriented to receiver oriented; from transmission oriented to interaction oriented; and from text oriented to context oriented.

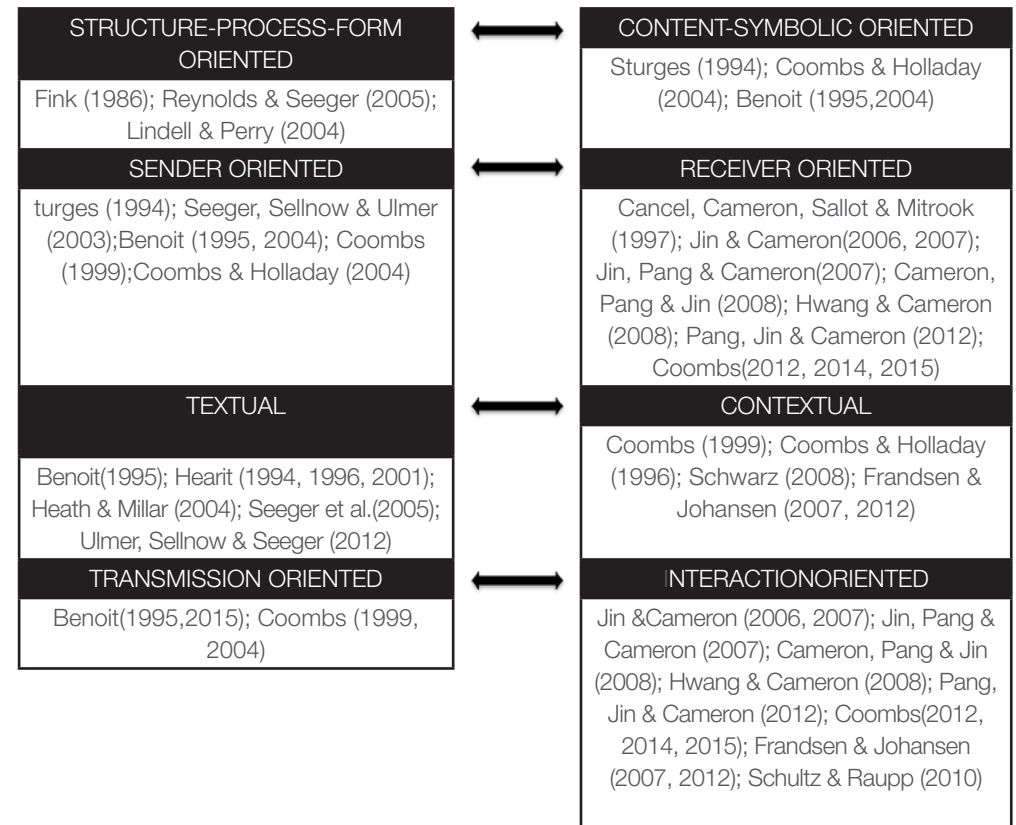


Figure 3. Spectra of crisis communication theories and some illustrative authors

We have thus identified broad spectra on which crisis management, crisis communication and theories of crisis communication may be considered. Our intention is to determine a similar spectra for our envisaged stakeholder-focused crisis communication research, but first it is necessary to understand the limitations of current conceptions of stakeholder-focused research.

## 6. Turning towards the stakeholder in crisis communication research – crisis consciousness and communities

In these early days of the ‘stakeholder turn’ it is important that we approach terminology and concepts clearly so that directions for future research maybe properly mapped and considered. For example, it is useful to understand whether research is being conducted into stakeholder reactions to crisis events, or their responses to crisis communication attempts (Schultz & Raupp, 2010); or whether ‘stakeholder’ refers to an individual or a group (assuming the term ‘stakeholder’ is appropriate over other terms in-use e. g. ‘publics’).

‘Stakeholder-focused’ crisis communication research has to date developed very firmly towards an emotions-led approach. Work on ‘stakeholder emotions during crisis’ (Coombs & Holladay, 2005; Coombs, Fediuk, & Holladay, 2007; Coombs & Holladay (2009); Jin & Cameron 2007; Jin, Pang & Cameron, 2007; Cameron et al. 2008; Choi & Lin, 2009; Jin, 2010; Kim & Cameron, 2011; Liu, Austin & Jin, 2011; Jin & Pang, 2012; Kim & Kioussis, 2012; Moon & Rhee, 2012; Jin, 2014; Jin, Liu & Austin, 2014; Jin et al., 2014) has been foregrounded recently in the belief that it will provide important information to inform organisational messaging that will have more positive effects on stakeholders and that will, in turn, ‘benefit the organisation’(Coombs & Holladay, 2014: 40). But at what point does an understanding of stakeholder emotion assist the crisis communicator? And can this truly be said to be a ‘stakeholder turn’ if the organisation is still being privileged? How might we break from the notion of the organisation being at the centre of a crisis, being responsible for deciding whether the crisis exists (‘calling the crisis’) and communicating to constituencies in an attempt to lessen the effects of the crisis?

A true stakeholder turn will need to encompass all notions of stakeholder and their likely responses – including whether they experience crisis in the same way as the organisation, with or without the organisation, as individuals or in groups, and whenever they wish to ‘call the crisis’, including with or without any form of media involvement.

Thus, further research clarity is required as we ‘turn’ towards the ‘stakeholder’. Perhaps we have merely ‘glanced in the direction of’ the stakeholder at present.

Any attempt to reconceptualise crisis in favour of the ‘object’ of a crisis and of crisis communication might also begin by questioning whether the term ‘stakeholder’ is even appropriate for the ‘turn’.

The term ‘stakeholder’ almost immediately privileges the organisation over others, since organisations traditionally seek to define stakeholders extending outwards from the organisation at the centre of a stakeholder map (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). ‘Objects’ of crisis communication would very rarely define themselves as stakeholders (or even as ‘stake seekers’). Thus the very use of the term ‘stakeholder’ can lead us to a ‘strategic view of relationships’ (Demetrious, 2013: 96 citing Greenwood, 2001: 8). And thus when applied to the study of crisis communication and in relation to the call for research to shift away from an organisational perspective, the term becomes largely oxymoronic.

For the purposes of this analysis, we have nevertheless favoured the use of the term ‘stakeholder turn’ although we recognise the interchangeability of language in the literature such as ‘stakeholder’ (from the business tradition, notably Freeman, 1984), ‘publics’ (from the sociology/political theory tradition, notably Dewey, 1927; Blumer, 1946) and ‘receivers’ (from the media studies tradition, although a contested term).

The term stakeholder may also be assumed to mean an individual and this may or may not be useful in considering crisis communication. The literature is schizophrenic on whether a crisis can be a crisis a) if the organisation does not believe it to be so and, b) if only one ‘stakeholder’ believes it to be so.

Coombs (2015) argues that crises exist whenever individuals experience them or believe them to exist. This view of a crisis being in the ‘eye of the beholder’ (Fediuk et al, 2012: 640) supports the view that organisations cannot ‘call their own crises’. Yet researchers have also previously stated that ‘One individual alone does not create a crisis event’ (Fediuk et al., 2012: 652). This is confusing. If crisis is in the eye of the beholder, then viewing crisis from a stakeholder perspective means accepting that one individual can experience a crisis with an organisation on their terms (with or without the organisation acknowledging it) that results in a turning point in the relationship and a possible breakdown of that relationship. Further, if an organisation ‘calls its own crisis’ (often only as a result of traditional news media involvement) then most customer service issues do not fall into the definition of crisis. If customer service issues form an important consideration in social media crises, then these also fall out of current definitions of crisis, becoming ‘paracrises’ (Coombs, 2014).

But if we reconceptualise crisis as a turning point in an OPR, a customer service issue does become a crisis for an organisation if a customer has reached a turning point in their relationship with that organisation such that they are minded to call time on that relationship. Perhaps we are looking in the wrong place for crisis if we rely on definitions of crisis that include media involvement, or we leave the responsibility for ‘calling the crisis’ with the organisation and perhaps our current, conflated conceptions of crisis, crisis management and crisis communication are not helping.

Coombs has recognised crises as relational damage i.e. 'episodes in the ongoing relationship between an organization and its stakeholders' (Coombs, 2000: 73). Crises as relational damage resulting from stakeholder views has yet to be explored in the same way that major events that attract media attention have been explored.

We venture therefore that any moment where a stakeholder experiences crisis in the OPR should be viewed as a crisis by the organisation, and relational damage should be expected with reputational damage to follow as a result of a decline in OPR.

Psychologists have defined individual crises as cognitive states. They occur directly or indirectly in response to our interactions in complex networks of social relationships (and the social constructions that result from this) and can be as a result of '1) a human condition; 2) a moral failing; 3) a psychological disturbance; and 4) a faulty mode of social interaction' (Maloney, 1971: 258, adapted from Siegler et al., 1968).

Thus as a cognitive state, a crisis can be a crisis for one individual simply because it makes sense to them to be so, possibly as a result of a 'faulty mode of social interaction'. Organisations entering into transactional or longer social relationships with individuals would be wise to heed that.

Thus a crisis may be a crisis if either party in the relationship believes it is, but rarely do stakeholders operate individually. Indeed the term as originally imagined by Freeman (1984) defines a stakeholder as 'any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives' (1984: 46) and Starik (1994: 90) as those who 'are or might be influenced by, or are or potentially are influencers of, some organization'.

Thus the stakeholder may be viewed as both an individual and one that operates socially with others. Here, we might do well to consider the notion from political theory that a 'crisis is first and foremost a public concept, spoken by members of a public to other members of a public about a publicly constituted object' (Milstein 2015: 148) and we are increasingly drawn to the notions of 'crisis consciousness' and 'crisis communities' (Milstein, 2015) as we approach considerations of what a 'stakeholder turn' in crisis communication research really means.

Milstein argues that a crisis consciousness:

- 'depends on the ability of people to make claims about the crisis and having those claims mutually recognized by others involved in the process of diagnosing and responding to the crisis' (forming a crisis community which) 'comprises those people who experience the effects of the crisis and who therefore might claim a stake in its outcome. A distinguishing feature of the crisis community is it does not necessarily correspond to any already existing community, nor can it be reliably be derived directly from existing forms of social and political organisation' (Milstein, 2015:151).

A crisis can be perceived by an individual who will then seek to influence and draw others into their thinking, creating a crisis consciousness and community. The organisation need play no part in it and, indeed, there are examples where the organisation simply did not exist and yet a 'crisis' still occurred.

## 7. The crisis eco-system - when crises do not conform to notions of crisis

To further highlight the shortcomings of current receiver-focused crisis communication research, we next consider two paradigmatic cases which demonstrate the difficulties in applying the presently dominant notion of crisis and the complications of considering a 'stakeholder turn' in crisis communication research: BES and Lehman Brothers.

The first is the case of the Portuguese bank BES (Banco Espírito Santo), the financial arm of Espírito Santo Group (GES) and the second biggest bank (assets) in Portugal. BES, supporting an insolvent GES, reported losses of 3.577 billion Euros for the first half of 2014, which would, in turn, threaten its own survival.

Recognising consequences on the entire European banking system if BES were to fail, the Bank of Portugal in conjunction with the country's securities markets authority, the CMVM, 'under direct supervision of the European Commission's DG Comp', intervened. On 31 July 2014 the Portuguese Government passed urgent legislation to change the regulatory framework of the Portuguese financial system and the next day BES shares were suspended until further notice, the bank having already lost 40.3% of its market value.

On 3 August 2014 the Bank of Portugal unveiled the plan to rescue the bank, which consisted of pumping 4.9 billion Euro into the 'troubled bank' and splitting it into two entities, a 'good bank', called Novo Banco, to house its healthy assets and a 'bad bank' for its riskier assets. The bailout wasn't made with public funding but through a fund owned and financed by the entire banking system that allowed the Portuguese Prime Minister to assert that the resolution wouldn't have consequences to Portuguese taxpayers (Antunes, 2014; Económico, 2014; Suspiro, 2014).

In effect, the organisation at the centre of the crisis (BES) had 'disappeared' but this did not prevent, from 5 August onwards, a multitude of stakeholders seeking out targets for their protests at the resolution (splitting and bailout); especially shareholders (small stockholders and institutional ones) and bondholders, but also, opposition political parties, civil society movements, capital markets analysts, media reporters and commentators.

Suddenly, but expectedly, the attributions of responsibility moved from BES to the Portuguese



Government, Bank of Portugal, CMVM, EC and even the European Central Bank. There was not an organisation in crisis anymore. Instead, a network of entities was dragged into a crisis because they were somehow related with the crisis event evolution. Crisis contagion had occurred through a complex network of OPR which resulted in the decline of OPR between stakeholders and a number of organisations to whom they could attribute blame. No one organisation existed to 'call a crisis' and a crisis consciousness developed within a crisis community which sought redress.

The second case study relates to Lehman Brothers Holdings, Inc., the fourth-largest U.S. investment bank which was involved in the largest bankruptcy proceeding in U.S. history. As Wiggins et al (2014) highlight, Lehman's activity was characterized by '(1) a highly-leveraged, risk-taking business strategy supported by limited equity; (2) a culture of excessive risk-taking; (3) complicated products and corporate structures that spread operations and risks across borders, and (4) regulatory gaps that ignored the systemic risks posed by large global firms'(2014:1). Its business strategy called for regular capital issue (billions of USD) to maintain its activities.

In 2006, Lehman Brothers started to invest assertively in real-estate-related assets and shortly after it had important exposures to housing and subprime mortgages, just as these started to show problems (subprime mortgage industry crisis in 2007). In order to stay afloat, Lehman decided to embark on extremely uncertain financial and dubiously ethical business actions but, on 10 September 2008, having being unsuccessful in these attempts to raise more capital, reported an expected \$5.6 billion in write-downs on its toxic assets and an expected loss of \$3.93 billion for its third quarter. It also announced that it planned to spin off \$50 billion of its toxic assets into a publicly traded corporation in order to separate them from the remaining "healthy" firm' (Wiggins et al., 2014: 9). Lehman tried desperately to find new business partners with the help of the U.S. Treasury (and other government agencies) however it was unsuccessful and on 15 September 2008 Lehman's filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection because it was incapable of funding its business activities (Harvard Business School, n.d.; Investopedia, n.d.; Wiggins et al, 2014)

As in the BES case, the collapse of Lehman Brothers left a mass of entities subjected to a crisis without an obvious attributional target, and with no organisation left to 'call a crisis'. The main protagonist no longer existed and the highly affected stakeholders had to find new targets on which to focus their anger and anxiety.

With so many questions without answers, stakeholders' first attention was to the primary regulators namely the SEC, the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME), which regulated certain derivatives, the Office of Thrift Supervision, which supervised Lehman's thrift subsidiary, and the New York Federal Reserve Bank (NYFED). Collaterally the U.S. Treasury was the object of several enquiries and unpleasant questioning. The crisis had become contagious and again the attacks and attributions of responsibility from the stakeholders shifted from the original involved actor (and originator of the crisis) to others as the original actor.

In both cases as crises progressed we can observe (from the crises' stakeholder's perspective) adjustments to the target, attributions and narratives, and substantial modifications in the arrangements of the entire crises' systems. The crisis in each case persisted with a different focus, in each case a social issue that was no longer proprietary to a specific company or organisation, which was originally linked to it.

In order to explain this we introduce the notion of crisis ecosystem which we define as a group of interconnected entities, formed by the interaction of a community of actors with their environment originating from an issue of relevance to all the involved parties. The crisis ecosystem incorporates the concepts of crisis community and crisis consciousness as suggested by Milstein (2015).

The ecosystem (ie the affected community and its 'consciousness') therefore emerges from the recognition of the crisis effects over the entire network of actors. Millstein explains:

- 'The experience of crisis begins with real effects and with the attribution of these effects to the idea that something in the social world is functioning radically out of synch with expectations. But how these effects are understood and the necessary courses of action depend heavily on what those expectations are and the normative orientations that motivate them.' (Milstein, 2015:151)

Seen from this angle the crisis ecosystem is not organised according to the assumptions of the organisation-focused stakeholder theory of the firm (in which management issues are defined by the focal organisation which categorises and characterise its stakeholders) and crisis cannot be seen as something that happens exclusively to a firm/organisation. In our view a crisis develops in an issue-focused multi-stakeholder network (originated from a crisis issue or event) and progresses according to the stake each stakeholder has in it and the comparative power, urgency and legitimacy each one presents ('stakeholder salience' as proposed by Mitchell, Agle and Wood, 1997).

In a different context the concept of issue-focused multi-stakeholder networks has already been explored (Rollof, 2007; 2008) and the idea of multi-stakeholder networks is also hardly new (Rowley, 1997), however conceived this way in the realm of the analysis of crisis communication, it is a concept which raises several questions and opens new avenues for discussion, analysis and research as we begin to explore a 'stakeholder turn'. Any firm/organisation becomes then a member or participant in a multi-stakeholder network organised around a crisis issue; an actor as so many others. These networks become issue driven (Rollof, 2007; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003).

Relevant however is that the crisis issue produces contradictions and confrontations between stakeholders due to conflicts in expectations about the roles and positions of each stakeholder in the crisis ecosystem, crisis community and in the issue network. In this sense the principle of

the creation of social capital in stakeholders relationships and networks (Garriga Cots, 2011) is inverted and the crisis represents a depreciation of stakeholders networks' social capital.

Correspondingly we may anticipate different levels of stakeholder activity and influence according to:

1. their embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985) in the crisis ecosystem, community and issue network;
2. the stake they have in the issue development; and
3. their degree of problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition (the well-known independent variables proposed by Grunig (1983) in his Situational Theory of Publics) which reveal their degree of crisis consciousness (Milstein, 2015).

In this context, the concept of rhetorical crisis arenas (Frandsen & Johansen, 2012; Coombs et al., 2013) can be fully understood. Only in the context of a crisis ecosystem and crisis community is it possible to approach crisis communication from a multi-vocal perspective that is established when 'an arena opens up where a multitude of voices (actors) meet, compete, collaborate or negotiate' (Frandsen & Johansen, 2012:14). This in the realm of the stakeholder theory of the firm is characterised as stakeholder multiplicity defined by Neville & Menguc as 'the degree of multiple, conflicting, complimentary, or cooperative stakeholder claims' (Neville & Menguc, 2006: 377) which in our perspective additionally explains patterns of interaction, and arrangement (with inherent levels of activity and influence) in an issue-driven, multi-stakeholder network typical of crisis situations.

## 8. Future directions for crisis communication research

Thus the organisation is not required for a crisis to exist. Some form of relationship with an organisation (or previous relationship with a previously existing organisation is) and it is the degradation of the relationship that creates the crisis. Nor is the traditional industrial news media required for a crisis to exist. A social media 'customer service incident' can become a crisis if it collects sufficient traction for a group of individuals to form a consciousness and a crisis community around that. The eco-system of a crisis will contain dissenting voices and supporting voices in different arenas within the eco system. A crisis can become contagious, if the crisis community or individuals within it believes it should. A true 'stakeholder turn' in crisis communication should recognise this and theorise for it.

The re-appraisal of crisis as a 'faulty mode' in a relationship would free us from what Edwards describes as a 'closed logical loop' (2013: 13) in Public Relations research of the 'object' that results from definitional privileging of the organisation.

Having explored our considerations of crisis in the literature and identified cases that do not easily fit current definitions, we suggest therefore the need to design a new research agenda for 'receiver-focused' crisis communication research ie one that does not privilege the firm. Taking the 'spectra' approach, we now conceptualise such a research agenda in figure 4, to form both the basis for our own next stages but also as a map of the terrain as we see it for others to comment upon. We have acknowledged current receiver-focused research based on a spectra from stakeholder responses to crisis and stakeholder responses to crisis communication attempts; and we have considered current stakeholder emotions-based crisis research on a spectra from individual response to the group (or community/consciousness) perspective. We believe, however, there are additional spectra that remain under-explored.

We believe, for example, that research can occupy the spectra between a crisis recognised by an organisation and that 'called' by stakeholders, and we have recognised the research that might be required on the spectra which involves an organisation on the one hand and a contagious and complex network reaction on the other. Our own immediate focus of research might occupy a number of these spectra, but in particular, that which differentiates a crisis from 'heightened media activity as a result of a major event' to 'crises resulting from a decline in OPR'. Having presented our 'groundwork' in this paper, we are now moving on to design empirical research to test our notions with a view to providing new insight for the body of crisis communication knowledge.

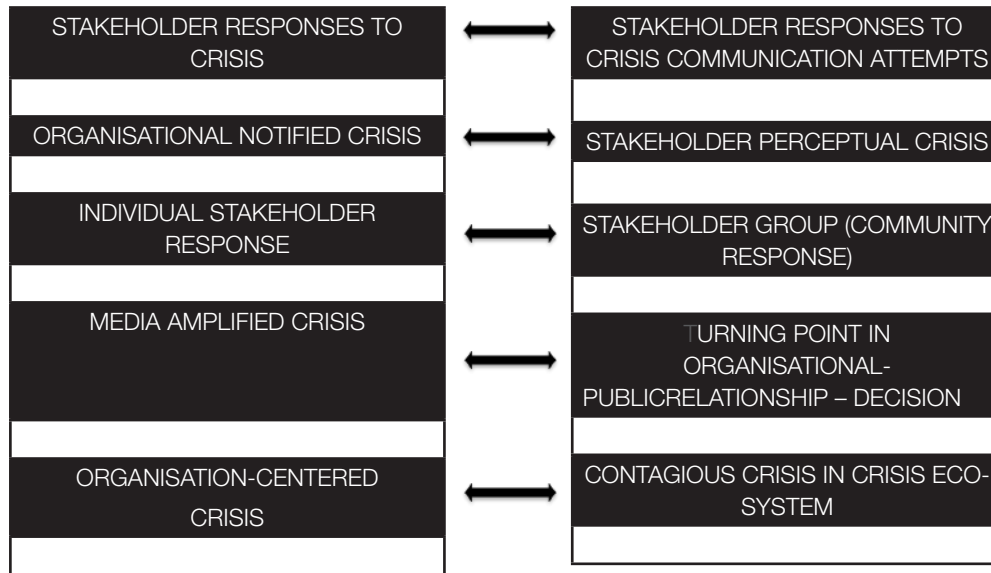


Fig 4. Spectra of future of crisis communication research

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## 3

## The Integration of Public Relations within a Media Context: the Impact of PR on Public Broadcasting—an Evolving Saga

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### Abstract

Through a case study of a nonprofit organization connected with both state and federal government levels, an organizational-public relations (OPR) analysis of a federally mandated relationship within this context illustrates the role of a public/community relations perspective developing through boundary spanning effort for over a span of eight years. An ethnographic analytical approach in this PR study established the means by which both ethical and strategic functions were communicated in the interface of the staff, Board of Directors' PR representative, and the community advisory board (CAB) as substantiated by the participants' experience. The results indicated a lack of civil discourse among these key entities in what represents the most trusted media channel in the United States. The boundary spanning functions of the public relations role provided the communication expertise necessary to impact the participation toward a more ethical and strategic framework for civil discourse based on the framework of performatives fundamental to Speech Act Theory.

Keywords: public/community relations, civil Society/Civil discourse, Speech Act Theory, organizational-public relationships (OPR), ethnographic research for PR, PR boundary spanning functions, Public Service Media (PBS-NPR), CAB-Community Advisory Board

### 1. Introduction

Democracies flourish when there is credible, objective information from which the citizens can make decisions. In the United States, a non-partisan national public broadcasting system, that includes hundreds of member stations in the 50 states, provides a non-commercial voice in an ever growing list of media outlets.

Public broadcasting requires the support of the public since government (both state and federal) support has diminished. Yet, public broadcasting has a solid foundation of support with the public because it has true impact on the communities it serves. For instance, public television has been ranked as the most trusted public institution for 10 consecutive years. Citizens are ranking public television as the second best use of taxpayer dollars behind only military defense. When it comes to educational uses, public television is unsurpassed. PBS KIDS is the #1 Educational Media Brand (62% with second place Disney at 13%). Over 28,000 homeschooling families rely on PBS for instructional resources. Research shows that PBS KID'S content enhances kid's early literacy skills (naming letters 21%, letter sounds 37%, and understanding stories & print 12%). PBSKIDS.org averaged over 13 million unique visitors per month in 2012. Over 500,000 teachers use PBS LearningMedia for access to over 20,000 digital learning objects online and in the classroom. NOVA is the #1 video resource in U.S. high schools, providing critical STEM content in classrooms.

Public broadcasting is not only on television. The National Public Radio (NPR) network also provides high quality radio content to listeners. Public broadcasting, both National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), have evolved to include social media platforms. With this evolution in technology and an increased focus on serving the communities in the United States, these systems are now referred to as the Public Service Media. Despite the controversies about issues with the Public Service Media funding, the Hart Research Associates and American Viewpoint Voter Survey established that "nearly 70 percent of Americans support continued federal funding for public broadcasting" (APTS Action, Inc., February 2013). Indeed, the cost of public broadcasting per American, per year is only \$1.35 (Hart & American Viewpoint, 2013, p. 4).

This impact on communities is documented by well-defined guidelines for station operations. Both the Corporation of Public Broadcasting (CPB) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) provide specific expectations on the relationship between the local Public Service Media and its community. It is the purpose of this research to focus on the role of public relations as grounded in the ethical facilitation of communications between two highly federally regulated subgroups. This article is a case study of a local Public Service Media staff and the mandatory Community Advisory Board (CAB), a separate entity governed also by the chair of the Board of Directors.

When public broadcasting experiences internal communication problems, these problems affect the community. Thus, the internal and external communication of the public media has a direct influence on the information and educational context for citizens. Through an ethnographic research method, this study advances our understanding of the role of public

relations in building conditions for democracy by tracking the nature of the communication process among key constituents identified as key organizational publics to the infrastructure of a public broadcasting system.

## 2. Literature review

In many respects the public relations practitioner is viewed as the facilitator of functions “to create (and re-create) the conditions that enact civil society” (Taylor, 2012, p.7). How the practitioner reaches this level of contribution in society seems to be affected by two areas of concern: the need for an ethical foundation and qualified public relations professionals—academic and practitioners.

In a study on “Ethics in College and University Public Relations,” Frank Wylie focused on the idea of ethics and the two primary components of the concept: 1) the responsibility of performing one’s duties in an ethical manner, and 2) the responsibility of performing one’s duties in a capable manner. Basically he was comparing the ethical and moral foundation of a person with the “experienced pragmatist,” similar such functions attributed to those in the profession of public relations (Wylie, 1989, p. 63). Blending the two areas within a professional domain brings together a set of attitudes, disciplinary standards, skills, aptitudes, experiences, and knowledge focused on facilitating, managing, and leading communities within societal ideals, especially those of democracy.

### 2.1 Ethical framework

Ethics in public relations always stimulates lots of discussions. The ethical dimension initially focused on early human development. The basic human sense of a moral compass is often most influenced by family, school, church, and community. On the basis of these early interactive social experiences, students enter the academic process with a moral framework and/or attitudes toward social responsibility.

The shift to a professional view of ethics is purported by Coombs and Holliday as the “ethic of care” (Coombs & Holliday, 2007, p. 33). The essential tenet of this perspective is described by these authors as based on the writing of a feminist author.

The ethic of care is closely associated with the work of Carol Gilligan, a feminist writer who viewed interdependence as central to ethical behavior. An ethic of care places the focus of ethics on “maintaining connections and nurturing the web of relationships.” The recognition of the importance of the relationships fits well with our view of public relations as managing mutually influential relationships within a web of stakeholder and organizational relationship. (p. 32)

It remains to clarify how those in the public relations professional are “responsible for

a capable” execution of professional duties. The struggle to accomplish a professional level on ethical grounds established in the ethics of care concerns a number of elements, including the development of professionalism within the discipline of public relations.

### 2.2 Professional domain

The development of public relations as a discipline to enable professionals to focus on “performing one’s duties in a capable manner” continues to be a challenge in the public relations profession. For example, over the years a series of recent Public Relations Commissions (1998, 2006, and 2009) convened to formulate and address the educational standards for undergraduate and graduate public relations curriculum. Once these recommendations were established, the efforts turned to encouraging schools to adopt these standards.

To further support the development of ethical and capable public relations, various professional groups were formed for students, academics, and practitioners. These professional associations, while being primarily developed in the areas of communication studies, mass communication, journalism, and public relations, were also based on a foundation around an ethical framework. Communication study scholars focused on the ancient rhetoricians as well as the more modern theorists like Kenneth Burke for the ethical dimension. As mentioned, other communication studies scholars like Coombs and Holliday focused on the “ethics of care.”

Journalism looks toward the basic ethical tenets in being an outside observer of the world. Reporting what one sees as independent is viewed more objective when a variety of sources are tapped to weigh in on the interpretation and personal opinion is distanced.

More recently the certification and accreditation of public relations programs at universities and colleges is being further supported by the individual accreditation and certification of college students and professionals working in the field of public relations. These recognitions not only designate these individuals as capable but provide a greater sense of recognition for excellence in the discipline.

Capable also means there is a Body of Knowledge guiding the discipline. For public relations the stream of research emanates from several perspectives. These approaches to the study of public relations represent primarily the types of departments housing public relations programs. Most of this literature developed in the 80s is codified in association records, journals, and scholarly textbooks (Neff, 2010). Establishing a Body of Knowledge, a higher education curriculum, and recognition through the accreditation/certification of programs and individuals in the profession establishes not only a foundation for producing “capable” professionals in the discipline—academics and practitioners—but illustrates the intertwining of ethics in the process (Neff, 2008). Ethics must be ever present to support the view that the professional in public relations is capable.

## 3. Communication Defined as a Fit for Democracy



The essence of “linguaging” is key to how discourse supports the process of building a civil society. The discipline of public relations is particularly poised as a communication-based process to impact the course civil society takes to assure discourse as democratic. Discourse potential is particularly important as underdeveloped countries aspire to a democracy but have not yet found the path and/or training to enact the nature of the process. The communicative ability to have an exchange of ideas with an agreement on the nature of the outcome, even if a compromise, is often cited as a missing link for those not experienced in the nature of the democratic process where multiple views are heard.

The field of public relations relies heavily on traditional forms of research: surveys, interviews, focus groups, and/or experimental approaches. Yet when one reflects on the nature of civil discourse, these methodological approaches seems inadequate in explaining the basic nature of democracy in action. There are inadequacies in current public relations research efforts in explaining the important function of the communication needed for building a civil society. To address this gap, this particularly research article focuses on nation building through civic discourse.

It is an experience outlined in an incident described below that indicates the need for a more ethnographic focus in future public relations research. Ethnographic research, for example, is a methodology connecting more closely to the nature of discourse, especially as an exchange grounded in performatives testing speech acts, as a more active communication building process. Speech acts specifically serve as the building process for shared communication toward speech for action not simply information exchange without “conditions of satisfaction” being fully negotiated among participants. As the public relations discipline attends to discourse as among its highest priorities, the opportunity to examine such discourse as a critical aspect of bringing about relationships in communities or on a larger scale of nation building becomes an opportunity to view the PR function within a democratic environ.

### 3.1 Journal article inspires understanding of role of public relations in civic discourse

The inspiration for revealing the value of the public relations literature on democracy initially originated, for me, from a discussion on a journal article on civil society and the role of public relations. The incident emerged from a fortuitous meeting with two other U.S. academics also travelling abroad.

While teaching at a summer conference in Croatia for Zagreb and Zadar universities in the town of Dubrovnik, another group of students with two U.S. academic mentors studying languages were attending sessions near our conference headquarters. In a casual morning meeting, the mentors mentioned how intriguing an article focused on nation building through public relations was to them (in our introductions we included our academic areas of interest). We agreed to meet and to discuss the research after dinner.

Meeting on the roof top of a hotel built into a cliff, seemed surreal when a crumpled copy of a public relations journal article was presented for intense scrutiny. The moon was very bright that

night and the Adriatic Sea lit up in sparkles when the beams of moonlight were twinkling off the ripples below. As the three of us discussed the nature of civil society into the night, the discussion led to, what these academics expressed as an amazing revelation: the role of public relations in building society, especially in the world of public policy. Public relations, as viewed in this article, is critical and central to bringing about a democratic society. Notably there was a need to provide more understanding on public relations in this instance, but the impact of the journal article was strong enough to overcome the often stereotypical perception of the discipline quite early into the discussion. This journal article revealed to these academics a public relations discipline never experienced before (Author notes, Summer 2004).

I never imagined a journal article could bring about such a serious discussion with colleagues outside the public relations discipline. Yet these non-PR academics pursued enthusiastically the principles outlined by Taylor as incredibly important: “where public relations can offer a strategic approach for relationship building” (Taylor, 2000, p. 207). This incident powerfully established the importance of research in public relations, especially in terms of understanding the role of public relations within the relationships between an organization and its publics to build a civil society. Yet the problem of how to capture this potential dynamic communication process remained. It was this dilemma suggesting the need for a closer focus of the discourse among parties that needed to be captured and addressed. Only the ethnographic methodology, the assessment of the dialogic/interactive communication, seemed to be appropriate for the assessment needed. Identifying the building blocks and nature of the essence of the communication process seemed best suited to Speech Act Theory. SAT allowed the inequitable interaction among participants due to differentials in power and control to be more fully revealed.

### 3.2 Communication as a conduit for PR

Dialogic communication, or a two-way interactive exchange rather than one-way communication, is critical for the development of democracy. Drawing on Kenneth Burke, Heath notes that humans can be open to ideas about the “wrangle in the marketplace” or lean toward being dictatorial and stifle communication (2008, p. 38). The “wrangle” offers the opportunity to hear a variety of opinions; however, the nature of communication is affected by contexts and human tendencies—attitudes, opinions, and behavior. Plus, it is important to recognize that some contexts have a highly regulated environment and/or power constraints. These regulations and/or power control roles impact human interaction, especially in a communicative sense.

Thus in an environment where communication is mandated to be discourse, the participants must acknowledge the requirements not only in terms of being present but in the spirit of truly sharing ideas. When a Public Service Media organization learns to listen to its publics there are several steps that take place. These are outlined in *Why We’re Here: The Powerful Impact of Public Broadcasters When They Turn Outward* as the following: 1) know your communities, 2) focus on impact, 3) span boundaries, and 4) cultivate public innovators as catalysts for change (Harwood & Leavy, 2011, pp. 14-15). These four foundations parallel closely to the functions of

public relations. The role of public relations as a “boundary spanner” and thus knowledgeable among organizations and/or networks is widely recognized in the literature ( ). The expertise of public relations professionals provides a lens into viewing these functions as critical to building discourse toward a civil society, including the mandated situations.

There is a sequence of conditions necessary when “a civil society is a process grounded in rhetoric.” Taylor noted that “there must first be someone or some group that feels safe to create discourse” (2010, p. 8). Second, there must be “some trusted channels to carry the message” (p. 8). As mentioned in initial listing, Public Service Media (specifically public television) is the most trusted channel in the media sector and the high standards of the institution as protected by law and regulations, assures the courage and strength of commitment is maintained. Therefore, the focus on the communication process, the basis of a civil society, within this trusted context (channel) as facilitated within a public relations perspective, is essential to this discussion.

### 3.3 Framework for discourse.

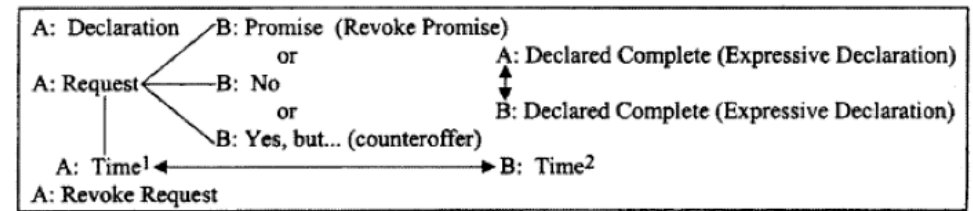
What should discourse be like in the most trusted institution in the United States (which happens to be a media channel dedicated to television) when interfacing with its publics? If civil discourse is to happen within Public Service Media, is there a model of interactivity to guide the process as outlined in Taylor’s article to “serve as a foundation for a public relations approach to nation building?” (Taylor, 2000, p. 180). The discussion should be centered on key principles according to Taylor but yet first meet the standards of Speech Act Theory as the framework of communication operations. Then the five key principles needed include: 1. levels of relationships necessary, 2. PR used strategically, 3. the negotiation of relationships, 4. the impact of social context, and 5. developing trust or control over one’s relationship.

This discussion brings the focus to a more nuanced level of concern. What does it mean to have ethical communication? How does dialogic meet the criteria of ethical communication? Does dialogic simply mean one allows another person to talk? What is the role of listening? How does one determine if there is a true ethical component within the dialogic framework? These questions need to be examined within the concept not often found addressed in the public relations literature—the concept of authentic communication.

## 4. Speech Act Theory: A Model of Conditions Necessary for Authentic Communication

The basic model for the communication process from a Speech Act perspective means while public relations is often at the center facilitating the communication process, there are other critical elements that need to be evident. For example, each Speech Act is filtered through public relations in terms of the inclusiveness of culture, an episode, the relationship, and from the perspective of self/public/organization. This approach was “described and developed by Austin and Searle and

later integrated into the work of the social philosopher Habermas” (Neff, 1998, p.94). A fuller explication of the dialectic form, fulfilling the need for characterizing the communication process in a grounded sense, is graphically developed from a Speech Act perspective in the figure below.



Note: “A” is the first speaker; “B” is the second speaker.

Figure 1. Model of Speech Act Theory in Dialectic Form

This Speech Act approach provides a fuller understanding of an exchange that fulfills an authentic interactive process and, consequently, a more ethnically based rhetorical process. Basically the process outlines communication for action which is not a simple information exchange but focused more on an intent toward reciprocity. There is a declaration of intent to announce the focus of the communication context. A specific request is evident from among the participants who are invited to respond. The choice points in a request offer the opportunity to participate in some form or to not participate. However, the response is configured as an opportunity for a voice to be heard. Equally important is the exchange where participants confirm the exchange is complete for them or the “conditions of satisfaction” are further negotiated. If any aspect of this model is absent, it is not likely that civic discourse is possible.

## 5. Methodology

To illustrate how useful ethnographic methodology is to understanding the underlying authentic intent of a person’s discourse, the comparison of traditional survey research with a confirmative ethnographic approach should establish the comparison and contrast needed for substantiation outcomes. For example, questionnaires on energy usage sent out to families indicated certain families felt their energy approach was thoughtful and led to conserving energy. However, when ethnographic teams were sent in to document the actual usage of energy, conflicting results were found. Families were actually visiting their refrigerators four times more often than indicated on the surveys. Other inconsistencies with the survey results were found. It was the ethnographic data that was confirmatory of “actions” or “behavior” (Family Research Institute, 1981).

In this same respect, researchers from the critical perspective have called for a

deeper analysis of the discourse from a public relations perspective. Thus the sense of more understanding is needed on how relationships are articulated, especially in terms of civil discourse, is crucial. It is important then to find a way to bring about more transparency to discourse as a means to discover what is missing, antagonistic to civil discourse, or not meeting the standards of intent to communicate towards action. The following public relations researchers emphasized these perspectives with greater detail.

Jackie L'Etang "pointed out in her research on public relations, culture, and anthropology, the limitations of current research in public relations" (L'Etang, 2012, pp.165-183). Her emphasis stressed the importance of going deeper into the public relations process. In fact, her assessment emphasizes that the further understanding of the public relations process may be truly hindered without an ethnographic emphasis integrated into our research agenda.

Lee Edwards noted the importance of moving away from the typical research approach in public relations stressing an ethnographic that focuses more on "hegemony." Edwards described this approach as the more "normative role of public relations and the benefits it offers to organizations and their publics, as a means of building relationships and achieving mutually beneficial outcomes" (Edwards, 2011, p. 30) .

Michael Palenchar summarized in this work on risk communication, that the "community's right-to-know programs are increasingly important functions of public relations within communities" (Palenchar, 2008, p. 1). To capture this process, Palenchar utilized the ethnographic methodological approach as a case study of participant observations (p. 9). Perhaps essential to this effort was "beyond the community right-to-know initiatives " as mandated federally, there must be that enough communication to share to bring about impact in the community. Thus public relations not only has to impart the intent of the federal mandate to the community but must assess and monitor the discourse. Palenchar stresses that "public relations practitioners and scholars have a community and global responsibility to communicate for social impact" (Palenchar, 2008, p. 22).

### 5.1 Research Questions

The following research questions were developed from the public relations literature focused on social impact, especially the application of the ethnographic methodological approach in a case study context. Other documents relating to the federal, state, and Public Service Media standards were utilized to provide a framework for the analysis. These research questions included:

**RQ1:** How does ethnography capture organizational and public communication processes for analyzing from a public relations perspective?

**RQ2:** How does Speech Act Theory's (SAT) performatives explain the nature of a mandated relationship in terms of civil discourse?

These research questions guiding the analysis of a case study of a mandated OPR

relationship are described more fully below.

## 6. Case Study: Developing a Mandated Relationship Between an Organization and its Publics (OPR)—A Public Service Media Model

Public broadcasting as now known as Public Service Media in this case study focuses on a complex model of an organizational-public relationship (OPR) were Community Advisory Boards (CAB) are mandated and monitored for assuring community input. Government regulations, both on the federal and state levels, provide funding, grant opportunities, networking among sites, and a multitude of interconnections and partnerships with publics. However, along with these resources come many regulations and standards which are carefully watched and continually reported on. While a PSM environment is so trusted and dedicated to education, public affairs, the arts, and community needs, the OPR relationship must be carefully researched to assure compliance. The mere reporting of meetings held (minutes) and a list of CAB qualified members is not adequate input into a process intended to encourage a democratic process.

Specifically, in this context, the OPR relationship between the organization (Public Service Media) and its publics (represented by the Community Advisory Board) is a required element as mandated by CPB (Corporate for Public Broadcasting) for both PBS (Public Broadcasting System) and NPR (National Public Radio) station(s). However, even with a requirement for a Community Advisory Board (CAB) for the public broadcasting systems, the current situation reflects the requirement has not evolved successfully into an authentic, ethical, or interactive discourse based on relationships.

The challenge is to build relationships with publics in a station's broadcast "reach" within its domain of license. This goal is identified as one of the top priorities of the mission of the overarching governmental regulatory departments for Public Service Media and translates as such into the local station's mission and vision statement.

The nature of the challenge is complex, however. These concerns about the needs for an organizational public relationship (OPR) were addressed directly by public broadcasting consultants in a statewide meeting of public broadcasting stations in the Midwest in 2011. The action taken during the meeting suggested the depth of the concern.

### 6.1 Problem Identified Statewide.

Two consultants from Washington D.C. described this statewide meeting as a focus on what is identified as the primary obstacle to community development in public broadcasting: the CEO and/or general manager. In fact, the culmination of the meeting resulted in the members representing the community (board of directors and/or community advisory members) being gathered in a separate room from the station managers with the charge: "build a relationship with the community because the station administrators will never do it" (Meeting, 2011). This

approach, suggested by the federal government, was instantly rejected by the managers from the Midwest who run the statewide network of public broadcasting. The station managers' dismissed the consultants from further involvement with the project.

### 6.2 The Case: An Example of Complexity.

The case for this study focuses on a public broadcasting system that involves a television station, a radio station, and an interactive website. The television broadcasts to seven counties in one state and to a large urban area in an adjoining state. The radio station covers the seven counties defined by its site license. Both stations are PBS and NPR approved and thus an active Community Advisory Board (CAB) is required. However, the number of meetings allowed ranges from one annual to four quarterly, qualified CAB members match demographics (15 to 50 members representing the community), and minutes of meetings need to be recorded. A deeper reporting or analysis system is not required. Because so little attention was given to the advisory board, the BOD chair, prior to 2011 via the CEO, delegated the responsibilities of organizing CAB to a board representative with public relations expertise.

The President and CEO during this early time at this public broadcasting system was hired in 2002. The establishment of a Community Advisory Board (CAB) was not immediate. In fact, the community advisory board did not exist from the fall of 2002 until the spring of 2005. Establishing a Community Advisory Board did not occur until after the federal funding was approved for the television station. When this level of approval was established, a Community Advisory Board was mandated.

There are legal obligations or Community Advisory Board requirements for public broadcasting systems according to the Communication Act of 1934 (later revised in 1976 and 1991). Furthermore, the Board's manual devoted an entire section of the by-laws to the Community Advisory Board. The first section establishes an outline of the requirements for establishing a CAB board--the Membership Requirements, the Organizational Requirements, and the Meetings Requirements. The second section focused on the Responsibilities of CAB membership.

The by-laws for the organization thus reflected these legal obligations. However, the guidelines focused primarily on the makeup of the membership in terms of numbers (15 members up to 50 members) and "shall include a cross section of community interests, groups, and people." The by-laws continued to state other factors including "sex, race, occupation and geographic location." (Public Service Media By-laws, Board of Director Manual, 2011-2012). No standards were dictated as far as the quality of the OPR experience except to assure at least one to four meetings annually with minutes documented.

The presence of a BOD member as a BOD liaison with public relations expertise provided an opportunity to establish standards in communication for this federally mandated relationship. Public relations practitioners as boundary spanners are capable of documenting communication conditions and facilitating lines of communication. Therefore, this research effort brings forth criteria addressing the quality of the experience in terms of the opportunity to develop

civil discourse with authentic engagement within the most trusted institution in the United States, an important network since Public Service Media, as the official emergency network for the U.S., has national coverage extending to 95% of the nation.

### 6.3 The Micro-Analysis from a Public Relations Perspective

The analysis of eight years of CAB meetings relied on the boundary spanning role held by a public relations professional representing the board of directors. Given the responsibility by the CEO, the PR BOD member assumed the liaison responsibilities to develop CAB. Outlined by the by-laws, one key responsibility is to hold an annual or a maximum of quarterly meetings. Although CAB was to be independent of the CEO and staff according to the by-laws, the CEO only allowed two meetings a year and actually cancelled the second meeting in December, 2011. It was obvious the CEO imposed his will on CAB and resisted the implementation guidelines of the by-laws.

The effort to organize the community representatives from CAB and the station's Board of Directors to lead the OPR or organizational community relationship was identified in this Midwest case study as an opportunity to apply an ethnographic research method within a Speech Act Theory perspective analysis to establish an authentic example of public relations at its best—developing civil discourse within the most trusted source in the U.S.

The ethnographic documentation focused on identifying the performatives from a Speech Act Theory perspective (requests, promises, negotiating the conditions of satisfaction) with timelines. Information giving or exchanges did not qualify as "communication for action." According to the by-laws, the CAB board was responsible for developing their own agenda and community involvement. Such a role would require CAB to assume leadership responsibilities within the guidelines set by the by-laws. These key guidelines as outlined by the by-laws are the following:

1. The CAB shall advise the Board of Directors of the station with respect to whether the programming and other policies of the station are meeting the specialized educational and cultural needs of the communities served by the station, and may make such recommendations as it considers appropriate to meet such needs.
2. The role of the Community Advisory Board shall be solely advisory in nature, except to the extent other responsibilities are delegated to it by the Board of Directors of the station. In no case shall the CAB have any authority to exercise any control over the daily management or operation of the station. (Board of Directors Manual, 2011-2012).

With this in mind, the following CAB meetings were documented and assessed for the evidence of performatives (speech acts for intent to communicate for action) beginning in 2006 (the first year for CAB meetings) as a case study of a Midwest Public Service Media system (television, radio, and interactive website).

#### Table 1

Community Advisory Board (CAB) meetings

*Year One Meeting Analysis: Spring and Fall, 2006 (Only Television)*

The CEO totally dominated the hour session with the CAB representatives. The public relations board representative simply observed the control the CEO issued with his strong one-way communication.

**PR Facilitator:** Any attempt to encourage CAB members to speak up was quickly interrupted by the CEO's verbal control of the conversation. There was no opportunity for CAB to meet independently from the CEO either. The by-laws state the CAB chair (at this point no CAB elections were allowed) is in charge of CAB meetings. The CEO only serves CAB, if requested by the CAB chair. Guidelines on frequency of meetings as allowed as the bylaws state "not less than annually and not more than quarterly" meetings can be held (Board of Directors Manual, 2011-2012).

**Participants' responses during debriefing:** "The GM seemed so well versed on public broadcasting," "appreciated being updated on the public broadcasting developments," "unaware of most of what was mentioned" (either did not watch much—since only television was established at this time—or had a limited program connection and did not read the organization's member magazine or the newspaper listings of programming). The CAB members simply looked mesmerized by the CEO's command of facts. The meeting did not support the communication process as outlined in Speech Act Theory (no performatives only one-way information was evident) with the CEO controlling the information. a one-way communication flow.

*Year Two Meeting Analysis: Spring and Fall, 2007 (Only Television)*

The meetings over this phase were less well attended by the CAB membership. The CEO's ability to control the one hour meetings for each season with dense information continued.

**PR Facilitator:** Since interaction was not allowed by the CEO, another strategic approach was introduced. The public relations board representative developed a series of questions to be responded to by the CAB members. This approach accomplished two goals: 1) the CAB members fully participated and their comments were recorded on large sheets of newsprint, 2) the notes were later written up and distributed to the CAB members, the BOD PR Representative, and the CEO and staff. Notably the content of the meeting was solely the CAB written comments (took an entire hour to record the member responses who were very interested in responding to the questions). The sheets of newsprint arranged on the walls of the meeting room (markers provided) had such titles as: Favorite Program, How do you obtain information about public television (programming, schedules, events, word-of-mouth-WOM). However, the results were never discussed nor utilized by the CEO or the CAB members.

**Participants' responses during debriefing:** The CAB members were very involved in responding

to the various aspects of their personal experience in public broadcasting. Although the detail was very useful input, the CEO and the chair of the board did not participate and an authentic interactive exchange did not happen. The CEO and BOD chair did not seem to be threatened about the approach but were not interactive with the CAB members either. The CAB responses to the process included: "wonderful to see the perspectives of other CAB members," "interesting how public broadcasting is discovered," and "wonder how this information will be used?" Again, in the second year only one-way information was evident. Except now the direction of the information flow in the latter instance was from CAB to the CEO/staff. Again, no performatives were evident.

*Year Three Meeting Analysis: Spring and Fall, 2008 (Only Television)*

The lack of interactivity, virtually a standoff between staff and CAB board, resulted in less attendance by the CAB members and more confusion about their role and purpose.

**PR Facilitator:** The CEO is coached by the BOD PR Representative to "ask questions" rather than simply lecture to the CAB members. The first instance of the CEO asking a question revealed how insecure he was. The CEO addressed a community person who was not a member of CAB but a substitute for a regular member. This substitute attendee was uninformed about CAB and simply was asking questions more from the point-of-view of a parent's interest in broadcasting programming. The CEO seemed to pick this opportunity to turn the tables and "ask" a question knowing full well the person responding was not well informed. This is an example of how difficult and feared the CEO was of two-way communication. He selected an opportunity where he could not fail. Note: the CEO never asked another question.

**Participants' responses during debriefing:** The attendance was now down to three CAB members. The reliance on the CEO for information continued. Again, the communication process never entered into a speech act performative communication process.

*Year Four Meeting Analysis: Spring and Fall, 2009 (Radio Added by 1/1/09)*

Establishing a radio station provided another avenue of focus for the CEO. To fill the time of the meeting, the CEO asked the vice president of radio to the CAB meeting to expand on the new radio developments. At this point, the meeting reverted back to the original pattern of the CEO controlling the discourse. The radio vice president was the only one addressed to speak by the CEO.

**PR Facilitator:** By integrating staff into the CAB meeting, the discourse reverted to the original pattern with now more staff participants dominating the one-way information flow. This communication process reverted to the earlier phase of one-way communication by controlling the communication on an information level. Although now the CAB members did ask a few questions for clarification, the level of interaction remained on the information level—not even

information exchange.

**Participants' responses during debriefing:** Although the PR/Chair of the board of directors was now directly responsible for CAB, the presence of a very controlling CEO and BOD chair remained an obstacle. The CAB members were appreciative of the information delivered by the CEO. However, the attendance was very minimal as the lack of engagement over time created less interest in attending these meetings.

*Year Five Analysis: Spring and Fall, 2010 (Television & Radio)*

The BOD PR Representative finally resorted to directly counseling the CEO to acknowledge the Board of Directors as the governance authority over CAB--not the CEO.

**PR Facilitator:** In response to the advice as outlined in the by-laws, the CEO warned the staff "not to talk" at the next meeting. This overreaction resulted in the meetings being awkward since the CEO's attitude openly displayed arrogance and disdain for the process.

**Participants' responses during debriefing:**

Again, there were few CAB members attending the meetings. The CAB members did not feel comfortable in assuming an independent voice with the CEO's attitudes of contempt displayed at the meeting. Although these sessions were primarily information flow, the PR BOD representative had to ask questions to keep the process going as the CEO and staff were reluctant to engage. The CEO's intimidating manner kept CAB members from participating, too.

*Year Six Meeting Analysis: Spring & Fall, 2011 (PR Member Assumes Chair Position)*

With the PR Representative on the BOD moving up to the chair position, the CAB recruitment process as outlined in the by-laws was implemented. Application forms were developed, agreement forms with standards and requirements outlined were established and if a candidate was accepted the nominee was presented to the full BOD for approval. The fall meeting was cancelled by the CEO (he had no authority to do this).

**PR Facilitator:** The community board requested the CEO's administrative assistant to take minutes and send out the minutes with the meeting notice. The agenda is developed now by the CAB chair and the BOD chair (who is also the PR representative). Preparation for CAB meetings no longer focused on just programming areas of concern from "what programs do you like" but evolved to questions that involved more of a conceptual or issue-oriented perspective. Instead of asking "Which programs do you like?" CAB members were asked to assess "The value of a program to a particular audience such as a children's program."

**Participants' responses during debriefing** The attendance, even with more frequent meetings,

is now representative of nearly the full CAB board membership. Although the staff attends, the CAB members are interacting by initiating more questions. No requests have emerged yet. However, there is for the first time interactivity between the staff and CAB—although the interaction remained on the information exchange level.

*Year Seven Analysis: Spring and Fall, 2012 (Interim Co-CEOs/Presidents)*

The CEO leaves in the fall and BOD co-chairs assume his responsibilities (one is the PR representative). Now there are quarterly meetings. The cancellation of the Fall 2011 meeting (although only one meeting is required) resulted in a warning from CPB during an audit. CPB indicated more guidelines were to be added about announcing upcoming meetings on a variety of platforms in a timely manner.

**PR Facilitator:** The CAB board elects officers. The CAB members are making at least 3 requests per meeting (focused on developing the executive board). The members are more in charge of where meetings are occurring and are requesting the information they want. This has resulted in 9 requests with promises made in all instances (willing to serve in a position). Timelines are being negotiated. Now the by-laws are being reviewed with the CAB members to help them understand their leadership role.

**Participants' responses during debriefing:** The CAB members are still learning about the potential of their responsibilities. Once the infrastructure is solidified and the orientation is accomplished the evolution to assuming more of a role in assessing community needs should be better established. As noted the request performative is being utilized and conditions of satisfaction are processed.

*Phase Eight Analysis: Spring and Fall, 2013(Interactive Website 3/29 Starts; New CEO Begins May 20th)*

Under the co-interim CEO/President arrangement, the process selecting CAB members continues to be developed and quarterly meetings continue to be arranged. Meanwhile, a national search for a new CEO was successfully conducted.

**PR Facilitator:** Expansion of CAB membership is the focus of much effort at this time. Also, establishing more of a training regimen for new members will enable engagement to be more effective and immediate. The PR BOD Representative needed to assure the staff that their participation was valued too and the effort was to move toward a dialogic (discussion) mode. Essentially the PR Rep did a lot of perception checking to assure the Speech Act conceptual process was fulfilled. However, the intervening factors moving the process into a higher level of discourse included: 1) the PR Rep became the chair of the board and 2) the CEO left the

organization and 3) in the interim the PR Rep/board chair became also the interim acting as co-President & CEO. The documentation of performatives established the first strong indication of the Speech Act Theory being implemented: Requests: 5; Promises 8; Negotiation of Conditions of Satisfaction: 2.

**Participants' responses during debriefing:** The CAB members are being asked to read *Why We're Here*. From this reading the potential for "communication for action" should be evident. Also, the new interactive website is very helpful in explaining Public Service Media.

#### 6.4 Discussion of Results.

The communication process examined during the eight years of this study focused on the Community Advisory Board meetings, a mandatory community advisory board for those Public Service Media (PSM) systems receiving funds from the federal government. The guidelines from the by-laws establish the chair of the BOD as having the oversight of CAB functions. However, the guidelines, as set by the FCC, did not provide the deep analysis needed to clearly identify the impact of the CAB role in community development.

By establishing the SAT standard of interaction in this case study (a framework of interactive performatives indicating intent for communicating for action), the lack of performatives evident in the communication process and the heavy reliance on one-way information flow from the CEO and/or staff established CAB was not allowed to interact as established by FCC guidelines and documented in the by-laws. Thus even if CAB met at least annually, had representatives meeting the criteria established in the by-laws, and provided minutes of those meetings, the process failed to identify social impact.

At a statewide gathering of Public Service Media (PSM) CEOs and chairs of Board of Directors, two Washington D.C. consultants for public broadcasting clarified and confirmed the severity of the communication problem between the PSM systems and their respective CAB advisory boards. The ongoing SAT assessment of the communication between the CAB and PSM system in this study revealed a similar serious situation. What emerged was the concept of power as being the critical deterrent hindering CAB development. Despite the FCC ruling that CAB cannot interfere with programming or operations, the station managers (CEOs/Presidents) continued to keep the CAB membership away from any kind of leadership role as allowed by the FCC and the PSM's by-laws. Identifying the Speech Act performatives at the CAB meetings provided the yearly assessment to determine if the communication process satisfied the FCC requirements. CAB was clearly affected by the power dominance of the CEO. Only after the CEO left in the fall of 2012 did CAB began communicative initiatives utilizing the performatives of request, promise, and negotiating "conditions of satisfaction."

The following research questions developed from the public relations literature focused on the ethnographic methodology within a Speech Act Theory perspective. The discourse analysis within a framework of standards (performatives) established the intent to communicate

and provided a deeper analysis of the effectiveness of CAB advisory boards. These research questions included:

#### **RQ1: How does ethnography capture organizational and public communication processes for analyzing from a public relations perspective?**

The decision to conduct the study through an ethnographic approach provided a more authentic documentation of the interactive process of the CAB process. With the factor of "power" so dominant in this case study, a survey, interview, or focus group process would not have been possible or authentic. In this case study, a board member (also a public relations professional) was appointed as a CAB liaison. Consequently, the PR liaison documented the fit between the Speech Act Theory performatives (the standard for "intent" to communicate for action) and the communication of the CAB board with the CEO and staff.

The ethnographic approach revealed the Speech Act Theory was not reflected in interaction of CAB during the period of the CEO's employment (2005 to the fall of 2012). Consequently, the CAB board was not making requests and the discourse was essentially information with one-way directional intent. Essentially communication was one-way communication or a flow of information from the CEO to the CAB board or vice-versa until the CEO left.

#### **RQ2: How does Speech Act Theory's (SAT) performatives explain the nature of a mandated relationship in terms of civil discourse?**

As mentioned, the factor of "power control" clearly kept the CAB in submission. The CEO did not allow surveys, focus groups, and/or interviews. However, the presence of a PR BOD representative at the meetings (assigned by the CEO) enabled data to be gathered within the framework of Speech Act Theory to determine if the performatives (communication for action) were evident. However, the one-way information flow from the CEO and his staff suffocated any potential for CAB leadership. Only after the CEO/President left did CAB move into a more development mode with evidence of performatives. Requests recently established the infrastructure for CAB (executive committee). Now requests from CAB better reflect the needs of the members. The leadership needed from CAB continues to develop. The infrastructure is in place and the training acquaints the CAB board members with the by-laws and the key literature in Public Media Service. The civil discourse developing through this "turning outward to the community" fits the public relations expertise in community knowledge, impact efforts to create community, boundary spanning capacity, and the vision to serve as a "catalysts for change" for social impact.

The combination of the ethnographic methodology and the utilization of the Speech Act Theory as the framework of analysis confirmed the gridlock in discourse and the consequent loss of social impact. If civil discourse is controlled through one-way communication by either group of participants (in this case study of a mandated OPR relationship between the infrastructure representing the staff/BOD and CAB) as the sole strategic approach, one-way interaction paralyzes

the process. However, the nature of noninteractive discourse captured via the ethnographic and analytical interactive communicative model created the gap of the case situation in comparison to the model of civil discourse.

## 8. Implication for Further Implementation and Research

The evolution of the communication from “information” to “communication for action,” as mandated by the FCC, is documented ethnographically over an eight-year period. The public relations expertise of a board of director was relevant to the boundary spanning effort to represent the chair on the Community Advisory Board and then eventually represented the dual role of BOD chair and co-interim CEO/President. This Midwest Public Service Media (television, radio, and interactive website) system now has a growing Community Advisory Board representing more fully the needs of the community.

The evolution over these years, 2006 to 2013, examined closely the communication interaction as fitting a model of Speech Acts, an interaction representing civil discourse. Such an analysis would provide a greater understanding of “communication for action,” a status beyond the legal requirements for CAB meetings. However, the communication process under the leadership of a public relations professional opens up the communication process to a more rigorous assessment where each participant feels fully acknowledged and given the opportunity to respond. A lot of time is now spent in assessing the CAB’s perceptions of the communication process and encouraging engagement. Yet this brings up the concept of “power” and its role in stifling and constraining the interaction process. There will not be many examples where the balance of power shifts from the CEO to a board member skilled in public relations processes. Experiencing the evolution toward a more interactive process does provide experience in a model of an advisory group where a community group is authentically feeling empowered. Perhaps to translate this into a training program for other general managers (GMs) should be considered. Helping GMs to understanding the importance of sharing the evaluation and assessment process can be productive for both the organization and its community publics and ultimately will bring about a healthier environment to strengthen public broadcasting as a Public Media Service.

Although the CAB is in more control of the communication process in this case study, the difficulty in reaching this level confirmed the assessment of the Washington D.C. consultants at the statewide meeting of the public broadcasting stations. The CEO/General Manager truly gate keep the communication process to literally suffocate discourse. The importance of truly involving and integrating the various publics within a viewing area cannot be overlooked. The critical presence of a public relations professional is central obviously to assuring this process is developed. CPB needs to be more rigorous in examining the commitment of a station to integrate and involve the viewing community, particularly recommending a presence of a qualified public relations practitioner. Having public relations professionals as part of the board of directors for a public broadcasting systems will assist the transformation toward a stronger and more authentic OPR (organization-public relationship) model for civil discourse. Public relations professionals

need to assume the responsibility of monitoring the social impact of Community Advisory Boards for Public Service media through their expertise in assessing the communication process for the intent to communicate for action.

Since this study allowed access to the interaction of a mandated OPR relationship in Public Service Media and since the role of an assigned participant as a BOD representative also was a public relations professional with sustained access for at least eight years, the ethnographic data gathering seemed the most minimally invasive approach. The interventions by the PR representative were not intrusive but more illustrative of how gridlocked the communication process for the large extent of the study of this period (2006 to December 2012). Obviously the stations in this Midwest state where the case study was located were clearly warned about this dire condition. However, how a mandated relationship can produce such little yield of social impact became a most interesting question to answer if authentic access to the process could be evaluated.

Discourse needs to happen. Society suffers if the “wrangle in the marketplace” is endangered. If Public Service Media is the most trusted institution and the most trusted channel of communication in the nation, it is a crisis if the mandated relationships from the governing bodies are stifled, ignored, or destroyed by those in charge of this incredible resource for public policy, education, the arts, and for representing the “voices” of the people in the United States. In a complex time, our country needs to have communication based on fact and research and unfiltered by bias. The potential is there. The infrastructure is established. The will or intent to communicate to build a civil society is needed. Trust should be expressed to allow the diverse communities to participate. Democracy can only flourish when the opportunities are supported in an authentic way. Obviously, a systemic problem has been identified and the means need to be found to move past the established infrastructure and to activate the communication process so well recognized and desired by the public relations profession who understand the process—the intent to communicate for action. Such an understanding truly extends to the global needs. Public relations functions are critical in establishing a better understanding of how democracy is expressed through “words with speech acts with intent” not “brute force.”

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## Media Platforms and Reputation in Sport: an Australian AFL Analysis.

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### Abstract

Media plays a considerable role in the branding and reputation for sport organisations, clubs and athletes. Both traditional and social media have an influence on the dialogue that shapes a sport brand and influences a sport reputation. In Australia, the biggest locally supported sport code is Australian Rules football. The code at its professional level has evolved from a localism culture to a 'commodified sport', characterised by a high-level of business objectives, technology and sport elitism. The code has a strong emphasis on brand and reputation resulting from advanced professionalism and commercialisation. The code is governed by the Australian Football League (AFL) Commission. The Commission endeavours to protect and manage all aspects of its brand-management. The game-day adjudicators, AFL umpires, are an integral part of the AFL brand, as they are a visual representation of the AFL officialdom to the spectators and viewing public for each game.

This paper identifies media commentaries that contribute to the current reputation for AFL umpires through an analysis of traditional and social media. It examines and categorises commentaries from daily newspapers and popular social media sites to highlight the influence such comments and posts may be having on the umpires' reputation. A 2010 survey demonstrated the AFL public generally held the umpires in reasonable regard, but media commentaries do not appear to reflect this opinion. The paper aims to analyse and measure such media commentaries on AFL umpires, and suggest strategies to improve umpire reputation through traditional and social media.

Key words: Brand, Reputation, AFL Umpires, Media Commentaries

### INTRODUCTION

The use of traditional mass communication, like newspapers, television and radio, have the capacity to reach vast numbers of general public in a short period of time (L'Etang, 2008; Harrison, 2011). Social networking and information-sharing platforms on the internet also have broad reach and allow people to contribute to the dialogue regarding topical conversations and commentaries (Gunelius, 2010). Therefore, these media provide a strong contribution to the commentaries surrounding sport, and in particular professional and commercialised sport (Wallace, 2011). Media also makes a substantial contribution to brand development and reputation in sport (Wallace, 2011; Oates, 2009). In Australia the biggest local sport interest is attributed to Australian Rules football. This paper reviews one aspect of brand and reputation management for Australian Rules, the match day officials known as 'umpires'.

Australian Rules football is a football code peculiar to Australia involving an oval-shaped ball, oval playing field and 18 players-a-side on the field who can run, bounce, handpass and kick the ball all over the ground. The game was recognised as a unique sport with its own rules in 1858, but has elements evolved from a combination of many contact sports, particularly rugby and Gaelic football, with some saying the indigenous game of Mangarook also influencing its development (AFL, 2014b; East 2012). Australian Rules is commonly referred to as AFL - the abbreviation of the national body known as the Australian Football League (AFL) Commission that governs the vast majority of Australian Rules competitions across the nation. It is the most popular Australian spectator sport in terms of attendance and television viewing, generates the highest annual revenue of any sport within Australia and has the greatest marketshare of any sport in Australia (IbisWorld, 2014).

The code at its highest level has evolved from a localism culture to a 'commodified sport', characterised by elite professionalism and focus on generating revenue (East, 2012). Localism culture in sport refers to loyalty associated through demographics. The commodification of sport is a term used to explain how sport transforms into a product that has a strong emphasis on league administration and commercialisation (East, 2012). With the advanced professionalism and commercialisation of the code has come a stronger emphasis on brand and reputation (East, 2012). A big part of the brand development is the regard held for AFL umpires, who represent the Commission on match-days. The AFL brand generates huge revenue through games attendance, television and broadcast rights, and merchandising (IbisWorld, 2014). Therefore, the AFL Commission endeavours to protect and enhance its brand and tries to control all aspects of brand-management (Scott and Walsham, 2005).

Traditional media has long been an agenda-setting platform for sport (McCauley, 2008; L'Etang, 2006). With the growth in access and use of electronic social media platforms, the public has been able to contribute extensively to such commentaries (Wallace, 2011). Both media provide the information for which brand can be managed and developed, but also add to the knowledge interested publics use to frame a sport reputation (Vernuccio, 2014).

This paper analyses the public and media commentaries that can influence perceptions of AFL field (central) umpires. Traditional and the social media sites are analysed with regards

to the commentaries relating to umpires and their decision-making in the national professional league. Such media commentaries can set the agenda for dialogue around AFL, and ultimately shape the AFL brand as a result of public's judgement of umpire reputation.

The media posts are subjected to content analysis through quantitative clustering (Wedel & Kamakura, 2000). It aims to establish the reputation AFL umpires have within the AFL public and media commentaries, and investigates determinants on why the particular reputation exists. The paper includes a literature review of the importance of reputation and how it applies to AFL, its brand and umpires. A recent survey investigating the AFL public's opinion on umpires indicated that umpires are held in 'fair' to 'strong' regard. Recent traditional and social media focussing on AFL umpires is made analysed to categorise current commentaries on umpires and establish regard for the umpires in media. Finally, conclusions are drawn on the contemporary reputation of AFL umpires and recommendations made on how the AFL could improve management of this reputation through using media resources more effectively.

## MEDIA INFLUENCE ON OPINION

Traditionally, mass communication to public audiences has been done through media such as newspapers, television and radio. Such media had an extensive influence on setting the agenda for topical commentaries by the fact that most people looked to the old forms of media to provide content on social issues (Harrison, 2011, L'Etang, 2008). People formulate their opinions based on the information they are presented with, and the traditional media typically broadcast such information to the masses.

With the advent of social media and information/content sharing platforms on the web, the scope for people to engage with diverse opinion, imagery and subject matter has broadened the amount of information an individual can now access in order to formulate opinion on (Harrison & Hirst, 2006; Doorley & Garcia, 2011). People and key publics are now making significant contributions to the commentaries and dialogue on topical subjects through this 'new media', particular in areas of their expertise and interest (Gunelius, 2010). This has resulted in broader opinions being pulled from media (both traditional and new) to add to the formulation of one's own opinion on topics of interest. The new media dialogue of many-to-many has opened up conversations between key publics that previously only occurred between people who had direct access to each other (Harrison & Hirst, 2006).

Sport and media have always shared interdependence, particularly in Australia where sporting attributes and achievement have strongly shaped determinants of being successful by the public (Shilbury Westerbeek, Quick & Funk, 2009). Sport heavily relies on the media for promotion, exposure and topical commentaries, and the media has a dependence on sport for topical content. Therefore, sport publics look to media (both traditional and new) for information and commentaries regarding their sporting interests. The content within media sets the agenda for discussion and influences the opinion of those who engage with its content (Doorley & Garcia, 2011).

## Open-source branding

Open-source branding is a new vision where contributors to media commentaries, particularly through social media (online networks and platforms), become co-builders of the brand through the media eco-system (Vernuccio, 2014). Stakeholder are able to contribute directly and continuously in the process of brand building and become co-producers of the values that underpin the brand, leading to brand owners losing total control over content, reach and frequency of messages that shape the brand and reputation (Vernuccio, 2014; Safo, 2010). With new media, particularly social media platforms, anyone can contribute to the discussion or post comment freely and quickly (Doorley & Garcia, 2011). This has implications for branding in the sporting environment where many stakeholders react emotionally and often instantly to sporting performance, frequently in a negative manner (Oates, 2009; Pegoraro, 2010).

## Key AFL Publics

Key publics are a person or identifiable group of people who can influence an organisation and its effectiveness (Harrison, 2011). The AFL Commission is a large organisation and its operations may be considered corporate as it is a united body working towards a business enterprise (Macquarie, 1991). Stakeholders in the AFL include corporate staff, players (including participants), team administration, spectators, sponsors and game administration. As the AFL is not a listed company it does not have public shareholders (AFL, 2014b). Therefore, the paying public, both as game-day spectators and viewers are identified as the key public stakeholder for the AFL (AFL, 2014b). A stakeholder corporation is dependent upon considerably external stakeholder input for its success, as is the AFL (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2014). The public support of spectators, viewers (free-to-air and pay-to-view), and merchandise consumers has enabled the AFL to generate considerable income stream; more than double its nearest sport code rival in Australia (IbisWorld, 2014). The key to a successful stakeholder corporation is being inclusive and transparent and allows stakeholders to continuously contribute to the production of values that underpin the brand (Vernuccio, 2014; Carroll & Buchholtz, 2014). As the AFL has such public interest, then external stakeholder groups, like spectators and fans, have an expectation that the organisation should be open and accountable to its operations.

## AFL Media and branding

Sporting brand is very important in terms of the ability to generate revenue, viewing figures and memberships (Heathcote, 2013). Currently, the AFL has a very strong brand to protect. There are 14 AFL clubs in the top 20 sport brands in Australia and the AFL has the only local sporting club with an AAA rating, according to a study by Brand Finance and Landor Associates (Heathcote, 2013). The AFL, like many large organisations and corporations, is aware of how its media relations activity can influence public opinion through media engagement. Protecting the brand and the public's opinion on the brand (reputation) are important considerations for the AFL.

In 2012 the AFL decided to operate its own media agency, the AFL Media Centre, and produce a website to report on every aspect of its operation, good and bad. The media agency has around 105 staff, including: reporters, sub-editors, video journalists, photographers, designers and product staff. Such a large team provides significant content and influences agenda-setting for conversations around the AFL (Happell, 2013).

In 2013 the AFL released its own social media engagement policy for all AFL employees (including players and club administrators) acknowledging that social media has increasing prevalence in both the professional and private lives of its staff, players, administrators and fans (AFL Policies, 2015). It recognises the value in using social media to build more meaningful relationships with fans, communities and other relevant stakeholders. The AFL acknowledges the risk associated with its members using social media outside of its policy guidelines, and sets out conditions for use of social media in an official capacity by its members (along with what constitutes inappropriate use).

The AFL Media Centre has built an online research panel that is representative of its fan-base (Marketing, 2013). This enables the AFL to generate media content that can be used to manipulate topical conversation in traditional and social media in order to positively reflect its desired brand and enhance corporate reputation (Doorley & Garcia, 2011; L'Etang, 2008; Harrison, 2011).

A study by Corporate Reputation Watch identified media criticism as the biggest external threat to an organisation's reputation (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2014). So the AFL is using its resources to have positive influence on the content and commentaries occurring regarding Australian football in both traditional and new media platforms. This positive influence is a means to developing and maintaining a positive reputation for the brand with the AFL public (Doorley & Garcia, 2011).  
Reputation and the AFL

An organisation's reputation is shaped by the public opinions for that organisation (Beder, 2002). Reputation is the estimation in which a person or thing is held by the community or the public generally (Macquarie, 1991). At a corporate level, reputation is the value afforded to the organisation based on the public's general beliefs (Dowling, 2006; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). A corporate brand is considered to be the assurances an organisation promises to deliver, and reputation is seen as how external stakeholders perceive the organisation is delivering on its promises (Beder, 2002; Scott & Walsham, 2005). In terms of the AFL Commission and its key publics, the brand represents value in the sport marketplace, as opposed to individual AFL teams or player and their net-worth in the market (Brodie and de Chernatony, 2009). Typically, a sport fan's brand value for a league or association is measured in terms of consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) that reflects a longer-term alignment with fulfilment of promised values that league promotes (Gladden & Funk, 2002). Particular to sport is the branding strategy to position the brand in the minds of the consumers (fans and participants) to be symbolic of what they hope to gain from experiencing the sport, and reputation management aims to ensure that these experiences are somewhat fulfilled (Shilbury et al. 2009). All public representation of the AFL brand, including umpires, can have an influence on the AFL's reputation.

The AFL is the most successful and influential Australian sport code. There is a direct correlation between financial success and public reputation (Doorley & Garcia, 2011). AFL games currently have an annual attendance of around 7 million and an average game attendance over 33,000 (AFL, 2014c; Footywire, 2014). The AFL generates immense interest and wealth with annual revenue of more than \$215 million, a current television deal worth \$1.25 billion over five years and more than 300,000 media stories per year (IbisWorld, 2014; AFL, 2014c; convictcreations, 2012). Millions of dollars are wagered each week against AFL game results (Munro, 2010). The AFL also significantly influences social and ethical issues for Australian society through its support for community and regional football development, and its very public policies on equality and racism (AFL, 2014b; Munro, 2010). Therefore, delivering on the AFL brand has considerable implications, in terms of social and financial support for the AFL Commission.

Umpire reputation is important to the overall AFL brand. The umpires are the game-day representation of AFL officialdom. Exposure to umpires is through spectating (and viewing), media and the AFL corporate publicity. The experiences that spectators, players, team administrators and contributors to media have relating to on-field umpires define the umpires' general reputation. The risk to the AFL's reputation is that the public perceives umpires are not performing to an admirable level.

### **The AFL's Perception on the Umpire Brand**

The umpires are branded by the AFL as judicious and trustworthy adjudicators for the rules of the game (AFL, 2014a). It appears the AFL Commission have the belief that the general reputation of umpires is not as positive as it would like, as it has implemented a number of promotional strategies and policies to more positively shape the football public's opinion on umpires. These strategies include: appreciation for umpires, fast-tracking ex-AFL players to elite umpiring status, gender equity in umpiring, and limiting negative comments to the media about umpiring by AFL personnel.

The AFL have introduced 'Umpire Appreciation Round' and the 'Umpiring is Everyone's Business' campaigns and may be seen as acknowledgements by the AFL that all is not adequate with the perception of umpires, and that a cultural change towards AFL umpires needs to occur (AFL, 2014a, Wilson, 2010). In a deliberate step by the AFL to highlight the connection between umpires and players, it is targeting and fast-tracking ex-professional AFL players to the elite level of umpiring through the new 'Player to Umpire Pathway Academy' (Bradshaw, 2010). The AFL has recently cited female participants as representing the codes largest area of growth, and recent successes include female umpires beginning to gain traction as elite umpires for the professional and semi-professional leagues (Lane, 2015). Media commentaries by officials regarding umpires is regulated through 'AFL Regulation 16.1: Public Comments on Umpires', which states that any negative public comment by AFL players, coaches, and team officials regulated by the AFL regarding umpires are liable for fines of up to \$20,000 for a first offence (Sexton & Russell, 2009).  
Media Commentaries and Umpires' Reputation

Traditional media commentaries on AFL umpires is typically a report on umpiring incidents from games, which are usually contentious, or a reflection of umpiring and decisions made based on past incidents, the rule book and stakeholder opinions. The custodians of the traditional media content are professional journalists, writers, reporters and media agencies. As many of these contributors are professionally trained with strong public reputations, their commentaries carries considerable worth and impacts the formation of opinions for their readers, listeners and viewers (Harrison, 2011). Such commentaries go through a structure of regulation in line with the processes for the media agency.

Social media commentaries on AFL umpires, on the other hand, are often unregulated and judgement-biased (as results in this analysis below indicate individuals often are motivated to use these platforms to express their displeasure at umpire decisions). This may mean the AFL, as brand owners for umpires, lose a measure of control over content that contributes to their umpires' brand (Keaton et al. 2014, Safco, 2010; McCauley, 2008). The fan-sport-club relationship permeates the discussion and branding remains dynamic through this social process, resulting in umpire reputation being formulated through collaboration and co-creation – not solely through the AFL Commission's own network of communication distribution (Vernuccio, 2014; Safco, 2010; L'Etang, 2008).

By investigating social media platforms and traditional media, one is able to detail trends and make an analysis of the current reputation for AFL umpires and see if it reflects the AFL's intended brand.

### Past Umpire Survey

As observed by the author, a combination of 'bad press' for umpires, negative social discussion around umpire competency and public comment through social media seems to indicate a poor reputation for umpires and their ability to fairly oversee AFL games. The AFL public appear to have a poor perception of umpires and their ability to adjudicate effectively and fairly games of AFL football. But this is in contradiction to a recent survey conducted with around 300 Australian Rules ex-players and fans to determine AFL umpires reputation. The majority of responses were effectively positive.

The survey results (see Appendix One) indicated that 70 per cent of respondents rated AFL field umpires as doing a good to excellent job (AUTHOR, 2012). Notably, almost 81 per cent believed umpires in non-professional leagues do a good to excellent job. Therefore, it can be determined that the field umpires' reputation with the AFL public is respectable. This is also reflected in an earlier AFL Commission's investigation into perceptions on the standards of umpiring with AFL league clubs, which had identified no critical issues with the umpires' public reputation (Saunders, 2003).

An important indicator of the importance of umpiring to the AFL public was that many of the survey respondents (around 50 per cent) voiced an opinion on umpires and umpiring by contributing to the optional comments section. This suggests the ongoing management of

relationships between the AFL and its public regarding the reputation of umpires is an important function.

To better evaluate the perceived reputation for AFL umpires in the media, the new research in this paper analyses current data collected during the June to August 2014 period from traditional media, a dedicated AFL public blog site and a social media platform. By analysing this data relating to the umpires and their decision-making, the paper aims to categorise commentaries in the media regarding the AFL umpires and their ability to adjudicate professional football games. Such media provides substantial information on which the AFL public use to frame an opinion on umpire reputation.

### METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

A media analysis to ascertain the public reputation for AFL umpires was conducted between June 1 and September 3, 2014 (a period of 13 weeks). This period of time in the AFL's 2014 season included the last 13 roster games for the year, typically a critical period full of football emotions as teams jostle for ladder positions heading into the final series. It is a period of time where many fans become very active in support for their clubs (Wallace, 2011; Oates, 2009).

A quantitative empirical study was undertaken of traditional media outlets, the Herald Sun, The Age and The Australian. These traditional outlets are located, or have strong readership, in the heartland of AFL (Melbourne, Victoria) and have the highest percentage of AFL sport journalists (McCauley, 2008). The sample posts and media articles were subjected to a quantitative content analysis. Media articles refer to reports, commentaries and stories appearing in the Herald Sun, The Age and The Australian newspapers. The key search characteristic to identify appropriate content in traditional media was 'Umpire', and a refined search pinpointed media that referred specifically to AFL umpires.

The social media platforms reviewed include Big Footy, as the most popular AFL fan blog not aligned with news agencies, and Twitter, being the most popular microblog used in Australia and often used by AFL personnel, sport media commentators and players (Pegoraro, 2010; Oates, 2009). The Big Footy blog was reviewed by searching Australian Football/Umpires, Match Review Panel (MRP), Tribunal and Rules forum and then a manual analysis of all posted forums to see which referred to AFL umpires and their decisions. Twitter review involved the search words AFL Umpires/Umpiring and Umpires/Umpiring AFL, with identified tweets then being analysed for their relevance to AFL umpires. Tweets from the official information site for umpires "Umpire AFL" were not included in the analysis due to their obvious bias.

Each identified media record (comment, report, post and tweet) was positioned in a simple quantitative criteria table, under the cluster characteristics of: 'Positive towards umpires', 'Neutral towards umpires' and 'Negative towards umpires', following the common method of clustering for quantitative analysis (Krippendorff, 2004; Wedel & Kamakura, 2000; Neuendorf, 2002). A post, tweet or article position in a cluster was defined by the nature of the content being

majority-weighting towards one characteristic, identified as such by the author. For this research, the methodology was to interpret the entire text, rather than look for associated meaning in single words or phrases – so the overall characteristic for the post, article or tweet.

This is the most simplistic approach to character identification, which often results in the best representation of the samples cluster credentials, although this method is subject to an element of subjective interpretation by the researcher in terms of cluster qualities (Wedel & Kamakura, 2000).

## RESULTS

The following tables demonstrate the clustering results for comments on AFL umpires published in traditional media, the Big Footy Blog and Twitter.

### Newspaper Articles AFL Umpire Focus June 1 - August 31, 2014 (see Appendix Two)

Month	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
June	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (100%)	4 (11%)
July	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (100%)	5 (13%)
August	4 (14%)	11 (38%)	14 (48%)	29 (76%)
Total	4 (11%)	11 (29%)	23 (61%)	38

### Big Footy Blog 'Umpire Themed' Posts June 1 - August 31, 2014 (see Appendix Three)

Month	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
June	22 (5%)	161 (35%)	275 (60%)	458 (68%)
July	5 (13%)	10 (26%)	23 (61%)	38 (6%)
August	4 (2%)	33 (19%)	140 (79%)	177 (26%)
Total	31 (5%)	204 (30%)	438 (65%)	673

### AFL Umpires/Umpiring Tweets June 1 - August 31, 2014 (see Appendix Four)

2014	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
June	1 (8%)	4 (31%)	8 (62%)	13 (32.5%)
July	0 (0%)	5 (50%)	5 (50%)	10 (25%)
August	3 (18%)	8 (47%)	6 (35%)	17 (42.5%)
Total	4 (10%)	17 (42.5%)	19 (47.5%)	40

## ANALYSIS

The total cluster characteristics for data across all three mediums for the period of June 1 to August 31, 2014 indicate that the contributors (representing the AFL Public and sport media from the major AFL bracketed newspapers) have 58% 'negative towards umpires' characteristics regarding issues relating to AFL field umpires. Basically, 58% of comments made through these mediums over this period reflected poorly on AFL umpires and/or their decisions.

A further breakdown of these results demonstrate the predominantly AFL-bracketed Big Footy Blog recorded posts at a substantial 65% of 'negative towards umpires' characteristics over this three-month period. 'Neutral towards umpires' characteristics accounted for 30%, and only 5% were characterised as 'positive towards umpires'. In the month leading up to the finals series (August 2014) 79% of commentaries were negative, 19% neutral and only 2% positive. Negative commentaries for the preceding two months were in the low 60% range.

People using Twitter to pass comment on AFL umpires over the three-month period indicated that 47.5% negative, 42.5% neutral and 10% positive; bearing in mind the twitter feeds from the official information site for umpires "Umpire AFL" were not included in this data collection. In the month leading up to the finals series (August 2014) neutral tweets were 47%, 35% negative and 18% positive. The preceding two months indicated 50% (July 2014) and 63% (June 2014) as negative tweets.

The newspapers deemed to be AFL-loaded for sport interest (The Age, Herald Sun and The Australian) had a substantial 61% of negative commentaries over this three-month period. In the month leading up to the finals series (August 2014) a more moderate 48% of commentaries were negative, 38% neutral and only 14% positive. However, even though AFL umpire articles in the preceding two months were minimal at 5 (July 2014) and 4 (June 2014) 100% of these articles were characterised as negative.

Commentaries on AFL umpires were diverse across the mediums during this period. The newspaper data indicated that 76% of commentaries on umpires occurred in the month leading up to the finals series. This suggests sport reporters and journalists appeared to use umpiring and their decisions as topical content at this stage of the season than for the earlier stages (N.B. there was no obvious indication that overall AFL media stories increased in proportionally during this month compared with the preceding two months).

Big Footy Blog activity was typically determined by the lead post and the amount of response that post generated. Strong post responses on blogs are linked to reader attachment and emotional connection of contributors, so sport blog activity is more likely linked to the theme of the lead post, as opposed to the time of the season (Safco, 2010; Oates, 2009). The analysed data appears to support this theory, as in June 2014 there were 458 posts, only 398 posts in July 2014 and 177 posts during the season-defining month of August 2014.

An interesting observation is that Twitter activity on AFL umpiring categorised was surprisingly low at only 40 tweets compared with the other two mediums (38 news articles and 673 blog posts). This may be a reflection on the use of Twitter by Australians, as Twitter rates seventh in active social media users in Australia, considerably lower than the three leading platforms

of Facebook, YouTube and blogs (Cowling, 2013). Identified activity over this period was evenly spread, with a small increase of 17 tweets in August 2014.

## DISCUSSION

Sport media has a significant influence on the opinions and beliefs of sports fans who engage with the commentaries (Nicholson, Kerr & Sherwood, 2015). Professional journalists and reporters are particularly persuasive as their commentaries are considered informed and objective (Oates, 2008; L'Etang, 2006). Many of the sport reporters and journalists from the major daily newspapers the Herald Sun, The Age and The Australian are award winning AFL journalists (The Age Real Footy, 2014). The data indicates that 61% of their articles on AFL umpires over the recorded three-month period were negative and only a total of 11% were positive. With around 1.9 million people engaging with the Herald Sun, The Age or The Australian on a daily basis means these news agencies have a considerable scope to influence sport fans' opinions (Roy Morgan Research, 2014). Based on the analysed data from these newspapers, most of the influence would have negative connotations for the AFL umpires' brand. Traditional media as a platform for influence is an area that the AFL Media Centre could make significant contributions towards improving positive commentaries on AFL umpires (Nicholson et al. 2015).

Social media platforms and fan-sites are typically frequented by emotionally-charged sport enthusiasts (Oates, 2009; Pegoraro, 2010). Sport fans who relate passionately with their team and its performance are reported to have a greater inclination to commit negative social behaviours as a result of a poor team performance, including the use of blame and abuse for sporting authority (Keaton, Gearhart & Honeycutt, 2014; Oates, 2009). Much of this negative comment is uploaded to social media platforms, as fans vent their discontent through comments they can readily share with others (Keaton et al. 2014; Nicholson et al. 2015). In a game of AFL there are on average 37 interpretive decisions where the umpire is called upon to make a decision based on their interpretation of the rules (AFL Statistics, 2010). AFL fans often would not agree with the umpires' interpretation, and if they believe this has influenced the outcome of the game, or a period of play within the game, they may reflect this through commentaries easily posted on social media in the heat of the moment.

Different codes studied by other researchers (see for example: Oates, 2009; Pegoraro, 2010; Keaton et al. 2014) indicate that sport fans using social media are charged to comment based on the result of the games and the performance of their team, and that any reference to the game administrators (like referees and umpires) are influenced by game results. However, this paper's analysis of Twitter contradicts this trend with the majority of tweets analysed being positive (10%) or neutral (42.5%) and the minority of posts actually being characterised as negative (47.5%). Posts on Big Footy blog follows the trend of negativity towards game adjudicators as the vast majority of posts (65%) were characterised as negative towards umpires and their decisions. The average negative commentary for both blog posts and Twitter tweets was 56.25%. From the literature it is

reasonable to expect emotive influence contributes to the sport fans' posts and tweets, and would have an impact on the theme of the social media commentaries regarding AFL umpires during this critical part of the season.

In terms of mediums used, the number of blog posts regarding AFL umpires is considerably more than the number of tweets for the same period. A sample number of 673 Big Footy posts is a much higher than the Twitter sample of 40 tweets, means for research reliability the blog posts can be considered a more accurate reflection of AFL fans' opinion on umpires and their decisions than the Twitter feeds for fans who engage in commentaries on social media about AFL (Neuendorf, 2002). This may reflect the intended use of both platforms, as the Big Footy blogsite is more a contemplative medium where sport fans go to discuss sport, namely AFL football. Whereas Twitter is more of a real-time medium where people tweet their immediate opinions and reactions to a current situation, or engage in an exchange over a topical theme (Pederson, 2013; Safco, 2010). This also follows trends from previous research, where an opportunity to engage in opinionated debate attracts more active engagement (Oates, 2009; Pegoraro, 2010).

The average for negative comments/commentaries for both social media and newspaper articles was 58.6%. Results indicate newspaper articles written by professional writers in reputable newspapers have more negative commentaries on AFL umpires at 61% than do comments made by the AFL public through social media at 56.25%.

### Limitations to the Research

The research method is open to subjective interpretation when identifying cluster characteristics by the researcher. The subtleties of interpretation relating to the intended viewpoint by the authors of the commentaries cannot always be exactly determined when using pre-determined cluster characteristics to label data. Even though the characteristics were kept very simple an element of researcher misinterpretation may influence some of the cluster allocations (Krippendorff, 2004; Wedel & Kamakura, 2000; Neuendorf, 2002).

The time-span for this study is deliberately drawn from a specific period in the AFL season when emotions run high and much is at stake for AFL teams and their supporters. During other parts of the season, or even out-of-season emotive reactions may not be as strong as during this intense football period (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991; Krippendorff, 2004; Wallace, 2011). A more longitudinal analysis of the media may reveal a less emotional attitude towards umpires and their decision-making at different times of the year, or even over different years (Pegoraro, 2010; Oates, 2009).

The sample groups may not be a true representation of the AFL public, as the participants on the reviewed social media sites reflect the views of those who are active on social media, and have the passion to engage in the conversations around umpiring that involve their supported team. Many of the contributors to these social media sites were repeat contributors on these topics and on other themes around AFL football, and their bias and repeat contributions may skew results.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research has identified that commentaries on AFL umpires both in traditional and social media are typically negative, and that these commentaries will influence the public reputation for AFL umpires. The AFL brand will be adversely affected by negative media commentaries regarding umpires and their decision-making, with around 59% of media comments analysed in this 2014 research being characterised as negative towards umpires. Traditional media commentaries typically written by award-winning professional writers was 61% negative towards the umpires and their decisions (only a total of 11% were positive), while around 56% of public commentaries on social media studied were negative.

A previous survey from 2010 (AUTHOR, 2012) conducted with AFL fans indicated that around 70% of the respondents rated AFL field umpires as doing a fair to excellent job. Similarly a study by the AFL in 2002 suggested opinions on umpires were not an acute issue. However, the results from this analysis suggests that there are critical issues with the commentaries on AFL umpires, and that this negativity towards umpires and their decisions through traditional and social media may have a undesirable effect on the overall AFL brand.

The AFL has its own media centre with around 20 reporters (including 3 top-level journalists at the time of writing), but appears to have a limited effect on amount of negative commentaries the umpires receive from traditional media. With around 1.9 million readers a day purchasing the researched media publications, there is considerable negative influence on the information regarding AFL umpires that AFL public encounter through daily newspapers. According to media theorists (like: L'Etang, 2008 & 2006, Harrison, 2011, Doorley & Garcia, 2011; Archee et al. 2013) this information would typically make a significant contribution to the perception and reputation of umpires with the AFL public. Equally, the AFL Media Centre has substantial electronic media resources at its disposal that could engage with social media content and provide extensive commentaries that reflect positively on the umpires (Pegoraro, 2010; Nicholson et al. 2015).

### Recommendations

It is recommended that the AFL, and in particular the AFL Media Centre, endeavour to have a more positive influence on the reputation of their umpires. As demonstrated by literature in this paper, the AFL Media Centre has a role in influencing media and public commentaries on umpires in an effort to positively influence umpire reputation and preserve the AFL's desired brand.

Using contemporary media relations strategies, the AFL Media Centre should consider:

- Developing stronger relationships with key AFL journalists and reporters and provide deeper opportunities for professional sport writers to analyse umpires and their decisions
- Generate more social media commentaries of a positive nature regarding umpires through engagement with key AFL online discussion platforms
- Engage more with negative media commentaries and be more accessible for comment on umpires and further explain the decision-making process
- Invite more official commentaries on umpires from clubs, management and administration to further

limit media space being filled by uninformed comment

Based on the data in this research highlighting substantial negative commentaries regarding AFL umpires from both traditional and social media, the AFL needs to consider if they can do more to positively influence media discussions around umpires.

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Appendix One: Summary of results: Umpires Reputation Survey (AUTHOR, 2012)

Question	Quantitative Results
1	Respondents' gender: 289 male, 29 female respondents, 1 no answer
2	Respondents' ages in years: 170 over 35, 120 between 20-35, 20 between 15-19, and 7 under 15 years, 2 no answer
3	Football background for respondents: 2 AFL, 62 semi-professional, 107 social/amateur, 90 as under-age players only, 57 never played, 1 no answer
4	Performance at AFL level: 12 at 5/5, 108 at 4/5, 101 at 3/5, 61 at 2/5, 1/5, 3 no answer
5	Opinion on what most think of AFL umpires: 6 great, 87 good, 148 average, 73 poor, 5 no answer
6	Umpire performance in other leagues: 15 excellent, 78 very good, 126 good, 38 average, 14 poor, 44 not applicable, 4 no answer
7	Difficulty in predicting an umpires' decision: 15 never, 233 sometimes, 57 most of the time, 12 all of the time, 2 no answer
8	Too many rules in Australian Rules Football: 150 yes, 143 no, 23 unsure, 3 no answer
9	Each umpire interprets the rules the same: 55 yes, 242 no, 20 unsure, 2 no answer
10	Number of times AFL umpires make clear mistakes: 67 less than 3, between 4-6 123, between 6-9 66, 10 or more 60, 3 no answer
11	More or less AFL umpires in charge: 31 more, 65 less, 191 3 field umpires is the right number, 25 unsure, 7 not answered
12	Video review for difficult decisions: 98 yes, 216 no, 5 not answered
13	Umpires needed from high-level playing backgrounds: 111 yes, 17 no, 188 not a necessity, 3 no answer
14	Further comments: 156 (see breakdown below)

Appendix Two: Newspaper Reports on AFL Umpires June 1 - August 31 2014

Date	Newspaper	Author	Article	Cluster
21 Aug	The Age	Peter Hanlon	Umpires say Brownlow Medal voting isn't broken, so why fix it?	Positive
21 Aug	The Age	Simon White	Five changes I'd make to AFL umpiring	Negative
26 Aug	Herald Sun	Jay Clark	AFL umpires to learn from US best in self-funded end-of-season trip ...	Positive
22 Aug	Herald Sun	Sam Landsberger	Jason Akermanis under investigation for allegedly harassing country footy umpire boss	Neutral
23 Aug	The Age	Jon Pierik	Jason Akermanis welcomes country footy probe over cyber bullying claim	Neutral
18 Aug	Herald Sun	News Corp Australia Network	Pushes in dying moments of Geelong, Essendon, Richmond wins create umpiring controversy	Negative
14 Aug	The Age	Brad Elborough	Fremantle coach Ross Lyon hoping for 'rub of the green' from umps	Negative
27 Aug	Herald Sun	Chris Vernuccio	the most baffling umpiring decisions	Negative
21 Aug	The Age	Peter Hanlon	Umpire Shaun Ryan is back with a bounce	Positive
19 Aug	Herald Sun	Mark Robinson	Brent Harvey is not the first star player to retaliate to tagger tactics	Negative
31 Aug	The Age	Jesse Hogan	Chris Dawes suspended, Ben Rutten reprimanded in final match	Neutral
23 Aug	Herald Sun	Staff Writers	Jimmy Bartel under pump for diving in Geelong's loss to Hawthorn ...	Neutral
22 Aug	Herald Sun	Sam Edmund	Geelong skipper Joel Selwood turns attracting high tackles into an art form.	Neutral
23 Aug	Herald Sun	Tim Mitchell	Thomastown flexes its muscle in 75-point thumping of premierships ...	Neutral

27 Aug	The Age	Ashley Porter	Port Adelaide's Robbie Gray credits knee injury for winning AFL Coaches Association's award	Neutral
23 Aug	Herald Sun	Jon Ralph	AFL football operations manager Mark Evans says Channel Seven distorted angle	Negative
25 Aug	Herald Sun	Staff Writers	More goal review controversy, Podsiadly pays price and did Jimmy dive	Negative
15 Aug	Herald Sun	Bruce Matthews	Allen Christensen's late free kick for Cats shouldn't have been paid ...	Negative
30 Aug	Herald Sun	Staff Writers	Half-Time Report: First finals fixture, Blues' missed chance, Tigers ...	Negative
28 Aug	Herald Sun	Rebecca Williams	Players confused over holding the ball and push in the back interpretations according to survey	Negative
17 Aug	Herald Sun	Michelangelo Rucci	Adelaide coach Brenton Sanderson yet to pass judgment on Rory ...	Neutral
24 Aug	Herald Sun	Mark Robinson	Herald Sun chief football writer Mark Robinson reveals his likes and ...	Neutral
28 Aug	Herald Sun	Shelley Hadfield	There are 17 teams we hate, and 17 teams whose members hate us ...	Negative
30 Aug	Herald Sun	Shane Crawford	Shane Crawford lists what he has and hasn't liked about the 2014 ...	Negative
16 Aug	Herald Sun	Patrick Carlyon	Vested interests have crippled the great game of footy	Negative
23 Aug	The Age	Tim Lane	Razor Ray, a sharp man of action making the right calls	Positive
14 Aug	The Age	Jesse Hogan	Best and worst decisions from AFL match review panel in 2014	Neutral
3 Aug	The Age	Rohan Connolly	Time to blow whistle on tiresome notion that umpires cost you the game	Neutral

5 Aug	Herald Sun	Al Paton	Marc Murphy, Joel Selwood the AFL umpires' favourites — but Magpies, Dockers in the doghouse	Negative
12 July	Herald Sun	Peter Rolfe	Legends, fans and umpires plead with AFL to go back to basics	Negative
7 July	The Age	Emma Quayle	Summit on holding-the-ball rule as umpires boss admits Monfries decision was wrong	Negative
8 July	Herald Sun	Malcom Conn	Sydney coach John Longmire calls for full-time umpires following Eagles' treatment of Lance Franklin	Negative
9 July	The Australian	Peter Lalor	Umpires need help, says Swans coach John Longmire	Negative
7 June	Herald Sun	Sam Edmund & Nathan Hewitt	Umpires boss Wayne Campbell concedes Troy Menzel should have been awarded free kick against Jared Rivers in loss to Geelong	Negative
7 June	The Age	Jon Pierik	Carlton's Troy Menzel deserved a free kick, admits AFL umpires boss Wayne Campbell	Negative
12 June	The Australian	Courtney Walsh	AFL umpires on brink of losing respect	Negative
9 June		Patrick Smith	Malthouse half right with his free kick at the umpires	Negative

Appendix Three: Big Footy AFL Blogsite – umpire forums 1 June - 31 August 2014

Date	Forum Title	Positive	Neutral	Negative
29 Aug	Congratulations Ray Chamberlain (200 games) and Chris Kamolins (150 games)	1	2	1
28 Aug	400 Games Shane McInerney	1	4	7
21 Aug	Findlay umpiring in Hobart and Melbourne at the same time?		4	1
11 Aug	Worst umpiring all year			8
10 Aug	Hometown umpiring	2	3	29
10 Aug	Free kick awarded after the siren		4	
10 Aug	Freo were ripped off of a win last night thanks to the umpires		3	14
4 Aug	Contender for the worst umpiring decision of the year			60
4 Aug	What has happened to the umpiring		12	20
31 July	Congrats to Brett Rosebury on 300 games	4	1	2
20 July	Crucified by umps	1	5	21
5 July	Umpire injuries		4	
28 June	Umpires cause maul		15	10
25 June	Head high contact and umpires	1	2	1
23 June	Luke Shuey Tunnelling	3	4	45
21 June	Should we sub umps in and out of the game		1	4
20 June	Umpires - use the stacks on holding the ball to favour teams .			5
11 June	Abolish the umpire bouncing the ball	13	113	16
11 June	Does the Umpire throwing the ball up simply add to congestion?		2	1
10 June	Bias against interstate teams ... re west coast today	5	13	190
7 June	Recalling a shoddy bounce?		11	3

Appendix Four: AFL Umpires/Umpiring Tweets June 1 - August 31, 2014

2014	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
June	1 (8%)	4 (31%)	8 (62%)	13 (32.5%)
July	0 (0%)	5 (50%)	5 (50%)	10 (25%)
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Total	4 (10%)	17 (42.5%)	19 (47.5%)	40

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## Public Diplomacy as Strategic Communication in and by International Organizations: from Theory to Practice (or the other way around)

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### Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to examine public diplomacy as strategic communication in international<sup>2</sup> organizations. The paper reviews the strategic public diplomacy efforts of the United Nations Department of Public Information as a case study of an intergovernmental organization's communications engagement with its various stakeholders. Drawing upon emerging theories of public diplomacy and strategic communications, respective communication activities are evaluated against Zaharna's taxonomy of information versus relational framework of public diplomacy. The review revealed that the organization uses a combination of both approaches, and points to further research.

<sup>1</sup> As a UN practitioner, I am familiar with the UN system, which was helpful in conducting this research. It may be relevant to note that this research was conducted while on official special leave without pay from the organization, during which I was a full time PhD student at the University of Vienna. However, to avoid any ambiguity in terms of my motivation to do this research, I used only publically available information, namely DPI corporate website.

<sup>2</sup> The terms 'international' and 'intergovernmental' are used interchangeably in this paper.

### Introduction

Intergovernmental organizations engage with their Member States as their primary stakeholders on a daily basis while going about fulfilling their mandates. They also engage with other stakeholders including non-state ones, such as civil society organizations and the private sector, the academia and the media, who may have an interest and a stake in the respective international institutions' work. International organizations do so through what is usually referred to as public information, outreach and advocacy, taking place in the national, and more and more so, the global public sphere. They increasingly take advantage of new media platforms, which allow for the merging of the national with the global along with the local sphere into what Volkmer calls "communicative spheres" (Volkmer, 2014). Public information, outreach and advocacy contain elements of public diplomacy, which is sometimes seen as a counterpart of public affairs whose main purpose is to inform, while the main purpose of public diplomacy is to influence. The main distinction between the two is in the audience: domestic vs. foreign (Heller & Persson, in Snow & Taylor, 2009). USC<sup>3</sup> Center on Public Diplomacy distinguishes between public diplomacy and public affairs, which refers to "a government's activities and programs designed to communicate policy messages to its own domestic audiences" as opposed to foreign audiences that are served by public diplomacy. Melissen (2005), however, views the separation between public affairs (domestic audiences) and public diplomacy (foreign audiences) as inappropriate due to the interconnectedness of the world today. Public diplomacy also implies power (Snow, 2009), and as introduced by Nye can be regarded as 'soft power' for relationship building among states (Nye, 2008). Nowadays, however, public diplomacy is employed with and among diverse stakeholders Castells, 2008).

The paper examines the following research questions (RQ):

- RQ 1: How do international organizations engage with their stakeholders and do they do so by engaging in strategic public diplomacy?
- RQ 2: What does it mean to communicate strategically in an international organization in the light of the international and intercultural character of these public institutions?
- RQ 3: What factors influence the use of strategic communication in public diplomacy efforts by an organization?
- RQ 4: What are the pros and cons of applying strategic communication approaches in managing stakeholder relationships, in particular with non-state stakeholders?

The assumption put forward by this paper is that public diplomacy is strategic in that it is purposeful in order to reach an objective. In that sense it could be seen as synonymous with strategic communications. Specifically, this article focuses on the strategic public diplomacy of the United Nations (UN) secretariat, and more specifically, its department of Public Information (DPI). The article begins with a brief overview of what scholarship has to say about public diplomacy and strategic communications as two inter-related fields.

<sup>3</sup> University of Southern California (USC) Center on Public Diplomacy, retrieved from <http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/page/what-pd>

The methodology section discusses how and why I went about researching the case study of UN/DPI. As a UN practitioner, I reviewed only publicly available information as related to various stakeholder relations by DPI although it should be acknowledged that my own experience with the UN system and DPI has guided my research. Relevant websites were reviewed for publicly available information on how DPI approaches its communication and relations with their respective audiences on behalf of the UN. The activities were assessed according to Zaharna's (2009) information and relational frameworks in public diplomacy. The discussion part of the article presents the findings and elaborates the answers to the research questions. The conclusion briefly summarizes the article and makes recommendations for future research.

### Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication

Löffelholz, Auer and Srugies (2015) distinguish between four kinds of relationships between public diplomacy and strategic communication, namely they can be seen as synonymous (also the assumption of this article), they can be seen as distinct, or either of the two can be seen as overarching the other. The three co-authors also identify the strategic dimensions of public diplomacy in order to evaluate the strategic character of public diplomacy in practice. Based on their analysis they conclude that while public diplomacy can be synonymous with strategic communication, it is not strategic in itself. They identify several factors that may influence the strategic nature of public diplomacy: lack of financial and human resources, limited degree of and expertise in public diplomacy evaluations, insufficient institutionalization of public diplomacy within organizations.

Tracing the term 'public diplomacy' back to its beginnings, Cull (2009) attributes its first mention to Edmund Gullion in 1965 who – at the time – was dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, and a former US foreign service officer. In his view, public diplomacy deals

“... with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process of intercultural communications.” (Cull, 2009)

Public diplomacy can be seen as a political or a communication instrument used in governance, by “states, associations of states, and non-state actors to understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior; build and manage relationships; and influence opinions and actions to advance their interests and values” (Gregory, 2008, p. 3). Although there is no agreed definition among scholars and practitioners of public diplomacy, today the USC Center for Public Diplomacy <http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/page/what-pd> defines public diplomacy as “...the public, interactive dimension of diplomacy which is not only global in nature, but also

involves a multitude of actors and networks. It is a key mechanism through which nations foster mutual trust and productive relationships and has become crucial to building a secure global environment. “

The “multitude of actors and networks” reflects the changing world of governance (Rosenau, 1995; Held & McGrew, 2002), which is characterized by a new system of actors, including civil society along with governments and international organizations, all with a “stake in influencing decisions of international relevance” (Adolphsen, 2014, p. 17). Multiple stakeholders – state and non-state – sit at the table together and engage in a public discourse, i.e. “exchange of speech acts in front of an audience” (Adolphsen, 2014, p. 28). This exchange takes place in a public sphere, “a network for communicating information and points of view” (Habermas, 1996, p. 360). The discourse has been shifting from national to global with the global public sphere built around the Internet, “prompting the emergence of global civil society and of ad hoc forms of global governance” (Castells, 2008, p. 78). The national, global and even local spheres, however, may be merging into what Volkmer (2014) refers to as “communicative spheres” available through individual's micro-networks, enabled by the Internet's multimedia platforms.

Establishing their presence in the public sphere, be it national, global or individual “communicative spheres” on the Internet, both state and non-state actors deliberately engage in public discourse, which can be seen as strategic communication. According to Hallahan et al (2007, p. 3-4), this kind of intentional strategic communication can be identified as “the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission,” assuming that people will engage in “deliberate communication practice on behalf of organizations, causes, and social movements.” Strategic communication on the international stage is often referred to as public diplomacy (Adolphsen, 2014), a term that has been traditionally reserved for governments. They used this ‘soft power’ in contrast to military and economic power (Nye, 2008). Zaharna (2009) speaks of public diplomacy not only between sovereign states’ traditional diplomacy of official state-state relations, but also educational and cultural exchange programmes and visits, radio and television broadcasting and even language training, all to improve a country's image abroad. In Castells' view (2008, p. 78), “public diplomacy, as the diplomacy of the public, not of the government, intervenes in this global public sphere, laying the ground for traditional forms of diplomacy to act beyond the strict negotiation of power relationships by building on shared cultural meaning, the essence of communication.” According to Gilboa (2008), some scholars refer to the ‘new public diplomacy’ where non-state actors such as civil society organizations and private companies engage in public diplomacy activities once reserved for states to promote their own image and activities. Melissen (2005) distinguishes public diplomacy from propaganda, nation-branding and cultural relations. Fifty years ago Gullion would have preferred the term ‘propaganda,’ but due to its negative connotations, he opted for ‘public diplomacy’ (Cull, 2009). Kelley (2009, p. 82) argues that while public diplomacy and propaganda may not be the same, public diplomacy has at times shown a “propagandistic communication style,” for example in long-term campaigns or crisis management. Snow (2009), Gilboa (2009) and L'Etang (2009) see parallels between public diplomacy and public relations, as well as strategic studies, international

relations and diplomacy. Individual states' public diplomacy has been reviewed by various scholars, although most scholarship is about and from the US and the UK, two countries with the longest traditions in public diplomacy<sup>4</sup>. Interestingly, there is a lack of research into EU and UN, although Melissen (2005) suggests the two being "public diplomacy novices" that do not give provide much public diplomacy training to its international staff.

### Informational Versus Relational Communication Framework

In recognizing the large amount of scholarly work being produced in public diplomacy and its related fields, Zaharna (2009) proposes two distinct frameworks of how political entities communicate with their publics, namely an information and a relational framework. Under the information framework, communication is seen as "a linear process of transferring information often with the goal of persuasion or control," and the relational framework views communication as "a social process of building relationships and fostering harmony" (p. 88). While furthering political objectives is common to both frameworks, the informational one is about the design and dissemination of messages, and the relational one is about building relationships and social structures.

In her work, Zaharna (2009) draws upon intercultural communication and Edward T. Hall's concepts of low-context (little meaning in the context, most in code or message) and high-context cultures (most meaning in the context, very little in the code or message) according to which people tend to interpret communication. Zaharna also recalls several studies on collectivism vs. individualism, and independent vs. interdependent cultures, explaining whose interests (individual or group) people tend to favour. Harold Innis' and James Carey' work on transmission vs. rituals of communication (in Zaharna, 2009), with the difference being between "imparting information" vs. "the representation of beliefs" also contributed to Zaharna's distinction of the two frameworks.

In the light of the above, the informational framework reflects the transmission idea of lowcontext message with individual ideal. The focus here is on messaging strategy, whereby information is gathered, selected, designed, presented and disseminated as a message to promote, advance and engage publics to achieve the goals of the individual political sponsor. The sponsor decides on and controls the planning, implementation and evaluation of communication, including the message, the goal, the timeframe, the channels and the target audience, which is passive and its interaction with the sponsor is limited. Any feedback can be ignored by the sponsor. This one-way flow of information is distributed via a number of communication channels, from interpersonal (designated spokespeople), to print and multimedia (including audio/visual, broadcast, electronic). Because broadcast and electronic can be transmitted to the most people in the least amount of time, control over such media allows the sponsor to control its message. According to Zaharna (2009), the information framework also aims at specific goals or objectives, such as policy advocacy or image/reputation.

Initiatives designed under the information framework are typically evaluated quantitatively by simply counting the output and audience reach (e.g. how many brochures, readers/listeners/viewers) or via opinion polls of the audience's knowledge, attitude or behavior. Zaharna (2009) identifies the following initiatives under the information framework:

1. Propaganda: oldest, most prominent, most extreme form of control over message and dissemination, moves from advocacy to coercion, deception, information control, manipulation, access to alternative sources may be limited; once exposed, it may lose its persuasive value; common in dictatorships, conflict-ridden environments; cyberspace may be the new frontier.
2. Nation-Branding: sometimes seen as separate from public diplomacy or public diplomacy is seen as one of its dimensions (Anholt in Zaharna, 2009); it is about "strategically designing and disseminating information to targeted audiences" (p. 90); used in advertising, public relations, direct marketing.
3. Media Relations: "dissemination of information and coordination of public relations with the press" (Melissen in Zaharna, 2009, p. 90); point of contact, spokesperson.
4. International Broadcasts: using radio or television to disseminate information. The views of the political sponsor (e.g. BBC, VoA, Radio Free Europe, CCTV International); often labeled propaganda, although no coercion or deception (audience chooses to listen/watch).
5. Information Campaigns: issue-specific media-driven, modeled on Western public relations (include key messages, objectives, target audiences, tactics of design and dissemination, primarily via mass media); evaluation via opinion polls measures effectiveness in reaching the objectives with the target audience.

In contrast to the information framework, the relational framework focuses on ritual communication of building relationships in the spirit of collectivist/interdependent, high-context focus away from the message. Messaging strategies are replaced by relationship-building strategies around specific actions, which can be symbolic and demonstrate commitment, develop trust and establish credibility. There is no one sponsor rather there is "control mutuality," as per Grunig and Hon between parties that "share in deciding and controlling" (in Zaharna, 2009, p. 92). There is an "interactive relationship between the political sponsor and the public", which is seen as "active participants, stakeholders, or even constituencies" (p. 92). Establishing and expanding interactive communication channels is at the heart of the relational initiatives (e.g. establishing strong media relations through local media), favouring face-to-face contact and direct interaction. Given the ongoing nature of relationships, Zaharna recalls Lindermann, Grunig & Hon and other scholars' work by suggesting that the monitoring and the evaluation of relational initiatives also be ongoing and their effectiveness "measured by the duration, strength and perceived satisfaction among the parties" (2009, p 92). Zaharna distinguishes three different tiers of relational public diplomacy initiatives, based on the level on "the level of participation (individuals, institutions, or community), degree of coordination (limited, shared, or negotiated), scope (single-issue or multifaceted), time duration (days, months, or years), and policy objective

4 See Snow, N. & Taylor, P. (Eds.), Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy. New York, NY: Routledge.

(political or non-political)” (p. 93).

1. Under the first tier, Zaharna includes various exchange programs and visits such as cultural and educational exchange programs (e.g. Fulbright) and leadership visits by heads of state or government.
2. Zaharna’s second tier anticipates a higher level of participation, longer duration, partnership coordination as well as a public diplomacy skill set (e.g. establishing interpersonal communication channels). Examples include cultural and language institutes (e.g. Alliance Française, The British Council, Goethe Institut, Confucius Institute); development aid projects with dual symbolic and actual dimensions of relationship-building; “twinning” arrangements (e.g. “partner towns” “brother/sister cities”) can be officially designated by governments or as citizen diplomacy; relationship building campaigns (similar to information campaigns but different in its primary goal of relationship-building rather than disseminating information to publics (e.g. partner groups working together); and non-political networking schemes use Krebs and Holley’s (in Zaharna, 2009) so-called “network weavers” creating and expanding relationships between like-minded individuals or groups.
3. Finally, Zaharna’s third tier of relationship-building initiatives “involves policy networking strategies that incorporate coalition building with other countries or non-state actors to achieve policy objectives.” Rather than working alone, this most complex “catalytic diplomacy” (Hocking in Zaharna, 2009, p. 96) requires good facilitation, coordination, advocacy, negotiation, and mediation skills.

In Zaharna’s view, when “communicating with culturally diverse publics and for navigating the changing communication dynamics of the international arena,” relationship-building and networking strategies may be especially relevant (2009, p. 97). Zaharna also suggests that predominantly Western assumptions that “communication equals information” (p. 97) and that relationships can be built by simply providing information are misguided especially when it comes to communicating with culturally diverse publics who may respond better to the highcontext relational communication strategies based collectivist/interdependent focus away from the message. Zaharna calls for public diplomacy “to redefine its vision of strategic communication to include both information transfer and relationship building” (p. 97).

## Methodology

Research was designed around a case study of public diplomacy as strategic communication in the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI), which was selected for its large size and reach. Firstly, DPI with (a staff of around 750 worldwide<sup>5</sup>) is one of the largest, if not the largest, public information and communication component of any international organization; secondly, DPI is by far the largest in scope of its programme, providing information and communication support to the UN secretariat on all issues on the UN’s agenda,

from human rights and international law, development and humanitarian assistance, to peacekeeping, disarmament and counter-terrorism; and thirdly, DPI engages with various stakeholders, from governments and the media, to various representatives of the civil society.

Once the case study was decided, DPI’s corporate website at [www.un.org/en/hq/dpi/index.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/hq/dpi/index.shtml) was reviewed for publicly available information about how DPI communicates with its stakeholders, and whether it engages in strategic public diplomacy while doing so. While there was no explicit information about a communication strategy or plan on the website, the information available was analyzed according to Zaharna’s (2009) two respective frameworks of strategic public diplomacy and their related initiatives. As discussed above, the two frameworks distinguish between an information and a relational style of public diplomacy, or how political entities communicate with their international publics. This is particularly relevant for my study as the UN/DPI publics are international and intercultural by nature. Zaharna (2009) refers to similar studies in intercultural communication, although these are not included here.

## Findings and Discussion

As per its corporate website, DPI was “established in 1946 by the General Assembly resolution 13 (I), to promote global awareness and understanding of the work of the United Nations. DPI undertakes this goal through radio, television, print, the Internet, video-conferencing and other media tools<sup>6</sup>.”

According to Zaharna’s (2009) strategic public diplomacy frameworks, the “About DPI” blurb falls under the information framework, as it clearly articulates its goal as to “promote (...)” and the way it goes about it is through “radio, television, print, the Internet, video-conferencing and other media tools.” They are all tools that largely correspond with the information rather than relational framework, with the possible exception of the Internet and video-conferencing, which might be evolving as networking framework, as elaborated by Zaharna, Fisher & Arsenault (2013). Although this paper limits its analysis to the information and relational frameworks, it is important to note the “decentralized of contemporary communications privileges networks – not diplomats. The so-called “connective mindshift (...) of empowering and engaging with others is a more efficient path toward sustained change” (2013, p. 17).

The information framework also holds true for DPI’s slogan on the home page: “Informing the World about the World Organization” DPI’s mission, however, combines informational framework with relational one as per “The Department of Public Information is dedicated to communicating the ideals and work of the United Nations to the world; to interacting and partnering with diverse audiences; and to building support for peace, development and human rights for all. Inform. Engage. Act.”

5 Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015, A/68/6 (Sec. 28). Retrieved from un.org

6 Department of Public Information, as retrieved from [www.un.org/en/hq/dpi/index.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/hq/dpi/index.shtml)



The word “engage” adds a new dimension to communicating with the organization’s publics. It no longer just informs a passive audience, but instead expects the audience to be active, engaged. “The recent mantras of relationship building, networking, alliances, partnerships, and engagement are all part of the vocabulary of collaboration.” (Zaharna, Fisher & Arsenault, 2013, p. 22)

The UN General Assembly’s Fifth Committee is responsible for administrative and budgetary matters; it approved DPI’s budget for 2014-2015 biennium in the amount of \$186,017,200<sup>7</sup>. DPI is run by its head at the Under-Secretary-General level, who reports directly to the Secretary-General. Ms. Cristina Gallach of Spain was appointed by the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in December 2014 and took office on 1 February 2015. Interestingly, Ms. Gallach is Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, while “communication” is not part of the department’s name.

DPI is accountable to and reports on its work annually to the UN General Assembly’s Committee of Information (Col), established by the General Assembly resolution 33/115 C of 18 December 1978. Col is composed of UN member state representatives; currently there are 114. Any member state that is not a member of the Committee, can apply for membership through the Secretariat. DPI is composed of three divisions, namely Strategic Communications Division (SCD), News and Media Division (NMD) and Outreach Division (OD).

SCD “formulates communications strategies on priority issues and launches global campaigns. The Division also manages the network of 63 United Nations information centres and offices around the world.”

NMD “produces and publishes news and information on the UN’s priorities and activities, and builds partnerships with media organizations and other target audiences. It helps and supports the work of journalists and news organizations covering the work of the United Nations.”

OD “engages and educates people and their communities worldwide to encourage support for the ideals and activities of the United Nations”

The “About DPI” page similarly places the three divisions under the information framework, and partly under the relational framework, for example in the case of NMD, which “builds partnerships with media organizations and other target audiences,” although their publics are still identified as “target audiences” rather than “stakeholders” as is common under the relational framework.

While administratively attached to DPI, on par with the three divisions, the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General reports directly to the Secretary-General<sup>8</sup>.

The office “plans the Secretary-General’s media related activities and briefs journalists on a daily basis. To explain the policies and work of the Organization to the world’s media, the Office:

- provides daily briefings, interviews and background discussion (for this purpose, receiving guidance from the Office of the Secretary-General, as well as information from other offices, funds, programmes and agencies of the United Nations system);
- advises the Secretary-General on relations with the media;
- schedules his/her press interviews;
- travels with the Secretary-General and speaks to the media on his/her behalf.

Similarly, the mission of the Office implies that its activities fall under the information framework, although it would be important to mention the Media Accreditation and Liaison Unit (MALU), which is administratively placed under NMD’s Press Service. While most of its services include some sort of information review and dissemination, the liaison function potentially goes beyond being the first point of contact for the UN-accredited journalists, and in fact builds relationships with the media representatives.

“Provides accreditation and liaison services to journalists covering United Nations activities at Headquarters and at major United Nations conferences abroad; reviews applications and authentication of credentials and required documents from print, photo, television, film and electronic media; facilitates media coverage of United Nations activities within appropriate guidelines; and coordinates the provision of facilities - such as office space and equipment - to accredited correspondents. As part of MALU, the Media Documents Centre (MDC) disseminates UN documents, press releases and statements of member states directly to accredited journalists.”

As mentioned above Col meets annually and oversees the work of DPI, providing guidance on its policies, programmes and activities. In its most recent meeting, from 27 April – 8 May 2015, the three divisions reported on their work.

SCD echoed its mission in its report A/AC.198/2015/2: “(...) the Department develops and implements strategies for communicating United Nations messages on priority issues. The Division also manages the Department’s network of more than 60 field offices. As the secretariat for the United Nations Communications Group and its task forces, the Division seeks to strengthen the coordination of communications across the United Nations system.”

7 Proposed Programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015 as per A/68/6 (Sect.28).

8 Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed Mr. Stéphane Dujarric of France as his Spokesman, with effect on 10 March 2014. Retrieved from [www.un.org/en/hq/dpi/index.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/hq/dpi/index.shtml)

NMD in its 2015 report to Col A/AC.198/2015/3 also reflected its mission: “(...) the Department strengthens support for the United Nations by enhancing the quality, format and timeliness of information products on the Organization, and for increasing the geographic range and frequency of use of its products by media outlets and other users.” Similarly, OD in its report to Col A/AC.198/2015/4 also recalled its mission:

“(...) works to enhance understanding of the role, work and concerns of the United Nations and to encourage the exchange of ideas, information and knowledge in support of the goals of the Organization.”

The three respective divisions’ achievements were quantified in their reports by presenting the number of deliverables as requested by the Col. Examples below include for SCD: some of the communications campaigns work and UN Information Centres around the world; for NMD: the UN News Centre and multilingualism; and for OD: Academic Impact Initiative and working with non-governmental organizations.

### SCD

#### Communications campaigns

“5. Working with the Secretary-General’s Climate Change Support Team and partners in both the United Nations system and civil society, the Department promoted the Climate Summit in order to galvanize action towards a climate agreement. This was accomplished through traditional media outreach, which resulted in 34,000 articles, and through a robust social media campaign that produced more than 3 billion impressions, reaching virtually half of all Twitter accounts.(...)”

6. Working with the Office of the Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning and partners in the United Nations system and other offices, the Department prepared and launched a campaign strategy for “2015: The Time for Global Action”.(...)”

#### Information Centres Service

“48. In the field, United Nations information centres continue to use digital communication tools, including social media platforms and mobile telephones, to reach a wider and younger audience in a timely and effective manner. The Information Centre in Panama City, in collaboration with the office of the Senior Coordinator for the Response to Cholera in Haiti, raised awareness on social media about the importance of adequate sanitation, reaching 5,000 people on Facebook (...) Crime campaign “Against Human Trafficking” on Facebook and Twitter, which reached 101,475 people.

49. (...) reach out to local audiences in their languages to promote global United Nations campaigns. (...) In an effort to increase the service that the Information Centre in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil provides to Portuguese-speaking audiences around the world, the information centre works in close collaboration with the United Nations in Brazil, maintaining the latter’s Facebook and

Twitter accounts. (...) Facebook page doubled its audience size to more than 200,000. On Twitter, the “United Nations in Brazil” account surpassed the 100,000 mark in 2014. To date, United Nations information centres use local languages on 17 Facebook, 16 Twitter and 7 YouTube accounts.”

### NMD

#### United Nations News Centre

“52. The multilingual United Nations News Centre web portal continued to provide timely, accurate and balanced news coverage (...) in all official languages (...). In doing so, it coordinated with the relevant substantive offices, (...), and a range of information networks in New York and around the world.

53. During the reporting period, the United Nations News Centres in all six official languages saw increases (...); the Russian-language portal saw the most dramatic relative improvement, with page views rising by 142 per cent, from 462,373 in 2013 to 1,121,144 in 2014, and the number of Russian users climbed by 175 per cent compared with 2013. The English portal experienced a 13 per cent rise in page views and a 20 per cent gain in users compared with the same period in the previous year. Meanwhile, the six language News Centres combined accounted for more than 16 million page views, representing more than 11 per cent of all page views for the entire United Nations website.

#### Multilingualism

“77. The Department undertook concerted efforts to improve multilingualism through cooperative arrangements while (...). Agreements were established with two universities in China, Soochow University and Shanghai International Studies University, to translate content from English to Chinese. Agreements were also established with the University of Salamanca to translate content from English to Spanish, (...).

78. (...) The official Arabic United Nations Facebook account saw an increase of more than 100 per cent over the same period in the previous year, with more than 200,000 active followers. Similarly, the official Arabic United Nations Twitter account (...) now exceeds 100,000 followers. The Department also translated and narrated the UN in Action television programme in Arabic (...).”

### OD

#### Academic Impact initiative

6. The United Nations Academic Impact initiative continues to be a bridge between the Organization and the global community of scholarship. (...) The Academic Impact continues to partner with its members in relation to specific objectives of the Organization. (...) In October, the Academic Impact arranged a discussion involving the finance and foreign ministers of Timor Leste and scholars on the development of that country and the United Nations role therein. (...).”

#### Non-governmental organizations

“9. The Department regularly engaged with members of civil society working at the international and local levels to increase their involvement (...). Toward that end, briefings for civil society, also available via webcast, remained the chief means for regular engagement and feedback from civil society in New York on the work of the United Nations. Increased use of social media around the briefings contributed to a high volume of online conversations by civil society on Facebook and Twitter concerning the Organization’s agenda.

10. The sixty-fifth annual Department of Public Information/Non-Governmental Organizations Conference, on the theme “2015 and beyond: our action agenda”, which took place from 27 to 29 August 2014 at United Nations Headquarters, brought together a record number of engaged civil society representatives from around the world.”

#### Dag Hammarskjöld Library

“36. (...) the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries was reconstituted as the Steering Committee for Libraries of the United Nations, with the aim of building practical cooperation among the library services.

39. Over the reporting period, some 2,750 information research requests from Permanent Missions were answered. Some 60 per cent of participants in the training sessions given by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library were Permanent Mission staff and delegates (accounting for 480 of the 800 attendees during the period).

40. Some 11,430 United Nations documents (representing 129,234 pages) were digitized over the reporting period, and 10,950 of those documents were uploaded to the Official Documents System, and hence made available to researchers.”

In response to my RQ 1: How do international organizations engage with their stakeholders and do they do so by engaging in strategic public diplomacy? information found on DPI’s website suggests that most of the information presented in the three reports can be identified under Zaharna’s (2009) information framework (e.g. promoted, deployed, prepared, launched), however, the relational framework clearly and increasingly complements the basic information dissemination (e.g. working with partners, established agreements). Although this is evident throughout DPI’s work, important to note here are the efforts in partnering with local audiences by the UN Information Centres (UNICs) around the world, and the specific efforts taken by the various offices in NMD (e.g. News Centre, UN Television and Radio, and UN Website). The relational framework is most evident in the work undertaken by OD, which has strengthened its cooperation and partnership with various representatives of the civil society, from academia and NGOs, celebrities, to youth, students and even libraries.

This information also helps answer my RQ 2: What does it mean to communicate strategically in an international organization in the light of the international and intercultural character of these public institutions? UNICs translate UN information into local languages, liaise and engage with the local media and the civil society, and organize events on UN priority issues and

observances. In particular, this relates to the part of the report on multilingualism. In response to the request by the General Assembly resolution 54/64 of 6 December 1999, the UN Secretary-General appoints the current DPI head and Under-Secretary-General for Communication and Public Information as the Coordinator for Multilingualism to promote the balance among the use of the six UN official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish) and the two UN working languages (English and French). UNICs take this idea further by including dissemination of the organization’s products and services in local languages<sup>9</sup>.

In considering RQ 3: What factors influence the use of strategic communication in public diplomacy efforts by an organization? DPI takes into account the budgetary constraints and the guidance provided by the Col. This is in addition to the programmatic priorities as determined by the General Assembly. The answer to the RQ 4: What are the pros and cons of applying strategic communication approaches in managing stakeholder relationships, in particular with non-state stakeholders? might be related to how DPI refers to its publics, either as passive audiences under the information framework or engaged stakeholders under the relational framework, but more research is needed here.

## Conclusion

As shown by Center’s historical review (2009), since its beginnings DPI’s mandate has asked it to undertake three tasks simultaneously: firstly, to promote a vision on behalf of the UN; secondly, to improve its image; and thirdly to merely and impartially engage in the dissemination of the UN’s proceedings and opinions. DPI continues to fulfill the three hardly compatible tasks though its three divisions, despite budgetary and staffing constraints<sup>10</sup> and criticisms accusing it of being a mere “government printing office, library, and reference source for member states, the press, and the interested public than as an energetic, media savvy, public relations machine pursuing a strategic agenda to advance UN ideals and bolster the United Nations’ image” (Alleyne, in Center, 2009, p. 974).

For all its shortcomings, research conducted for this paper showed that DPI engages in both information and relational public diplomacy (Zaharna, 2009) with some strategic dimensions of public diplomacy (Löffelholz, Auer & Srugies, 2015) included (e.g. messaging, goals and objectives, target audience or coordinating partners, instruments or types of media). Typically, the strategies are related to specific programmes that DPI is requested to promote as per UN programmatic priorities. There is no actual strategic communication or public diplomacy plan available on DPI’s public website that was reviewed for this paper. This is not unusual as strategic planning often takes place behind the scenes.

<sup>9</sup> On multilingualism, as retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/events/iyl/un.shtml>

<sup>10</sup> See Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015, A/68/6 (Sect. 28)

The fact that only publically available information on DPI's website was reviewed is a clear limitation of the study. More research is needed to collect more nuanced and timely data. A related study might want to consider that the Office of Internal Oversight Services<sup>11</sup> had "recommended that the Department should develop and present to the Committee on Information an action plan that considered (...) the need for a strategic plan for public information and communications in the Secretariat (...)" However, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General said that "outlining a vision and setting broad priority issues was the Secretary-General's role and that the Department of Public Information needed dedicated resources to support the Executive Office of the Secretary-General in developing a strategic communications plan for executing those priorities. Thus, rather than taking on board the recommendation for a strategic plan for public information and communications, the Department argued that the current structure, which combined a long-term communications policy approved by the Secretary-General with shorter-term communications priorities and campaigns, presented a pragmatic, flexible approach."

In addition to the above, the field of public diplomacy would benefit from more research about strategic public diplomacy by the UN, DPI and other organizations in the UN system, as well as other international organizations, including NGOs.

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## Convergence of Media and Transformation of Audience

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### Abstract

The development of information-communication technology represents the formation of a new technological-economic paradigm which brings a series of deep structural cuts to all parts of social life. The paper shows an altered logic of media action as a consequence of technologic development and the popularization of internet. Reflexion of the arisen change is a convergence which is in a simplest definition categorized as technological and of media. Joint or convergent communication channels which are formed on a gigantic media monopoly conglomerate affect the perception of receivers, consumers which are known under the term audience. The latter is affected by the process of transformation and it changes its original way of operation.

Media concentration is changing the image of media space and means convergence in the production of content, for it is based on general audience interest and cost reduction, what denotes traditional journalism aspects and refers to editorship integration and reorganisation of the same media organisation.

Even in the Slovenian media space we have encountered technology based convergence, which changed the media content production accordingly to reorganisation of media organisation, which simultaneously created and is still creating new user experience.

Convergence thus refers to social and cultural nature, which is triggering the question of forming the global village and the risk for the homogenisation of culture into an informational society.

Key words: convergence, audience, transformation, production, new user experience

## Introduction

The world is showing us a totally different picture with introduction of mass media, for it plays a great role with its own presence in all pores of our society, regarding the formation of social changes while enrolling in a strategic game of constructing the social reality. Creating an audience and a position of statements are reflected in a versatile invisible media strength. In coordination with the development of mass media, technological, media and informational revolution was unfolding, which is today best showing in a versatile web appearance, as a fundamental internet component.

In this article we are going to discuss the given issue of a traditional mass media introduction question on the internet and thus constructing the new media space. There were and still being created neologisms and phrases which describe the new media and technological environment: media convergence or media and communication practices convergence (intertwining various elements of media production and internet products consumption or content), new media, audiences and users. In this case the expression new in fact represents the customs and ways, most commonly on a convergence relation user – author, when the roles of two totally synchronize, for the reader/viewer/listener can become an author and vice versa in an instant, while he is simultaneously a consumer. This transformed audience represents the public on one side and consumerism on the other. The peculiarity of the new communications is that the users are simultaneously consumers and producers of the new content, while being convergent on various levels of communication. The transformed audience consequently accepts the altered patterns of media participation, what is reflected in the passivation and individualization. Thus we cannot research the convergence, without consequently researching the audience. We cannot just study convergence without consequently paying close attention to the audience and its transformation, therefore we will focus on it equally as it is an integral part of this paper.

Our point of interest is the meaning of the term convergence, what is its foundation for media convergence creation, how it reflects on the media market and what is the role of the new audience, in a relation towards traditional media and newly fabricated forms of production. The answer to the problem of how do news production companies react, is going to be found with an empiric research, based on an in-depth interview with the two largest Slovenian national media organisations: News production company Delo and RTV Slovenija. With this research we want to understand if the media convergence changed the media production content and sole reorganisation of media organisation, or is the media convergence creating new user experience, and furthermore did the development of information-communicational technology contributed to the media convergence. The methodological basis of the theoretical part is the descriptive study method of scientific literature in the fields of convergence, audience, informational technologies and communications.

The article represents the base contribution, regarding the convergence research within Slovenian field, it is a gathering of the most important research fathoms of the convergence term, it defines the newly formed audience characteristics, showing us the convergence production content situation on a national level (Delo and RTV Slovenija – MMC) while opening the research

question theme of this sort in the Slovenian media space, which is, at least academically, poorly even unsearched.

## Convergence

There are numerous convergence interpretations orientated on various entities, which in research, defining and term explanation transcend together. One of the main convergence trial problems is defining the term (Thorton & Keith, 2009, p. 258). For some scientists, convergence stands for media consolidation synonym, while it represents a description for others, when a new multifunctional device – phone, cable/optical modem – performs a task, where at first there were two or more devices needed. Even in the press and mass communication the opinions differ to what exactly convergence relates. Some researchers use convergence when they relate to cooperation between printing and broadcasting, while other specialists claim that every press or broadcasting organisation which places news in an internet form stands for convergence practices, what Thornton and Keith (2009, p. 258) label as webvergence.

As it stands, there is no unified convergence definition, for every applicatory field defines it by its utility norms. The sole expression convergence etymologically originates from the combination of Latin words *com* (to, towards) and *vergere* (to bend or lean) Liestøl (2007, p. 166). The same author claims that modern convergence emerged in the beginning of the 18. Century and was used in multiple settings and disciplines, from mathematics and meteorology to geography and literature. Convergence is considered as a process of »media border blurring: in communications from point-to-point« (de Sola Pool, 1987, p. 19), including mail, telephone and telegraph, while press, radio and television in the mass media (de Sola Pool, 1987, p. 19). Academic discussions about convergence and its integration into the politics strategies belong into the 90s, while paralelly with its studies there was a media development discussion.

There are multiple convergence interpretation inside the scientific circle. As said, the condition for the understanding of convergence is its technological basis. The multilayer understanding of convergence Fagerfjord in Storsul (2007, p. 20) segment it on network, terminal, service, rhetorical, markets and regulatory regime convergence. Representing convergence there are many actions taking place, which influence the media workflow (Deuze and Quandt, 2007, p. 237) Today convergence represents one of the main concepts for description and understanding of various concepts regarding digital media development.

From the aspect of our research we are especially interested in media convergence which refers to the media production frame, also named as media consolidation or concentration (Borko, 2008), that is a technological conversion, with basis on signal digitalisation. »During digitalisation, the signals are equal, regardless of information form or communication which it represents« (Fagerfjord & Storsul, 2007, p. 20). The separated channels are grouped into one channel on one platform, as in »television, radio, press internet merging« (Borko, 2008).

As Deuze claims (in Vobič, 2011, p. 947), internet has immensely changed the communication and organisation of other media: marketing, press companies and organisation

convergence, which have blurred the limits between press, electronic and internet journalism, as a global phenomena.

Based on convergence research, which goes back to the 80s of the previous century, Cook (2005, p. 24) points out the separation of media convergence on three fields: economic, technological or production convergence and cultural or visual convergence.

*Economic convergence* discusses media (Cook, 2005, p. 24) mostly on behalf of securing the media market by media conglomerates in a sense of economic, political and social parameters. Although in Cooks opinion critics (Gitlin, 1993, 1996; Herman & Chomsky 1988; Miller 1997; Price & Weinberg 1996; Schiller 1996) in Cook (2005, p. 25) stress that this type of convergence influences on reduced competition on media market and forms a homogenous media environment, where the same information reaches the consumer in different forms.

The development of media market in the 80s and 90s, when the liberalisation, with the democratisation of society enables wide and expedited privatisation of media and develops an economic underlay for capital stacking and media corporation expansion, validates that the global media industry, with media concentration does not admit national borders. The expansion of privatisation and capital concentrating, with the expansion of commercial media has enabled political-ideological processes »under the false flag democratisation« (Hrvatín & Milosavljević, 2001, p. 14) of media and society. Deregulation (the process of removing the country regulatory restrictions) has caused interdependency of political and capitalistic elites. »Connecting the large media corporations into even bigger content, technology and promotionally connected conglomerates is an obvious consequence of concentration in media domain« (Bašić Hrvatín & Kučić, 2005, p. 27).

The media concentration is based on concentration of ownership, profit and megacorporation creation with immense negative consequences for a democratic role of mass media, furthermore this trend is continued by globalisation and delocalisation of local characteristics and peculiarities. Reducing the production cost of the degraded contents, derogating the user, the mass media individual, for the sake of choice, offering one dimensional contents trough seemingly numerous media of all kinds and formats – these are the media concentration influences, which generally » treats the user merely as a passive consumer« (Bašić Hrvatín & Kučić, 2005, p. 33).

*Technological/Production convergence* by Cook (2005, p. 25) relates on unification of couple or several media technologies or on the information exchange trough digitalisation. This suggests that merging technologies in forming of hybrid products often require merging of markets, services and industry (Baldwin et al.; Nilsson et al.; Pavlik; Thielmann & Dowling in Cook, 2005, p. 25).

»Deuze (2004, p. 140) in given context adduces two application concepts of various (multi)media representations in journalism:

- Representing (short) news on a press internet portal with the help of various media formats (but not exclusively): texts, photographs, audio, video, graphics, animations etc.
- Integrated representation of new over various media, as are newspaper, magazines, radio, television or press internet pages« (L6-4181, p. 183).

*Cultural or visual convergence* je intertwined with technology and production convergence. Cook

(2005, p. 25) claims that process, media and technology convergence »is creating unique cultural and visual environment, in which visual images of one media easily overwhelm other media« (p. 25). Pictorial material of television news is easily usable as a visual communication in printed media – e.g. newspaper front page – or in digital world internet news – preview on internet press portal.

Because of the mentioned technological (platform), economic (markets) and media (content) linking we have a new expression called cross media, which are creating the modern media space, where digital media or internet is not the starting point, but a traditional media. Consequently, the intertwining of broadcasting, computer and newspaper industry is (still) far from reality of traditional media platform and this it still exists in relation to one another – of course with new internet platforms.

The field of cross media is applicable to several similar or competition concepts, which are being used differently by different authors: transmedia, multiple platform, cross platform, hybrid media, intermedia and last but not least divergence as contrast to convergence. The term cross media is used for description of the whole story, production or event with the use of an uniformed combination platform. The platforms are understood at physical devices, as a mobile phone, newspapers or television and radio.

One angle of differentiation of cross-media journalism, between broadcasting and newspaper company (as it is analysed in the empiric research) is in dynamic and static content: writing and pictures in contrast to audio and video (Liestøl in Erdal 2007, p. 76). Internet publications of the most larger newspapers are not clean reproductions of the newspaper on the internet, additionally we see video integration. But the fact is, that the text material and pictures are still the primary content of the newspaper agencies, as are the sound and picture in broadcasting. Generally we perceive this as something normal, but the production, that includes more than one media platform –newspaper or television -, will differ. Convergence in journalism is thus connected with the shift of media landscape and is mostly showing as the integration of editorship, which is not solely a technological process, but also »a reflection of interaction between the technology and journalism and following the specific and frequently conflicting relationships between journalism and markets norms in a specific media organisation« (Vobič, 2009).

To say that the webvergence is short termed phase and that the next phase of delivering news will be solely on the web, is cataclysmic. But we will surely see that it will be the transformation that will continue to dictate the convergence era of changes inside of ever so changing time.

## Audience transformation in the convergence process

The subject of our research is also the newly created audience e.g. it's transformation. Technological and social changes have reduced the homogenic and simultaneous experience of the audience. They have become »more numerous and caduced« while their »segmentation and fragmentation often predicted« McQuail (1997, p. 10). The media and lifestyle pluralisation is opening new possibilities of multidimensional communication of the audience at once (Kalamar, 2007).

An important audience transformation aspect is represented by audience division on public and consumer. (Ang, 1991, p. 154). By Ang, the audience has represented the public for so long, until they were addressed as citizens. Citizen participation includes it's research and is based on mutual interests. The audience transformation into consumers means the end of public or working in favour of socio-political communities. The transformed audience reflects the media consumer, a number of a client for public service or commercial broadcasting, in the limits of both, for the advertisers. Every member of the macro idolum audience represents »marketing object« (Ang, 1991, p. 154), while the transformation makes him a passive, uncritical subject.

The key point of the scientific research gnosis is the Web 2.0, which enables the broad usage of World Wide Web, user interaction, easier information transfer and better solutions for web applications, which drastically changed the everyday interaction of people with the media. (Nightingale & Dwyer, 2007). As stated by Gross (2009), the internet media formed a multidirectional, with audience supported communicational reality that gave the chance to citizens, where they can enjoy as content producers and not only as consumers, where he adds, that the media tyranny is challenged by the »up to down« system. The term »producer« by Bruns (2005, 2006) and Jenkins (2006) represents the unification of producer and consumer in an interactive environment consequently forming a new perspective of seeing the media audience. A new term "prosumerism" has been coined. It is a compound made of words producer and consumer and it denotes a situation "when the content producers transfer their power of controlling the news reception on the consumers" (Gunter in Oblak & Petrič, 2005, p. 96).

Media convergence allows various media activity and co-creation from the audience, hence the term active audience. The population's activity, their constant interaction with the media is closely related to intertextuality which serves as a basis for audience interaction between different media. The transformation of audience practices is also described with an expression fanification of the audience (Nikunen, 2007, p. 111), since the intermedial and interactive audience activity is most present and common in popular culture industry. Bailey (2002) and Jenkins (2004) even believe the fans to be the pioneers of the audience of the future and predict audience practice transformations – something, that could be described as popularization of audience. Nikunen (2007, p. 111) links these transformations and deviations of new audience practices to the concept of intermediality. This significant shift in audience behaviour is undoubtedly a result of fast-developing media landscape and media technology, especially if we take a look at the popular culture industry media – these show a drastic increase of intermediality and interactivity as far as audience activity is concerned.

Traditional media studies are more or less focused on the reception of a particular medium. Television audience reception research or local newspaper reader research is especially useful for receiving some detailed insight into specific understanding of a certain medium. An approach, which describes media consumption in such manner, is nowadays completely separated and isolated from media markets and expectations. Everyday media use is rather complex, diverse and overlapping, as numerous studies have shown.

It is interesting to observe changes in the nature of media research; before internet there

was a great alliance between television and tabloids, which was also widely discussed in media theory. The concepts of tellyland (Connell in Nikunen, 2007, p. 112) and celebrity (Hartley in Nikunen, 2007, p. 112) (fame exclusively thanks to television; as the show ends, the celebrities are forgotten) date from that time. With the arrival of the internet and the world wide web the tables have turned in internet's favour. The way people partake in media is connected to their habits. Deuze (2004, p. 146, 147) categorizes habits as follows: reading, watching, listening, multitasking. Jenkins (2004) believes that the media convergence alters the relation between the existing technology, industry, gender and audience and the "existing media" (Nikunen, 2007, p. 113) and explains that (Jenkins) convergence is a process which is oriented downward from corporation's viewpoint and upward from consumer's viewpoint; we call this phenomenon participatory culture.

The process of convergence is intertwined with technology, corporate strategy and audience. Online, web-based, new, digital, convergent are all adjectives that describe a modern user, which eventually pertains to the entire audience. In a nutshell, all those who use various online products for their own good or for others, read, change, comment, share, write new data, make opinions or create a new reality and are a complementary part of different publics.

As with any new, popular and quickly growing medium there are negative consequences, especially those linked with addiction, improper usage and an excessive waste of time (Oblak & Petrič, 2005, p. 97). In the past, plenty time and effort was dedicated to curb harmful effects of watching television, nowadays, internet presents an even bigger challenge, especially among youth. Kimberly (2004) describes the pathological use of internet as a mental disorder, whether we talk about video games or any other addictions. Social networks fall into that category as well. Their name suggests that these websites encourage social contacts and foster relationships between friends but the real effect is opposite: asociality. Passivity is "the back side of subjectivity" and poses a certain "threat, danger" which reduces the subject, takes his dignity and at the same time provides him with constant temptation, enticement and possibility to indulge in a secret pleasure, which is a paradoxically active strategy which in reality renders the subject powerless (Dolar, 1997, p. 11).

Napoli (2010, 13) explains that the mass media have contributed to the pacification of audience. He adds that passivity is becoming the elemental idea of audience (Butsch in Napoli, 2010, p. 13). Angus in Napoli (2010, p. 13) states that the original tendency of communication systems was not based on audience formation with means of production and circulation of public knowledge. In theoretical context it is easy to talk about active participation allowed by the media, but research work shows that it is difficult to discern true activity due to the fragmented and individualized audience. In the words of Livingstone (in Napoli, 2010, p. 13) the mass indirect audience has become very interiorized and inaccessible to the researcher.

Ule (2000, p. 87) warns about the problems of the postmodern generation; leaning heavily on youth which passively takes in new identities produced by the market of mass consumption. The postmodern population is at mercy of products of popular culture industry, which are being shared around between users, mostly via social networks. This method, instead of actual social networking outside of the domain of the virtual world, comes at a steep price of "relationship minimalism,

calculative egoism as well as energy and time saving" (Renner, 2000, p. 113).

The passivization of new audience is accompanied by individualization, brought by the new user experience. Individualization is "a process which puts a great burden of psychosocial integration on the shoulders of an individual. This burden was up to recently partly shared by intervening institutions (family, work, various reference groups)" (Ule, 2000, p. 31). Renner (2000, p. 99) argues that the main problem with "new individualization" lies in the "deconstruction of youth into a group of individuals, where each on his own, in deep privacy, fights for the best possible life space and is unable to recognize that the collective and political problems are being crushed into sand of self-disciplinary activity."

Aforementioned issue is not limited to single nations, countries our communities. It is an issue of the "super-national global society, which is neither a global state nor a federative group of countries bound together by some agreements, but rather a sphere of super-national factors and spaces, all functionally different in itself in a new global manner, which are pushing traditional institutions of modern societies more and more into oblivion" (Ule, 2000, p. 29).

The problem of modern audience research is its unpredictability, fragmentation and ever-changing structure as direct results of new media. On the other hand, its role is ever greater when it comes to social participation and market segmentation. Modern researchers of audience are still unclear whether new media represent a new domain, based on old theories, or require completely new mind-sets and questions (Gunkel & Gunkel; Morris & Ogan; Newhagen & Rafael in Livingstone, 1999, p. 64).

With regard to theoretical findings we can say that the transformation allows the creation of a new user experience which exceeds the dimensions of traditional nature. It changes rules of perception and dictates an altered logic of participation. An individual from the crowd of audience can become a creator of a new reality. This active nature of the new audience shows that the altered convergent media landscape (technological, economical, social) shuts the individual user off into his own individual world and passively rewrites the social and sociable capacity of media content. Let this serve as a reminder that the audience is not merely a product of technology, but also a product of social life. There are constant social forces that form the audience. These forces, and not the media, will determine whether we have found ourselves in a divided and estranged world. The likeliness of interactive utopia depend just as much on social factors as it does on technological capabilities.

## Research

This paper focuses on the phenomenon called convergence, where traditional mass media enter the world wide web and thus reshape the media landscape. With this phenomenon a new personal experience of an individual ensues, namely the transformation of this very individual into a new user, producer and a consumer with the help of convergence. Simultaneously, new methods of media content production are emerging, prompting us to focus this analysis also on content production at



two of the largest and most traditional Slovene production houses, active in both electronic media (radio, television) and in newspaper publishing.

For our empiric research we used the experimental-causal method to obtain data and study the in-depth interviews with two of the largest Slovene media companies Medijska hiša Delo and RTV Slovenija on the level of causal explanation of analytic results. We used the descriptive method, therefore only using facts and findings provided to us by answers from both media organisations.

Empiric research consists of two in-depth interviews with two of the largest Slovene national media organisations: the public broadcasting service RTV Slovenija – MMC and the media company Delo, the latter focusing primarily on newspaper publishing. The in-depth interviews indicate a state of convergence in the Slovene media space and reflect newly-formed ways of media production and news placement as the traditional media methods are being combined with the new. They, at the same time, answer the question of audience transformation, as the emergence of new media has altered the personal experience logic of the audience. With that in mind we will focus on the following research questions: has the media content production, due to the effect of media convergence, changed proportionally with the remodelling of media organisation (RQ1), does the media convergence really lead to a new user experience (RQ2) and did the development of information-communication technology cause a convergence of media (RQ3).

RTV Slovenija is a public service with a special cultural and national importance, which includes three main programming-production units: Televizija Slovenija, Radio Slovenija and the Multimedia centre (MMC). The focus of our interview was the Multimedia centre, which was founded in 2001 in order to create content for media, to develop multimedia applications and to interact with radio and television. The MMC represents a trend in convergence development and is, with help of new media, becoming an important connective element of two originally separated traditional units (radio and television) which dictates guidelines to user experience, integrated production and mutual work cooperation.

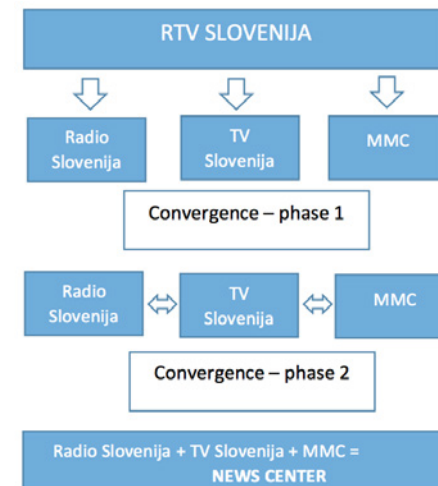
Delo is a recognized Slovene trademark which was throughout its history first and foremost a publisher of the daily newspaper Delo. Today it is known as the leading and the most influential company on the Slovene media market with a significant influence on the public opinion. The appearance of online digital platforms and integrated editorial departments in foreign publishing houses have encouraged Delo to recognize changes in the modern media space, take part in international conferences and start expanding their horizons.

RQ1 – RTV Slovenija: the convergence at RTV Slovenija primarily represents the coming together of individual programming-production units: TV Slovenija, Radio Slovenija and the Multimedia centre – MMC. This convergence meant a reorganisation of work into a more cooperative approach between journalists of each individual unit and between regional centres and its correspondents. It did not, however, mean an actual physical relocation of work. This second phase of the convergence is foreseen as a completely new news centre with fully integrated editorial departments, following BBC example. This new building will consider the daily editorial boards of television, radio and the MMC as a single unified unit.

The production of contents for the new media is divided between journalists from separate

units, which beside their primary work (writing articles, field work) now also prepare content for online publications which have to be adjusted to the online genre. Content convergence in its true form comes only after a team is formed, which will consist of journalists from the radio, television and online units and will work on projects and stories as a whole. As we speak, this concept remains what it is – a concept. The latest innovation on the MMC are show premieres on the website which are available to users before a show even goes on air; this trend will be introduced to the radio programme as well.

Figure 1. The convergence at RTV Slovenija



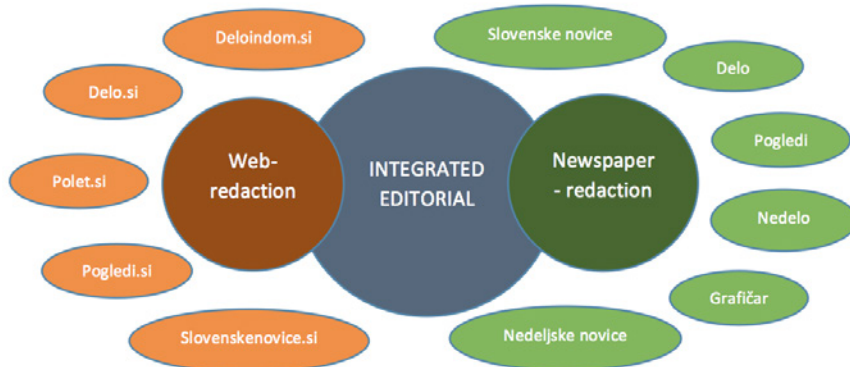
RQ1 – Delo: the convergence at Delo encompasses the organisational, professional and spatial reshaping with the centralization of work, which means that the unified newspaper and online redaction in one office with purpose of increased cooperation and unified work logic was actually created. In the main Delo building, they purchased additional floor space to expand and integrate the editorial department, thus making communication faster and more efficient as well as placing individual journalists into their respective places depending on the nature of their work. As all large media around the world already know, modern journalism is impossible with separation of units. Cooperation between journalists is a fundament for success, which in return demands physical presence. Technical changes represent the connection between systems of printed and online contents, whereas professional changes relate to learning how to use the internet, Facebook and Twitter from a journalistic perspective and to gain professional insight into how to work online.

The process of integration of editorial departments has been ongoing for three years and is based on the connection between the printed work and online work, since the company rightly

anticipated a problem of two journalists attending one same event: one responsible for the printed, the other for the online version. Online content creators were originally working together, but now they have dispersed into their respective redactions. A person working on, say, foreign politics has physically moved to the foreign politics redaction and is responsible solely for the online content. The internet thus found the way into traditional printed editorial boards.

The actual realization of convergent work remains (and probably will for the foreseeable future) only a journalistic wish. The reason for that are numerous scruples from employees, especially from older and more reputable ones, since those are less likely to deviate from their set patterns and beliefs. The online edition of the newspaper encourages the reader to buy the printed version, since the latter remains the primary source of income. On the other hand, the printed version encourages the reader to visit the newspaper's website and check out the audio-visual material that is accessible on the digital version.

Figure 2. The convergence at Delo with web and print editions



RQ2 – RTV Slovenija: the MMC editorial team has been reshaped with the development of internet technology, online production now having the primary role. Prompt news publishing is an important factor in media competitiveness from the user experience logic perspective. This promptness can not however violate key principles of RTV as a public service provider. Technological development and user experience strive for promptness, accessibility through various platforms (internet, mobile application) and are the driving force of media convergence development while at the same time being an important factor of change in the way not only RTV, but other media companies as well handle things.

The appearance of new media has caused an audience transformation. Many have stopped using television receivers and accepted the internet as their new primary medium (content

accessibility on MMC and RTV4D, which includes an archive of shows and articles, you can also listen to the radio and watch TV live). Here we speak of the end of a TV-viewer and the coming of an online-viewer. Radio presenters are aware of this fact, too. Such example is Hribar's show Radio Ga Ga, which gets many "clicks" online but its live ratings in regard to the number of listeners are very low. This is a phenomenon of audience transformation which is caused by the new media. Listeners do not have to wait up to a specific time to hear the show, since they can access it any time online. RQ2 – Delo: the media company Delo has a slightly different view on the new user experience. They want their user to be aware of the trademark Delo, but they let him decide on his own how will he access their newspaper. The convergence meant the need to adjust the newspaper company to an online publication of the newspaper and news in general. It also introduced a new level of promptness when it comes to news publishing, various new media platforms and ongoing processes of work integration. A new user experience also raises user's expectations due to existence of the internet and the nature of online news publishing. This method simultaneously introduces a new trend of promoting the trademark itself, namely the publishing house. The users are interested exclusively in content and where they can read it (printed or digital version). The website delo.si is a platform of the traditional medium Delo and Delo's contents can appear in printed media, on the website or on the application.

RQ3 – RTV Slovenija: the technological development that started the convergence at RTV was teletext for it combined the television and newspaper nature of the medium. Technological advances in the field of communication and information exchange meant a reorganisation of the teletext team into an online editorial team, providing the basis for the MMC we know today. Convergence is an ever ongoing process. With emergence of new media it is reflected in various forms, the combination of all three main units of RTV (radio, television and internet) is perhaps the most evident one. RTV 4D, a hybrid broadband radiotelevision, is the latest convergent achievement of RTV Slovenija. It offers unlimited access to online contents, to live radio and television programme and to extensive archives. Traditional media blended together into a single form via an online internet platform. The name of medium remains (radio, television as a show format) whereas the medium itself is no longer by all means necessary (radio, television as a medium).

RQ3 – Delo: opinions on media or media space convergence are similar in the media company Delo, since radical internal changes within the company began with the appearance of online digital platforms and the method of integrated editorial departments in foreign publishing houses. Convergent work is reflected in the integrated online and newspaper redaction where the website delo.si serves as a platform to a traditional medium Delo, Delo contents thus appear in printed version, on the website and on the application.

The traditional amount of content, whose original online role was to promote the publishing house and traditional printed press, is now enriched with interactive content. We talk about connecting information practices. This practice preserves the legacy of a traditional medium, since online users are able to access all digitalized printed publications of newspapers Delo and Sobotna priloga, besides the constantly refreshed news on the website itself.

The in-depth interviews with media companies Delo and RTV Slovenija – MMC showcase

the state of convergence in the Slovene media space and are a reflection of the altered methods of production based on the recently integrated editorial departments and the reorganisation of work. At the same time the interviews are pointing toward a different user experience of the audience of mass media.

## Conclusion

Technological advancement is almost enforcing a transformation of institutional levels and of individuals in the broader context of social life, it also poses a challenge to set patterns and our everyday routine. The all-embracing presence of information and telecommunication technologies, the rigidly capitalistic logic of goods production and maximizing profits on behalf of producers and consumers have thoroughly reshaped the media landscape. These changes are evident in all phases of media production, therefore we talk of a changed, new, digital media product and of a consequently transformed audience, which is marked by a different perception of media. The transformation of audience is reflected in lives of all individuals and it also predetermines one's participation in both open and closed social circles.

This paper presents an altered logic of media activity and the remodelling of media landscape. A convergence appears as a result of these changes. Using simple categorization We would talk about convergences in technology and in media. Both categorizations represent an act of integration or unification, the difference between them is in the fact that the first refers to an integration of platforms and multimedia devices whereas the second means a convergence between journalism and economy. The term convergence is multi-layered and hard to define, therefore it is most often described as: a blend of (media) technologies, systems and services; concentration of capital (in media), ownership and markets; integration of technological, social and cultural processes.

Integrated or converged communication channels influence the perception of receivers, consumer, in short all users to which we refer to as audience. This audience is affected by the process of transformation which changes its original nature of activity.

The media concentration alters the figure of media landscape and also represents a convergence in production of the content, for it is based on the general interests of the audience and on cost efficiency. As a result, the journalistic editorial boards found themselves in a dilemma and were confronted with a new challenge regarding the placement of media content. The phenomenon of convergence in journalism means integration of editorial boards and reshaping of the media organisation itself. Strict boundaries between the production of traditional and modern media are disappearing, which is logically accompanied by spatial, organisational and technological changes in editorial departments as larger unified redactions are being created.

We cannot study convergence without taking a look at what is happening with the audience. With the introduction of 2.0 Internet, the decentralisation of network and the media platform and services convergence an audience transformation takes place, which is integrated into modern digital infrastructures and with numerous interactive possibilities. Convergence is thus creating a new user experience, which dictates new terms of multimedia content consumerism,

interaction and personalised use of internet environment.

An individual (user) from the group of audience is thus simultaneously being transformed into a content producer and a consumer thanks to the ever more prevalent role of the internet, interaction and the development of applicative capacities of usability. We refer to such individuals by use of neologism prosumer (media producer and consumer simultaneously). Internet users from a perspective of a new user experience in the context of consumerism logic are divided into users, viewers and readers. These new experiences are altered habits and patterns in audience behaviour, which works in a transformed competitive environment and is integrated into new circumstances. The process of transformation thus alters the original role of the audience. Convergence is consequently also a concept of social and cultural nature, which triggers the global village formation question and puts the risk of homogenisation of cultures into an informational society.

We need to understand that the audience is not merely a product of technology but also a consequence of social life. It is subject to constant social forces which define it and determine whether it ended up in a divided and estranged world. One thing the audience does have on its disposal is the option of interactive utopia which is determined by social factors on one hand and technological options on the other.

In the analysis we determine changes in the field of media as well as possible alterations in the perception of media and the entire Slovene media landscape from a perspective of convergence and eventually of audience. The in-depth interviews with media companies Delo and RTV Slovenija indicate a state of convergence in the companies themselves and in the Slovene media space in general and how does that state reflect in content production and reorganisation since the emergence of new media. That is the reason why analysing these two media is so important – they are a good indicator of the Slovene media space as a whole. The in-depth interviews prove a different method of content production based on integration of editorial departments and reorganisation of work. They also show an altered user experience of mass media audience. The research has confirmed all three questions concerning both largest Slovene media organisations with significant influence on public opinion: media content production has indeed changed proportionally with the remodelling of media organisation as a result of media convergence (RQ1), media convergence does lead to a new user experience (RQ2) and the development of information-communication technology has really caused the convergence of media (RQ3).

The convergence at RTV Slovenija is basically the coming together of radio, television and multimedia (MMC) unit by principle of cooperation between journalists that are separated by units. Convergence in true meaning of the word will supposedly be achieved with a construction of a new news centre and with full integration of editorial departments following examples from abroad. This final stage of convergence represents an ever ongoing process. The transformation of audience is reflected in an altered user experience of viewers and listeners. This is a result of an emergence of new media, especially of internet which has become a primary medium for many people (archived contents and live content on the MMC and RTV 4D).

The convergence at Delo encompasses the organisational, professional and spatial reshaping with the centralization of work, which means that the unified newspaper and online

redaction in one office with purpose of increased cooperation and unified work logic was actually created. The convergence meant the need to adjust the newspaper company to an online publication of the newspaper and news in general. It also introduced a new level of promptness when it comes to news publishing, various new media platforms and ongoing processes of work integration. A new user experience also raises user's expectations due to existence of the internet and the nature of online news publishing.

It needs to be said that Bašič Hrvatini & Kučić (2005, p. 11) believe that convergence in Slovenia remains an academic phenomenon for which they were so far unable to find any actual practical proof. Nevertheless, even in academic circles we would find it difficult to find concrete theoretical results of convergence research in Slovenia. What we do run into are merely coincidental mentions. Therefore we believe this paper to be of greater importance to the research of both theoretical and practical nature of the convergent state within the Slovene media landscape. The paper opens new questions and points at new facts about the production and the absorption of news in modern day Slovene media space and simultaneously shows altered habits and behaviour of audience, especially compared to foreign theoretical and practical findings.

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## Talk's About Disproportionate Intelligence of Generation Y

### As Antidote of Sleeping Media and Brands: The Case of Gezi Park Resistance

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#### Abstract

During the Gezi Park Resistance in Turkey in 2013, the position of the media, of the business world and the brands on two very clear social fault lines, splitting the country in two and becoming a debate topic. This period brought the need to revise all communication knowledge on the government, media, business world, brands and target audience. While the 'pro-government media' tried to skip this event in the early days of the Gezi Park Resistance, broadcasting penguin documentaries rather than news, the brands that prevented young people to take refuge in their stores during the clashes with police faced a remarkable loss of prestige. People refused to go to the Starbucks store in Taksim for months and the store managers had to publish an apology. Media organizations that portrayed a similar attitude were labeled 'pro-government media' and were protested. This study will discuss the power of humorous communication form developed by the Generation Y during the Gezi Park Resistance in Turkey, while illustrating the attitudes of the medias and brands who failed in prestige in the context of statistical information relating to loss of reputation.

Keywords: Gezi Park resistance, disproportionate intelligence, Generation Y.

[Sometimes a place, sometimes an event,  
and sometimes a person comes to represent the spirit of the times.]  
(Erdal Atabek)

The subjects of Gezi Park resistance were mainly of Generation Y. The most significant aspects of those that belong to the Generation Y/ Echo Boom, who are born between 1978-2000, are their attitude toward freedom and technology. Another aspect of them is their solitude and their over self-confidence. Their familiarity with technology, joined with their self-confidence and their insights of freedom, who were very active during the Gezi Park resistance that began in June 2013, strikingly revealed their disproportionate intelligence as opposed to those individuals and/or institutions they were standing against. Claimed to have become 'asocial', 'apolitical', 'solitary' through the use of private technology and to have 'documented the collapse of public individual', this generation has shifted how it is perceived as well as the perceptions on the state, to the surprise of all the world, through the humorous resistance it put forth with its disproportionate wit against a disproportionate force. The world was introduced with a new form of communication that the Generation Y offered to the activism literature even though it was not expected of generating a meaningful and public resistance: "the amused dissidence of the Disproportionate Wit". They were not using violence but just resisting, and were even gaining public legitimacy through this sympathetic form of resistance. Yet, the media, the business world and the government, which have not met with such a form of resistance before, managed the situation very badly.

The main body of protesters at the Gezi Park events were composed of white collar professionals and their college student children which is the dominant target audience of the media and PR industry. The concerned companies encountered for the first time a generation that grew up with 'smart phones' rather than with television that was defined as an 'idiot box' and these companies could not manage this situation. The media and brands failed the first test of many critical challenges they will encounter more often in the future. Aside from maintaining their neutrality, they substantially lost prestige by taking a position against the movement. Yet, they could have conducted a successful reputation management by taking inspiration from this emerging form of resistance, that is, by recognizing the disproportionate wit of this humorous dissidence and even using it. But they could not achieve this because they overlooked two things:

Firstly, the old methods of complaint and protest do not exist anymore thanks to digital citizenship. People can put the brands and even the governments into a difficult position with a message they write from the comfort of their home. They can cause a serious loss of prestige.

Secondly, the best way to manage a situation is by being able to play with the methods of the dynamics that direct it, within ethical boundaries, whether you are for or against it. For social media is not a pain in the neck but a force that needs to be governed. New target groups with disproportionate wit and high capability of using technology are new PR agents that lie outside the conventional definition of target group, who can generate and disseminate information rather than just consuming it. You cannot survive by standing against such a source.

## Literature Review

### What's Gezi Park Resistance?

Gezi Park Resistance began on 28 May 2013 as a wave of demonstrations to contest the urban development plan for Taksim Gezi Park near by the Taksim Square-Istanbul. With the humorous form of protests' and disproportionate intelligence, it was the biggest joke of Generation Y. The plans to uproot trees in Gezi Park are just the latest in a long string of urban projects that ignore the cultural and historic heritage of Istanbul. Initially it was a minor occupy movement led by a small group of university students who resisted the ruining of Taksim Gezi Park by set up a camp in the park. There was no centralised leadership beyond the small assembly that organised the original environmental protest.

What Generation Y actually wanted to do was to paint a picture of the country, in which they want to live, in Gezi Park. Generation Y living in the park during the Gezi Park Resistance was cleaning the park in the mornings right after they got up, doing their morning gymnastics, taking care of the public garden they allocated at one corner of the park, reading, talking, discussing, sharing and singing with a significant number of artists who supported the resistance, and they were always cooperating. Actually, this way of life is the utopia of the urban citizen in which s/he had long lost his/her faith.

The tension of protests were inflamed by outrage at the violent eviction of the sit-in at the park protesting the plan. Thereupon, protests spread throughout the whole country and protest in Istanbul was immediately turned into a nationwide infact transnational resistance. Also the form of the supporting protests and their objectives changed after the Turkish police's violent response and agitator discourses of authorities. Thousands of people took to the streets across the country not only to protest urban development projects that are irreversibly changing the face of the country but also apprehension concerning government's increasingly authoritarian controls -encroachment on democratic rights and freedom of assembly, expression, media, pluralism, etc- .

More than two weeks later, some 3.5 million people (from a population of 80 million) had taken part in almost five thousand demonstrations across Turkey, five had lost their lives, and more than eight thousand had been injured. Clearly, the "Gezi events" were about more than trees. (Bellaigue, 2013)

Lots of people were injured as a result of water cannons and close-range shots from tear gas canisters and plastic bullets aimed directly at them. According to the Turkish Medical Association a total of 14 people as of 14 September, lost an eye due to by tear gas canisters and rubber bullets; 200 people received head and brain traumas caused mostly by teargas canisters and baton blows. Ancak protestocular, tüm bu kayıplara rağmen, gaz fişekleri ve şiddet kullanımını street humourlarına konu etmeyi sürdürdüler.

The opportunity to conduct scientific research on the Generation Y and on the substance of this movement was taken during the Gezi Park Resistance. The most important of these is the survey conducted by the Konda Research Company: "KONDA GEZİ REPORT: Public perception of the 'Gezi protests'; Who were the people at Gezi Park?"

According to the findings of the research: 49.1 percent (i.e. one out of every two protesters) decided

to participate in the protests after seeing police brutality. On the same note, 73 percent of the protesters who identify themselves as ordinary citizens decided to participate in the protests after police brutality. So, police brutality proved to be the turning point for the majority of protesters. When we observe the demands of the protesters, we can see that 58.1 percent of the protesters decided to participate in the protests due to restrictions on freedom, 37.2 of the protesters decided to participate in order to protest AK Parti and its policies, and 30.3 percent of the protesters went to the park to voice their indignation with Erdoğan's statements and attitude. As indicated by these rates, a protester may have more than one reason to participate in the protests. For example, 20.5 percent of the protesters went to the park in order to protest restrictions on freedom and to express their indignation with Erdoğan's statements and attitude.

### The Path to Generation Y, Generational Cohort Groupings

A generation is defined as an identifiable group that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages, divided by five–seven years into the first wave, core group, and last wave . A generational group, often referred to as a cohort, includes those who share historical or social life experiences, the effects of which are relatively stable over the course of their lives. These life experiences tend to distinguish one generation from another. A cohort develops a personality that influences a person's feelings toward authority and organizations, what they desire from work, and how they plan to satisfy those desires.(Sumola, Sutton, 2002, p. 364).

It's important to distinguish between life cycle effects and generational change, as well as the diversity between them. Because significant generational markers exist in all spheres of society and create experiences and values for.

- Silent Generation: 1922-1945
- Baby Boomers: 1945-1964
- Generation X: 1964-1978
- Generation Y: 1978-2000
- Generation Z: 2000- Today.

Today, Generation Y are the dominant players of the consumer society, of social movements and of the business world and should be taken into consideration from this perspective. In this context, it would be apt to start with the distinguishing characteristics of this generation.

Each generation is defined by its life experiences, giving rise to different attitudes, beliefs, and sensitivities. The "Depression generation" experienced World War II and the Cold War. "Baby Boomers" grew up with the space race, the civil rights movement, Vietnam, and Watergate. "Generation X" saw the fall of the Berlin Wall and the emergency of AIDS and the Web (Oblinger, 2003, p.38).

In Strauss & Howe's (2000) book titled Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation, they describes the Generation Y as "civic-minded," rejecting the attitudes of the Baby Boomers and Generation X , in other words, rejecting the ideological battles spawned by the counterculture of the 1960s, which persist today in the form of culture wars. A 2013 poll in the United Kingdom found that

Generation Y was more “open-minded than their parents on controversial topics” (Phillips, 2013). For example, of those surveyed, nearly 65% supported same-sex marriage.

There are a number of competing terms that claim to identify a generation of young people who participated in Gezi Park Resistance with the exception of Generation Y (Anderson, 2004). Some of the most common terms in circulation are the Millennials (Oblinger & Oblinger 2005), Net generation (Tapscott 1998, 2008), Digital Natives (Prensky 2001), Generation We (Greenberg, Weber, 2008), Generation Next, Net Generation (Shapira, 2008), Boomers (Armour, 2008), boomerang generation or Peter Pan generation (Shaputis, 2004). Members of the generation have labeled themselves as the Non-Nuclear Family generation, the Nothings-Sacred Generation, the Wannabees, the Feel-Good Generation, Cyberkids, the Do-or-Die Generation, and the Searching-for-an-Identity Generation (Tolbize, 2008). It's not important which one is preferred.

They are often known as the Millennial generation (Generation Y). Born between 1978 and 2000, the Millennials currently include 95 million young people up to 30 years of age—the biggest age cohort in the history of the nation. In the last three years, the Millennial generation has begun to emerge as a powerful political and social force. They are smart, well educated, openminded, and independent—politically, socially, and philosophically. They are also a caring generation, one that appears ready to put the greater good ahead of individual rewards (Greenberg, Weber, 2008, p.13). They are a generation that appears to be unrivaled in world history who are willing to struggle for the huge objectives.

This generation has been shaped by parental excesses, computers, and dramatic technological advances. One of the most frequently reported characteristics of this generation is their comfort with technology. In general, Generation Y shares many of the characteristics of Xers. They are purported to value team work and collective action, embrace diversity, be optimistic, and be adaptable to change. Furthermore, they seek flexibility, are independent, desire a more balanced life, are multi-taskers, and are the most highly educated generation. They also value training. They have been characterized as demanding, and as the most confident generation. (Tolbize, 2008, p.4).

#### **Understanding Generation Y or Participants of Gezi Resistance ...**

With its participants, objectives and outcomes, the Gezi Park Resistance was much more than an environmental protection action. It was a very special experience that was marked by the Generation Y in its every stage and should be approached from this perspective in all academic studies.

The data employed in the Gezi Report of KONDA (2014, 5 June) were collected via the Gezi Park survey conducted in Gezi Park on June 6-8, 2013, with 4411 participants. According to the findings of the research, the average age of the respondents was 28. 30.8 percent of the protesters were between the ages of 21-25, and 20.3 percent were between the ages of 26-30. In short, one out of every two people in the park was between the ages of 21-30.

This is the reason why Turkish columnist from Cumhuriyet Newspaper, Orhan Bursalı (2013) wrote “half a century of images of Taksim are mixed together but I cannot find a place for any of them in Taksim where I stand now. ... No part of history penetrates in” in the piece he described the Gezi

Park resistance.

Only one out of every five people in the park pursued college/university education after graduating from high school (42.8 percent college graduate, 12.9 percent master's/PhD student or graduate, 2.7 percent primary-school graduates). And when the respondents of the research were asked if ‘they came to the park in order to represent an organization or institution’, the vast majority (93.6 percent) identified themselves as ‘ordinary citizens’. Therefore, we can claim that although one out of every five protesters in the park was affiliated with a political party, association or formation, the protesters came to the park at their sole discretion in general. 62 percent of the protesters stated that they see themselves ‘as a member of a group subject to human rights violations’. 25 percent of the protesters stated that they ‘sometimes’ feel this way. In short, 87 percent of the protesters in the park identified themselves as a member of a group that has been directly or indirectly subject to human rights violations or unlawful treatment.

The survey of Conento Research Company on the “Generation Y of Turkey”, conducted in May 2014, shows that the demographic size of the Generation Y in Turkey is 25.5 million. Yet, according to the same study, if the Generation Y that are the representatives of the Gezi spirit is considered as urban, educated, trend-setting youth with a middle or upper social status, this number falls down to 5 million (Tufur, 2011). According to some studies, 35 percent of the 76 million people living in Turkey constitutes the Generation Y. Even the most minimal estimate is enough to define them as the dynamo of the country. The dynamo role of this generation further increases when we add the trend-setting value segmentation of this generation.

It is possible to compile all the characteristics of the Generation Y as revealed in the social sciences literature of Turkey and of the world:

Gen-Y have been coined the digital natives, the millennials, the professional consumers. To some, they are the tech-savvy, well educated and ambitious youngsters poised to take on and change the world. Others, however, describe a disloyal, disrespectful and demanding generation who have never learned to wait or work hard for anything. They have characteristics that can shape the future of societies. They are urban. They were raised as “individuals” and they dislike hierarchy or authority. They know the difference between loyalty and dependency. They struggle against anything they find authoritarian or unjust, and they can transform this struggle into a festivity rather than to violence. They have very high self-confidence. They do not want to do anything without first questioning it. Their means and channels of communication is their most significant characteristic that distinguishes them from previous generations. This generation is inclined to open communication, their main source of information is interactive media and they can access information very quickly. This generation is recognized as being more open-minded when compared to other generations because Generation Y is both respectful of differences, and also they like to make a difference and be noticed.

A large part of what has been suggested about this generation, whom was claimed to be a generation that is indifferent and unaware of the realities of the world and of the country, that does not read, does not organize, that is selfish, carefree, lazy and extravagant, that lives with a knowledge store of 150 characters in front of the Internet, and whom was blamed to be apolitical for



staying outside the economy-oriented ideologies, have been falsified.

Years ago, in his absorbing book, *The “new” rules of engagement: a guide to understanding and connecting with Generation Y*, Michael McQueen (2010) observed that it's time to bust a few myths and explain where the real challenges lie. They are not lazy or disrespectful. They are unreliable because they don't think about and plan for the future in a linear way, they are far more responsive and reactive and don't want to commit and this generation can often be high maintenance.

Of course these differences have historical and experiential reasons. The primary reason is the speed of technological change that had left its mark during the years during which the members of this generation were born. The liberation of communication as a result of this rapid change and the increasing power of criticism through monitoring is almost the particularity that characterize the Generation Y. When this character merges with an irresistible weapon they developed against violence, that is “political humor”, this forces all persons and institutions to recognize them.

They live during a period in which information technologies rule over everything by turning the world into a global village, during which people and corporations change everything up to the ways of living. They live through these changes and grow up with digital technologies. Thus, Generation Y, in the position of both consumers and producers, impose on the business world. Each generation questions the one before itself yet, the Generation Y do this much more sharply. (Güler, 2011)

This sharpness is the outcome of the four basic characteristics of the Generation Y that make them strong: they do not want conflict but they have the courage to persistently defend what they believe in; they are coolheaded, they trust themselves the most; they are creative; they communicate with humor and they do not only know about technology but also have a good enough command of technology to play with it. These characteristics provide them with various ways to deal with social or personal problems.

Social actions appears to be one of the hallmarks of the Generation Y. Sharing similarities with the Silent Generation (1925-1945), the Millennials do not for someone else to solve the problems that they see in the world around them. Millennials are choosing to confront both global and local problems in direct and unique ways (Anderson, 2004, 9).

These characteristics mark all the actions and discourses in which Generation Y take the center stage both in Turkey and around the world. A humorous communication style and use of technology are particularly prominent. That is also what happened during the Gezi Park Resistance. The dominant actors of the Gezi Park Resistance invited all organizations and institutions not to ignore them through their command of technology and weapon of humor. Generation Y are fascinated by new technologies. One common misconception is that all Generation Y are technological geniuses. A growing body of evidence reveals that they have developed new attitudes and aptitudes as a result of their environment. Although these characteristics may provide great advantages in areas such as their ability to use information technology and use it to solve their problems.

In their 2007 book, authors Junco and Mastrodicasa expanded on the work of William Strauss and Neil Howe to include research-based information about the personality profiles of

Millennials, especially as it relates to higher education. They conducted a large-sample (7,705) research study of college students. They found that Next Generation college students, born between 1983–1992, were frequently in touch with their parents and they used technology at higher rates than people from other generations. In their survey, they found that 97% of these students owned a computer, 94% owned a cell phone, and 56% owned an MP3 player. They also found that students spoke with their parents an average of 1.5 times a day about a wide range of topics. Other findings in the Junco and Mastrodicasa survey revealed 76% of students used instant messaging, 92% of those reported multitasking while instant messaging, 40% of them used television to get most of their news, and 34% of students surveyed used the Internet as their primary news source. (Berk, 2009, p.4).

Usage of social media was one of the hot discussion topics throughout the Gezi Park Resistance. Social media has gained greater significance not only because protesters mainly communicated through social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook since traditional media failed to provide a proper coverage of the protests. And Prime Minister Erdoğan's statement as, “There is now a menace which is called Twitter” increased the protests.

According to the findings of the Gezi Report of Konda: At 69 percent, the vast majority of the protesters who came to the park received the first news on the protests on social media. Only 7 percent of the protesters first heard about the protests on television. However, 71 percent of society in Turkey first heard about the protests on television. When inquired whether they shared any messages on social media or not, 18 percent of respondents answered positively. Therefore, we can assert that one out of every five shared information or opinions on the Internet. Three out of every 10 Internet users and 4 out of every 10 social media users shared posts about the protests.

## Discussion

### Most effective weapon of Generation Y:

#### Humorous form of protest and Disproportionate Intelligence

As Kuiper (2008, p.368) defines it, conflict theories approach to humour as an expression of conflict, struggle, or antagonism. Accordingly: humour is interpreted not as venting off but as an expression or correlate of social conflict: humor as a weapon, a form of attack, a means of defense.

Generation Y distilled a marvelous weapon from the pot in which they fused all the above mentioned characteristics. It was such a weapon that it made them even more peculiar. Indeed, humor is the only form of action that current state mechanisms do not know how to tackle. Up until now, young generations have authored many social movements in Turkey and around the world. Yet these movements were targeting authority directly, responding to violence with violence, and were organized struggles. And dominant powers formed a tradition of fighting off these forms of action. With Gezi Park Resistance, dominant powers met with the new weapon of Generation Y with which they can aim at any direction, at anyone, without hesitation, when provoked: a sense of humor that mocks sulky, authoritarian actions and discourses that disdain them; one that declares indirectly but

clearly “you cannot meddle with my lifestyle or my values”. As if the forms of resistance, struggle and criticism of previous generations evolved according to the conditions of the sickness, as with viruses, and rendered itself unable to struggle.

The main tenet of what is called humor, that is, approaching social realities with an amusing, out of the common, fun and satirical language, is that it is a critical approach. Traditions, customs, social systems and governments, injustices created by those in power are the subject matter and main target of criticism for humor (Avci, 2003).

Humor was in fact already a part of the Gen Y's lives. They just made it visible by extending it from the social media to the streets. As Prof. Dr. Sencer Ayata (2013) says: “These young people are the children of the child-centered families. They used to watch TV in their own rooms, used to play a game on their own computers. And they turned actions into an entertainment, into a computer game. They are creative and witty”.

This is such a potent weapon that it makes a brand or the reputation and the legitimacy of dominant powers questionable only with a line of writing. It is such a potent weapon that it represents the creative, witty and clever characteristic and form of communication of urban, university-educated middle class which has a command of popular culture. Yet unfortunately, since this character and this new form of communication is alien to the dominant powers and to the rest of the society, it will take time for them to cope with this new weapon. Until then, they need to come to terms with and recognize the generation that has the talent to use this weapon. Gezi Park Resistance provided an important opportunity in this respect.

In her article, “Humour and Social Protest: Introduction” (2007), Marjolein' T. Hart emphasize that humour is a powerful tool for social movements. Generation Y are absolutely aware of this tool.

Columnist Sadık Çelik at the Cumhuriyet Newspaper described the humor weapon of Generation Y at the Gezi Park as follows:

These are young people with a formidably effective sense of humor, an unspoiled common sense, they are purified from wishes to make others like themselves, and they have ingrained democracy. They use a sarcastic and highly ironic language. These are young people who are breaking the frames of a time in which an oppositional humor can be more effective than many fire arms, they do not cultivate the notion of other among themselves, they do not care for political parties, and they create a difference with their libertarian and individualistic approach, and they can also mock themselves if need be. (Çelik, 2013, 8 June)

Just like Dr. Hüseyin Kömürçüoğlu (2015, p.109) says “Generation Y have been expressing their opinions about the things that are happening around them since they were five years old. They communicate directly. They expect their views to be taken into consideration, that their choses are respected. If their views are not taken into consideration, then they make their voice heard using the resources provided to them by technology.” And when they do that, they use the humorous language that they use in technological media as a weapon.

Gezi Park Resistance protesters brought an understanding to how humorous form of protest and the ways it can be used as an alternative resistance to authority and power. They humorously criticised the discourse and language of the authority by responding to the statements

of Prime Minister R. Tayyip Erdoğan during that time, government officials, police violence and media organizations close to the government from different cultural contexts.

Irony that crept into the language of the protestors and sneered at the police and Erdogan from the walls, posters, and pavements was expected neither by the government and Erdogan nor by the public. The discourse of the government during the protests poses a direct contrast to the language of the protestors. The language of power asserted itself through Prime Minister Erdogan's speeches addressing the protestors was authoritarian, stable and static, dry, serious, vengeful, violent, and hypocritical. In contrast, the language of the protestors expressed through graffiti on street walls, pavements, posters and banners was creative, active, colorful, sincere, humorous employing irony whenever possible. While the police used pepper spray to dissipate protestors, they retaliated with spray-painted walls and pavements. One of those graffiti read, “We came with pencils not with bombs -the youth ” (Çetin, 2014, p.6).

Generation Y who participated in the Gezi Park Resistance made their voice heard the most effective and creative way through street humor, after social media. Knowingly or unknowingly, they created the most effective means of questioning authority. They wrote all their protesting expressions on the walls as if they were chatting among themselves.

As example, when the Prime Minister Erdoğan dismissed the protesters as *çapulcu* (looters), they joyfully reappropriated the term and identified themselves as *çapulcu*. They used it in anglicised form: “I am a chapuller,” “I am chapulling. And wrote it on the walls.

Social media and digital game culture constitute one of the main elements of Gezi Movement. Social media and game language used by Generation Y is a teenager language which is funny and highly responsive and “kisses the authority off” while blending the language of popular culture with the language of the protest. Game culture belongs to digital natives and it found a place for itself in the streets, graffiti and social media as it reflects their identity. (Öğün Emre et al., 2014, p.440).

Authority is sustained by respect. Making fun of the respect with humour can damage respectability of the authority. Humorous form of protests, that unfolded during the Gezi Resistance, is the the most comprehensive form of discourse struggle against the authority.

As Öğün Emre et al. (2014, p. 436) state, “Gezi created a new resistance language that refuses violence, carries peaceful, naive and optimistic messages, praises apoliticism and inorganization and with these aspects, puts some distance between itself and conventional social movements. Resisters adopted a witty, wise, funny and fearless language that rather than subverting the political power it is against and opposes to, or creating an alternative language to this political power's, restructures its discourse and immediately responds to the statements of PM Erdoğan and government officials. The humorous language of Gezi resistance which deals with the Government's authoritarian practices over the public life is clearly indicative of Generation Y' ‘disproportionate intelligence’ against unproportional force.

Inevitably social media played a substantial role in creating and spreading the humorous language of Gezi resistance. Wall posts in social media and street humour examples played a developer role for each other. Because of the inability of traditional media, social media wall

posts and graffiti have become the platform where the Generation Y showed their creative and disproportionate intelligence that rendered authorities all at sea.

Some of the most creative examples of social media and street humour from #occupygezi, #direngezi, #direnankara, #direnizmir, #bu birsivildirenis, <http://occupygezipics.tumblr.com/> (that are the twitter tags of Gezi Park protests) are these:

Dude this gas is awesome; Enough! I'm calling the police; At first everything was a gas cloud. Then life began!; You banned alcohol, the people sobered up!; Dude, don't be scared. It's us. The people; You shouldn't have banned that last beer; I asked God what to do. He replied #direngezi. (twitter tag of the movement); Tell me more Tayyip. It's fascinating; You can't scare a people who checks for gas leakage with a lighter by using tear gas!; If I can't find a park, I'll shit in the shopping mall; Interclass Istanbul Gas Festival; I'm neither a leftist or a rightist, but a chapullist (or chapuller); You're messing with the generation that beats cops in GTA (referring to the Grand Theft Auto computer game); Antarctica is resisting" (referring to almost all the mainstream Turkish media which didn't broadcast any of the unrest during the first days of the protests and instead broadcasted trivial stuff, with the most famous one being the penguin documentary); Now I'm a gas addict, bud!; State wake up and spray pepper to your rebels!; Where Are You Spartacus?; Pepper gas cuts no ice with us; we are a generation raised rubbing pepper on our mouths; Are you sure you would want three children like us?; Do not mark us absent Mr./Mrs., we are off to resist; I couldn't find anything to write but if I could, it would be anarchy and so on; If you don't play, you'll never win, mate; We Are All Pokémons; Police, don't be a bad ass!; a phrase Viva la fully independent Kurukahveci Mehmet Efendi in front of the Starbucks (A famous Turkish Coffee brand and shop), the writing 'Anti-Capitalista' by using CocaCola fonts; The Revolution Will Not Be Televised; Look! What does 3-5 Tree do to you; Coward Media; We don't Want Sold Media; How much a live broadcast etc. All the slogans that were disseminated on the social media or on the walls during the Gezi Resistance were referring to a sarcastic intervention to the authoritarian attitude of the government, to the police using disproportionate force, to the global neoliberal politics that threaten local values, to the brands and the media. As can be seen with the slogans, during the Gezi Resistance brands and media became another medium which became the topic of protesting along with the government and the police. Like many social movements, Gezi period had been a test of reputation and crisis management for many brands and media just like it had been for the government. As the dynamo of the resistance, Generation Y' being professional consumers and the most important target group of the media made the test even more difficult. What occurred about many brands and the media during the Gezi Resistance brought about the question of reputation and crisis management. Indeed, the evidence of the harmed reputation in question was often reflected on wall writings, social posts, and in protests.

Gezi Park protesters ran an organized campaign against or for some brands and companies over the social media and at the street protests. TV news channels such as CNN Turk, NTV, Haber Turk, which were considered to have failed to approach Gezi Parkı Resistance with a journalistic sensitivity; financial corporations like Garanti Bankası, which had close ties with the government; establishments such as Starbucks, Kitchenette, Mado, Saray Muhallebicisi, which

were either owned by people or groups with ties to the government or exhibited an adverse attitude against the protests by closing their doors to the protesters, were blacklisted by the Generation Y. On the social media and on the streets, people were invited to boycott these brands, and actions with chanting and clapping in front of the headquarters or shops were organized.

Two examples on this topic will suffice to show the weaknesses of the media and brands in their crisis and reputation management during the social events where Generation Y were the dominant actors.

During the last days of May, as a result of the fierce response of the police to the Gezi Park resistance, demonstrators tried to take refuge in the shops in the neighborhood. One of the largest 5-star hotel of Taksim, owned by domestic capital, Divan Hotel opened its doors to the demonstrators and let them take refuge in the lobby. Moreover, injured protesters received medical treatment at this lobby. On the other hand, world-famous coffee chain company Starbucks took down its shutters in order to prevent demonstrators from entering the store. This drew a huge reaction especially on the social media. Its main target group, young people, stopped going to Starbucks. Furthermore, a domestic coffee shop was given highlight against Starbucks in a rather humorous way with the slogan "Viva la fully independent Kurukahveci Mehmet Efendi".

According to a study that surveyed 713 people on how Gezi Park Resistance shifted brand choices of coffee shop, Starbucks became the brand that was harmed the most during the Gezi protests (Yalman, Okan, 2013). It lost both reputation and customers. 85% of those who participated in the poll said that they used to go to Starbucks before the Gezi Park protests while only 16.8% of them said they would go to Starbucks again after the protests.

From the perspective of responsibility in the context of their force of influence, a worse loss of reputation was experienced by the Turkish media. Media encountered protests due to claims of biased journalism, firing their employees, resignations and censorship.

While CNN International broadcast live the protest demonstrations on 31 May 2013 as the events were unfolding, CNN Türk broadcast a documentary on penguins. Another TV channel that is generally considered to be a reliable source of news in Turkish media, NTV, also did not air the demonstrations, auto-censoring itself. Finally, on the seventh day of the protests 2000 protesters consisting mainly of white-collar professionals convened in front of NTV, a major TV news channel, shouting "We do not want media for sale." They attached lira bills to a cardboard saying "How much does it cost to be on air? We can pay."

It is possible to analyze the outcome of the ability of the media in managing reputation and crisis during the mentioned period through protests as well as surveys. According to the telephone survey conducted by ERA Research & Consultancy on 12-13 June 2013, the most unreliable institution during the Gezi Resistance was media and television with a rate of 11%. According to the same survey, the sector for which the appreciation of the consumers shifted the most with regard to media sector due to their attitudes toward the protests. While the appreciation for HaberTürk, CNNTürk, NTV, Sabah Newspaper and Hürriyet Newspaper fell among the supporters of the protests, these news media received appreciation from those that were against the protests. The corporation that received the most points from the supporters was Halk TV, which broadcast the

demonstrations live from the very first day on, as well as social media.

Much of the Turkish mainstream media downplayed or ignored the protests; therefore social media played a key role during the period. The protesters made significant use of humour online; they also used the city's walls to disseminate humorous messages in their graffiti. There was, as the BBC called it, "an explosion expression in the form of satire, irony and outright mockery of the popular leader (the former prime minister) on Istanbul's streets and social media".(Morva, 2015)

In summary, it appears that consumer choices shifted about some brands, including the media, due to their attitudes during the events. Broadly speaking, it is clear that many brands could not manage the crisis well and lost reputation. Considering that the population they were faced with were the Generation Y who are professional consumers with a disproportionate wit and a weapon of humor, the course and outcome of reputation loss would be understood more clearly.

#### Conclusions and Future Study

Since the virtual world of Internet replaces the perception of the real world and let people form themselves and their relations using the symbols presented by this virtual world, Generation Y are the first generation that created a rupture in the perception of a world based on production, opening the door to the world of consumption. (Berberoğlu,1999)

It is the main responsibility of all private or public institutions (from state mechanisms to supermarkets) not to ignore these characteristics that define this generation in question. All organization that refuse to acknowledge the differences, expectations, and the power for change of this generation are doomed to disreputation, and are especially doomed to fail in managing the processes that are considered as crises by the Generation Y. In this context, for all institutions and brands, either in media or in the retail service sector, the only way for them to correctly conduct their image building, branding, crisis and reputation management is to "recognize" Generation Y.

Because:

As stated in the article titled "Gen-Y Must Influence Your Brand" (2013): Gen-Y is the 'influential generation', the generation that asks why, the generation that expects...GenY are an influential group, a generation that need to be noticed by brands. They demand attention, crave continuous feedback but in return WILL invest in your brand. ... Gen-Y are the influential generation, where peer-to-peer relationships are valued – symbolising the age of collaboration and communication. Clearly this is a lesson for brands, thinking not only about how they empower Gen-Y but also the way they engage with them.... Gen-Yers have been exposed to more marketing and commercial messages than any other generation – they have grown up as professional consumers and have learnt to filter these messages. For brands, it remains a tough order to get it right.

The company or brand reputation and crisis management processes should be managed with respect to social movements such as Gezi Park Resistance by considering the consumer characteristic of Generation Y. The things that have to be paid attention to in this form of management can be easily drawn from the lessons taken from the Gezi Park Resistance period.

For marketers and researchers, there is no demographic data that is as important as age among the factors that play a role in identifying consumer behavior because, as well known, effective marketing

is defined differently according to each generation (Roberts and Manolis, 2000).

Being situated as both employees and consumers in today's business world, Generation Y are at the center of all actions of communication strategies, including branding, reputation and crisis management. Especially the mentioned reputation loss and weakness in crisis management are weaknesses of communication strategies. Hence, in reading the target audience, particularly companies should review their communication strategies during this period.

With respect to Gezi Park Resistance, this review was summarized to the point in the report prepared by ERA Research & Consultancy (2013) "with the perception that the reputation of a company is all that it has" and by taking into consideration the characteristics of Generation Y. According to this report:

- Management of social crises includes areas of threats as well as opportunities on the part of strategic communication.

- Crisis communication cannot be delegated: it is managed at the highest level. It should not be extended over time, it should not be postponed. Time is the critical primary factor.

- In crisis and reputation management, the response that will be given to the event and the style of management are regulated according to the damage ratio. A response that has an unnecessary dose itself triggers the crisis. This is why one should be up to date with the current events and take a position accordingly. For instance, during the Gezi Park Resistance, the General Manager of Garanti Bankası going down next to the protesters and telling them "I am a chapuller as well" in order to calm them down when demonstrators were protesting escalated the crisis for the Bank.

- Social media as well as the disproportionate wit and humorous communication forms of Generation Y are resources that should definitely be taken seriously, and the skills of managing these should be improved. It was proved that neither state authorities nor brands have the skills to deal with this disproportionate wit and humor today.

- During social events and with regard to political choices, individuals can act saying "whatever happens", yet companies cannot halt communication and let things slide. Just as politicians take the pulse of public opinion and public conscience through weekly polls, companies too should monitor the perception about themselves with a similar reflex.

- All these suggestions become even more important when the subject matter is a media brand. Since media is the field in which the appreciation of the consumers shifted the most due to the attitude of the media, and because of media's field of impact and responsibility, media should be much more sensitive, attentive, responsible and unbiased in its strategic communication management.

Studies to be conducted on many social events in which Generation Y are the dominant actors will reveal further information on reputation and crisis management and on the responses of Generation Y. This study is limited to the Gezi Park Resistance. This study was conducted with the aim of contributing an added value for all brands, primarily media, in their review of their communication strategies directed at Generation Y with the anticipation that this study will inspire subsequent studies.

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Extended abstract:

## Considering Government Media Relations from a Network Perspective

### A Social Network Analysis of Government Media Relations in the Federal Republic of Germany

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#### 1 Introduction & Background

In an age of networked public spheres (Friedland, Hove, & Rojas, 2006; Raupp, 2011), the integration of a network perspective into political communication research is a salient analytical evolution. This also holds true for the field of government communication, which is so far often considered an under-researched area of communication studies (Cané & Sanders, 2012).

So far, network research in political communication studies *inter alia* focuses on campaign communication (e.g. De Nooy & Kleinnijenhuis, 2013), on online political discourse (Himmelboim, 2011) and the flow of news (e.g. Weber & Monge, 2011) or on governmental crisis communication (e.g. Kapucu, Arslan, & Collins, 2010; Moynihan, 2009). We argue that a network perspective constitutes a fruitful paradigm for media relations research, specifically applying it here to government media relations in Germany.

We consider network ties a form of social capital (Jansen & Diaz-Bone, 2011; Rojas, Shah, & Friedland, 2011) and assume that it is in the very interest of participants to be connected to other powerful actors. Potentially, this should lead to dense elite networks, also in the field of political media relations (Davis, 2010). On the other hand, digitisation is sometimes considered a process

that erodes established distributions of power, potentially rendering political communication and the specific networks in this field more open and integrative (Coleman & Blumler, 2009). It is against this background that we ask about the networks of government media relations in Germany. Which actors define these and how are they connected to each other? In how far are new actors integrated under online conditions? Our study seeks to find answers to such questions by applying social network analysis, by considering government media relations from a network perspective.

#### 2 Methodology

Our approach to government media relations is made from a network perspective. We seek to analyse them taking into account both nodes (i.e. organisational and individual inhabitants of this sub-field of political communication) and ties (i.e. the relations between these actors), thereby going beyond purely organisational perspectives (Borgatti, Everett, & Johnson, 2013; Yang & Talyor, 2015). We employ social network analysis as our central method of empirical enquiry. The data for this analysis is derived from primary sources, in this case from semi-structured interviews with political journalists (n=29) and government spokespersons (n=10). The interviews were conducted personally between 06/2012 and 04/2013 by two researchers; they are a subset of a larger research project on political media relations in the online sphere.

The government spokespersons represent governmental bodies on a federal level; the journalists are high-ranking political journalists from leading off- and online media outlets in Germany. Interviews are grounded by a semi-structured questionnaire incorporating both open and closed questions. The social network analysis thereby seeks to integrate qualitative and quantitative paradigms (Haas & Mützel, 2008), enriching structural network data with supplementary information on relationships and patterns of exchange.

The communication network between spokespersons and journalists is analysed as a (bi-modal) network between separate sets of actors, i.e. the focus lies exclusively on inter-group relations. Communicative ties between spokespersons and journalists – or their absence – are the main subject of interest; additionally attention is drawn on patterns of in- and exclusion in networks of political media relations.

#### 3 Findings

The findings from our network analysis show a dense network of established actors. The communicative ties that governmental bodies maintain mostly connect them to leading newspapers and public service newscasts:

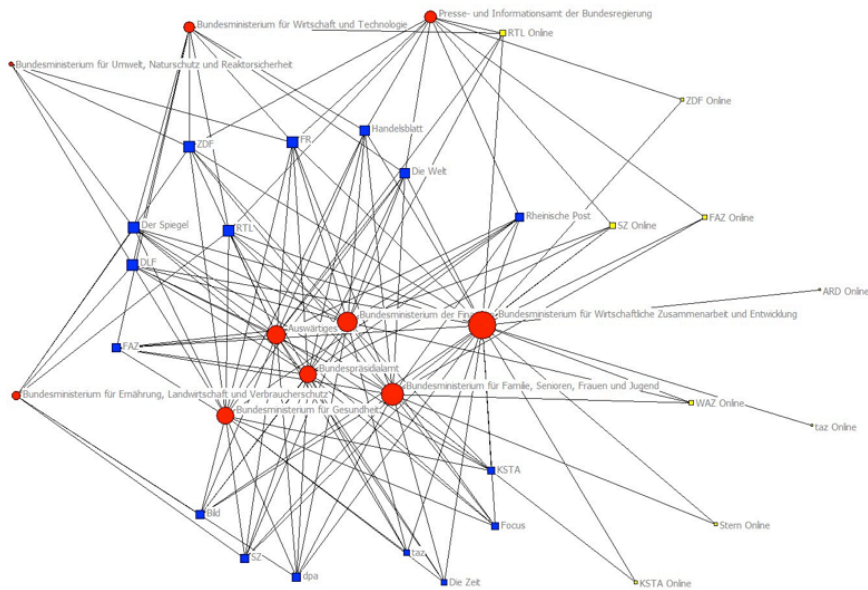


Fig. 1: Government media relations as a communication network; n=39; node size adjusted according to degree centrality; layout composed to geodesic distances; (red dots: governmental bodies; blue squares: offline media outlets; yellow squares: online media outlets).

As analysis of the media contacts of governmental bodies illustrates, they mostly opt for established media outlets, largely setting aside online media. Those online media outlets that have a slightly higher level of degree centrality are organisationally connected to leading offline media outlets (i.e. often constitute their online-variants); nonetheless they still fall behind established offline media.

Rank	Media Outlet	On- / Offline
1	Der Spiegel	Offline
	Frankfurter Rundschau	Offline
	ZDF heute	Offline
	RTL aktuell	Offline
	Deutschlandfunk	Offline
2	Die Welt	Offline
	Handelsblatt	Offline
	Bild	Offline
3	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	Offline
	Süddeutsche Zeitung	Offline
	Rheinische Post	Offline
	dpa	Offline
	Focus	Offline
4	Kölnischer Stadtanzeiger	Offline
	Die Zeit	Offline
	Süddeutsche.de	Online
5	taz – die tageszeitung	Offline

Tab.1 Network centrality (degree) of off- and online media outlets.

The leading ranks (in terms of network centrality) are almost exclusively occupied by offline media. Even though online media often appear as almost ubiquitous from a recipient's perspective, they hardly play any substantial role in the analysed network of government media relations. As further research shows, their relatively marginal role is also in contrast to their perceived influence in the system of political communication (Kocks, 2015).

We also find small differences between the analysed government actors. In their media relations networks some of these opt for a large number of ties, while others seek to gain social capital by maintaining selected ties to well-connected actors, i.e. to very well established media outlets, setting aside less well-connected online media and smaller print and TV-outlets.

A further question regards the integration of new actors into networks of government media

relations. In how far do such actors – as for example political blogs – play any substantial role here? In how far are media relations networks under online conditions inhabited by new organisational or individual nodes?

As the evaluation of a network-sampling question shows, some government spokespersons and political journalists do indeed maintain contacts to bloggers and online civil society activists. Yet at best, these ‘new’ actors are connected to two or three established actors and only so if they are concerned with specialised topics that are of interest to their established counterparts. In the analysed network, no ‘new’ actor succeeds in maintaining ties to more than three established actors,<sup>1</sup> the large majority of those named in the network sampling is referred to by only one interviewed spokesperson or journalist.

#### 4 Discussion

Considering government media relations from a network perspective allows looking beyond organizational paradigms and individual communications, taking into account actors, their interactions and their communications as well as the networks grounded on these.

The picture emerging here is one that is largely coined by structural conservatism. Networks are dominated by established actors; these are tied together closely while new actors do not play any substantial role. Social capital is accumulated either through the maintenance of a large number of ties – or through connections to a specific set of well-connected actors.

This picture corresponds to established conceptualisations of political media relations and is largely in accordance with other empirical findings, regarding both different national contexts and other fields of political communication in Germany (e.g. Davis, 2010; Kocks, 2015; Kocks & Raupp, 2015; Pfetsch & Mayerhöffer, 2011; Schwab Cammarano, 2013; Schwab Cammarano, Donges, & Jarren, 2010; van Aelst, Sehata, & van Dalen, 2010).<sup>2</sup> The advent of digital media has so far not brought larger alterations to the basic patterns and structures of political media relations.

The present analysis focuses only on the situation in one country (Germany), concentrating on government media relations on a federal level and at the time of the interviews (2012-2013). Further research is mandatory to monitor changes and continuities in networks of government media relations. Since a network perspective allows going beyond established paradigms and promises new insights into this field, the research presented is to be considered a starting point for such analysis. We now seek to widen the scope by adding comparative dimensions, both over national boundaries and the course of time.

<sup>1</sup> In fact, the only actor with three ties to established actors is a political blog (written by professional journalists) which was heavily involved in muckraking before the 2010 North-Rhine Westphalia state election.

<sup>2</sup> These studies are not all conducted as social network analyses, yet their findings all concern communicative interactions between politics and the media and (largely) correspond to those of the present analysis.

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## When the press office goes social.

### The role of social media policies for media relations strategies in public sector organizations.

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#### Abstract

In the framework of the process of social media adoption by public sector organizations, this paper aims at investigating the use of social media policies in order to effectively communicate and relate with citizens, journalists and other strategic publics. In particular this pilot study analyzes the use and contents of social media policies published by official Facebook social media accounts managed by press offices in Italian municipalities. Based on a qualitative content analysis, this empirical study shows a scarce use of social media policies, a prevalence of legal concerns rather than engaging ones, and a limited attention in managing media relations via social media with journalists and other digital influencers. Limitations and further steps of research are discussed.

#### 1. Introduction

The digital media revolution continues to produce profound changes in public sector organizations worldwide, influencing a variety of functions and activities, from archiving to accounting, from delivering services to communicating with citizens (Contini & Lanzara, 2008; West, 2005). Crucial developments have arisen from the use of digital technologies (above all Internet and social media) by public sector organizations in order to communicate with strategic publics, to engage with citizens and to relate with mass media. These digital platforms started to be considered strategic in order to improve the quality of public sector communication: indeed, very often,

government organizations and public administrations have failed in communicating with citizens in a bidirectional way, since they have intensively preferred to use impersonal publicity and public information models (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) to dump information to stakeholders and not to favor an effective two-way public relations model (Grunig, 2009).

These digital shifts and the so called social media revolution (Qualman, 2009) have also influenced media relations activities. Public sector organizations have been constantly dependent by mass media coverage to reach large part of the populations, and to connect with opinion leaders in different fields. They have often suffered the tendency of media coverage to highlight scandals and inefficiencies in the public sector and their limited power in the dynamics related to process of agenda setting game (Graber, 1992). In this perspective, the strategic use of the Internet and social media (Kaplan & Heinlein, 2010) have stimulated innovative practices for relating with journalists and mass media in general. Indeed, these digital platforms have enabled public sector organizations to bypass media systems and to disintermediate communication with citizens, aiming at achieving intangible assets such as reputation, transparency, and relationship-building (Kent & Taylor, 2014), and instill a sense of trust in government and in public sector (Goldsmith & Crawford, 2014).

In order to be effective in nurturing relations with stakeholders (Macnamara, 2010), thus also to improve the quality of digital public sector communication, social media requires the adoption of a strategic approach by these organizations (Kent & Taylor, 2014; Lovari & Parisi, 2015; Mergel, 2012). Nonetheless social media management in the public sector is an emerging area of study in public relations (Duhè, 2014; Verčič, Tkalc Verčič & Sriramesh, 2015), limited attention has been given to the use of social media by public administrations' press offices and to the importance of social media policies for media relations' activities. For these reasons, this explorative study aims at partially addressing this gap by investigating the quality of social media policies adopted by official Facebook social media accounts managed by press or media relations offices in a convenient sample of Italian municipalities.

#### 2. Literature review

##### 2.1 Social media and public sector organizations: opportunities and threats in engaging citizens and relate with mass media

Social media have a vital role in achieving communication goals and furthering public relations research agendas (Duhè, 2014; Verčič, Tkalc Verčič & Sriramesh, 2015; Ye & Ki, 2012). Their growing worldwide popularity and the innovative digital practices they enable and have won enthusiastic interest from researchers. The dominant academic discourse suggests that using social media is positive for public relations, since these platforms can nourish relationships, raise organizations' visibility, disintermediate mass media communication, and enable more symmetrical interactions between organizations and strategic publics (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012; Solis & Breakenridge, 2009; Yang & Kent, 2014). Despite this positive and techno-enthusiastic attitude,

empirical studies have shown that there are still several gaps between actual social media use and the normative use suggested by scholars (Valentini, 2015; Wright & Hinson, 2014). In fact, most studies have focused on the organization's perspective rather than the public's when assessing digital practices and the usefulness of social media (Lovari & Parisi, 2015; Lovari, Kim, Vibber & Kim, 2011). For these reasons, Kent and Taylor (2014) call for a healthy skepticism in studying social media, and for a more detailed understanding of the role of these digital platforms. Valentini (2015) stresses the importance of a critical reflection on the use of social media for public relations, and she draws attention to the potential abuses and misuses of these platforms. Similarly, Verčič, Tkalc Verčič and Sriramesh (2015) remark on this pervasive uncritical scholarly approach in their systematic review of 155 articles about digital, social and mobile media that appeared in the journal *Public Relations Review*.

Until recently, scholarly research primarily concerned social media's impact on corporate communication and private organizations; however, the use of these participative technologies in the public sector is now emerging as a vibrant field of study (Duhè, 2014; Verčič, Tkalc Verčič & Sriramesh, 2015). This vitality is evident in the increasing number of articles investigating this topic from different theoretical perspectives ranging from the sociology of communication to administrative studies, and from public relations to political communication. Indeed, scholars have focused their attention on the potential benefits of social media, such as increased transparency, accountability, and access to services (Bertot, Jaeger & Grimes, 2010; Bertot, Jaeger & Hansen, 2012; Bonsón et al., 2012; Mergel, 2012). Other researchers have studied how social media can enhance public voices, promote trust and civic engagement (Coleman & Shane, 2012; Dahlgren, 2009; Hong, 2013), and revitalize forms of democracy and citizen participation (Kent, 2013; Lovari, 2013). Furthermore, focusing on social media's impact on communication and PR activities, several scholars have found that public sector organizations tend to favor one-way broadcasting strategies (Criado et al., 2013; Zheng & Zheng, 2014) despite the opportunity these platforms offer for communicating with citizens in a bi-directional way (Hofmann, Beverungen, Räckers & Becker, 2013; Lovari & Parisi, 2012, 2015). Indeed, social media are frequently used asymmetrically as a promotional tool instead of as a mean to foster symmetrical relationship-building with strategic publics (Kent, 2013; Waters & Williams, 2011).

Alongside the relationship with citizens, social media have also deeply impacted on media relations practices. Media relations is a strategic function in public relations (Shaw & White, 2004; Supa, 2014a), aiming at creating a mutual beneficial relationship between organizations and mass media journalists (Supa & Zoch, 2009). Indeed, the relationship between PR professionals, working within or outside organizations, and journalists has always been seen as problematic (Sallot & Johnson, 2006), in a love and hate connection (Mcnamara, 2014), a connection that often reveals a general negative perception toward PR practitioners (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003). Internet and social media have greatly changed media relations' activities and practices (Bajkiewicz, Kraus & Hong, 2011; Waters, Tindall & Morton, 2010). Organizations have started to practice media relations via corporate web sites (Kent & Taylor, 2003), creating online press rooms (Alfonso & Miguel, 2006; Callison, 2003), and opening official presence on social media to be reached and to interact

with journalists, bloggers and Internet news journalists. At the same time journalists use social media not only as channels to search for new sources of information or to publish news articles, but as a dialogical environment to build and maintain relationships with organizations' press and media relations offices. Beside the normative use, scholars revealed how organizations do not use social media to strategically manage media relations, but these platforms are used to just dump information (Grunig, 2009), and not adopted for contacting members of other professions, such as journalists (Supa, 2014b; Wilson and Supa, 2013). Furthermore, Zeffass and Schramm (2014) found that only 10% of companies investigated in their study have opened social media newsrooms; thus, these platforms are not used as a multimedia hub for media relations, but mostly in an old fashion manner for conducting monologue.

Despite these relevant and insightful changes, limited attention has been given so far to the impact of social media in order to manage media relations in the public sector. Indeed, this topic has been partially covered by research agendas and it requires more attention by international scholars.

## **2.1 Managing social media: adopting social media policies for transparency and engagement**

The adoption of a social media logic for public sector organizations is a very complex and articulated process (Lovari, 2013; Mergel 2012; Mergel & Bertschneider, 2013). Moreover, the erosion of power and centralized control enabled by digital media has generated a real discomfort with the use of social media in the public sector (McNutt, 2014). Therefore, organizational culture often has acted as a major barrier to the adoption of social media, nonetheless their implementation seems to be inevitable in the public sector, due to the rapid technological improvements driven by third-party private providers (Mergel, 2015) - i.e., Google, Facebook, etc. -, and by the evolving citizens' media consumption patterns that are as well influencing mass media strategies in delivering information.

The process of social media adoption in the public sector differ from countries to countries, and from type to type of administration (OECD, 2015). However if public sector organizations aim at using social media to manage relations both with citizens and journalists, they have to focus on some crucial factors (Lovari, 2013; Mergel, 2012). Firstly, communication and PR departments have to clearly identify the objectives of their social media presence and they have to agreed them with top managements in order to align objectives with organizations' mission. Secondly, they have to identify skilled and trained professionals to run these platforms, defining communication strategies, select digital publics to reach, and contents to publish. Furthermore, public sector organizations have to prepare and make public the so called social media policies, a set of rules and policies, with the intention of being transparent in the use of social media, to declare terms of services for these platforms, and to publicize the engagement practices guiding interactions with different strategic publics such as citizens, civil servants or journalists. Social media policies are documents issued by an organization and addressed to its own external and/or internal publics suggesting proper behavior when interacting on social media pages of the organization or on its behalf (Ekachai & Brinker, 2012; Dodd, & Stack, 2014; Dreher, 2014). They establish guidelines

for access, use, management, and preservation of information (Jaeger, Bertot & Shilton, 2012). Moreover, social media policies are part of the social media governance of the organization because they express, implicitly or explicitly, the official position of the organization for the government of organization-public relations (Hrdinová et al., 2010; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012). The aim of social media policy is to sustain desirable online publics' communication behaviors while avoiding the incorrect ones. Desirable online communication behaviors are for example positive referral for the public sector organizations, sharing of useful information among citizens, expression of personal opinion while respecting others' points of view. On the opposite, behaviors such as criticizing people, being impolite, leaking sensitive information, bring legal, ethical and reputational risks for the organization.

Social media policies can represent an opportunity to establish a conversational and relational contract with strategic publics. Indeed, McNutt (2014) encourages the public sector to issue policies and guidelines governing the administration and use of social media, and also calls for it to provide employees with specific training on social media. Furthermore, social media policies can sustain universal information access and encourage citizen-organization interaction as social media are increasingly a primary means by which public sector organizations want to interact with citizens and key publics (Jaeger, Bertot & Shilton, 2012).

### **2.3 The evolution of public sector communication in Italy: the role of social media**

Effective communication and information dissemination are crucial activities for all Italian public sector organizations (Grandi, 2007; Faccioli, 2013). Indeed, national legislation (c.f., law n.150/2000) has mandated transparent communication on the part of public sector organizations by requiring them to institute specific structures and job titles – including offices for public relations, press offices, and spokespersons – in order to communicate with citizens and provide information to news media. Scholars have investigated the stages by which public sector communication has become institutionalized in Italy (Faccioli, 2013; Lovari, 2013; Solito, 2014). The process includes an increasing acknowledgment of the importance of digital media and reflects the evolution of organizational communication mixes, mostly arising from changes in the mediascape and in citizens' media consumption patterns. Despite efforts to keep pace with such developments, researchers have identified a frequent lack of vision among Italian public administrations, many of which continue to fall short of implementing a bidirectional approach to public relations activities both offline and online (Lovari & Parisi, 2015; Valentini & Sriramesh, 2014). Such difficulties may be the result of a general lack of strategy and vision among Italian public sector communicators and PR practitioners (cfr. Valentini & Sriramesh, 2014), together with other constraints related to country's poor digital infrastructures and the limited citizens' technological skills (European Commission, 2015). On the other hand, a number of features attest to the vitality of the digital revolution in Italy, such as the growing use of mobile devices and the diffusion of social media (European Commission, 2015). Indeed, a recent study (Censis-Ucsi, 2015) reported that Italian citizens rely greatly on social media when searching for information: for instance, 43.7% of the sample reported gathering information via Facebook, with a peak of 71.1% among users aged

14-29 years. Facebook is the most used social media in Italy, with more than 26 million monthly active users, 20 million daily active users, and with 16 million of Italians surf it through mobile. Moreover, according to a PRC study (2012), 38% of Italians use social network sites, and the majority of Italian web surfers visit these sites to express opinions about community issues (64%), a rate that is higher than that of most European countries.

Several scholars have begun to study the use of social media by Italian public sector organizations for communicating with digital publics (Bonsón et al., 2012; D'Agostino, 2013; Lovari & Parisi, 2012, 2015), while inadequate attention has been paid to the adoption of these platforms for media relations. The general picture is very scattered: some best practices for social media use have been established, yet there remains a simultaneous widespread absence of innovation in digital public sector communication in several areas of the country. This situation is also influenced by the Italian national legislation that started to consider social media strategic communication tools to enable participation and interact with stakeholders, but it does not have already inserted them in any act as mandatory for public sector organizations. This lack of specific centralized indications, has created a hybrid situation in which social media management is assigned to public relations or press offices - as it should be done according to some specific national guidelines and as suggested by several Italian scholars - but also to PR companies, university interns, political consultants or civil servants without specific job titles or competencies in the public sector communication (Arata, 2013).

In this context, although social media is a rising field of research in Italy, we noticed a lack of empirical studies on the impact of social media for managing media relations in public sector organizations and on the role of social media policy to interact with strategic publics. The only specific research on social media policies in the Italian public sector was carried out by Alovio and Chiesa (2014), who have identified the presence of only 47 social media policies, created and published by local administrations such as municipalities, provinces and regions on the web. The majority of these policies deals with Facebook engagement activities, while very limited is the presence of integrated social media policies including also the use of Twitter and YouTube. 80% of these policies is not officially approved with an administrative act by public sector organizations, and 75% of these documents are exclusively addressed to external publics. Furthermore, about 90% of the sample does not report the date of publication of the policy; and the majority of these documents are published both on the official social media page and on the corporate website of the administration.

### **3. Research questions and methodology**

From this scenario, to partially address this gap in the research, the objective of this explorative study is to investigate the use of social media policy by Italian public sector organizations, focusing the attention on those social media policies published by Facebook official pages managed by Italian municipalities' press offices. Thus, the study aims at highlighting the absence/presence of these "PR documents", analyzing their contents and their value in the relationship-building

process with strategic digital publics. We chose Facebook since is the most used social media in Italy, and the majority of interactions among public sector organizations and citizens take place at the local level (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2012)

In this framework we propose the following research questions:

**RQ1) What are the main themes included in social media policies managed by Italian municipalities' press offices?**

**RQ2) Who are the main publics social media policies are addressed to?**

**RQ3) Are social media policies used for citizens' engagement or/and for media relations management?**

The study was carried out in June 2015. We extracted a convenience sample of municipalities, crossing data of two empirical studies: a national study mapping the characteristics of 1676 Italian local public sector organizations present on Facebook in order to identify the number of pages managed directly and explicitly by press or media relations offices (Arata, 2013); and a study regarding the presence and typology of social media policies in Italian public sector organizations (Alovisio & Chiesa 2014). We selected the municipalities matching two criteria: they published a social media policy; and the municipalities' press offices managed the Facebook page.

The analysis was conducted thanks to a qualitative content analysis (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991), and adopting an iterative inductive open coding procedure. According to the qualitative content analysis approach (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006), we analyzed the text of the social media policies and identified keywords, phrases and passages to develop a list of dominant themes. Two researchers, separately, conducted the document analysis, coding phrases and passages by means of an iterative interpretive process while selecting quotes. To deal with the differences of individual interpretations, the researchers compared their independent coding. They solved the coding when they found conflicting results by means of open discussion.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

From the qualitative content analysis of these ten social media policies, have emerged five common themes: a) characteristics of the title the document (such as collocation, date, targets, etc.); b) the aim of social media presence; c) the kind of contents to be published; d) the social media management; e) the terms of use for users. For each theme, we found several sub-themes, as indicated in the Table 1 and described in the following.

<b>The document</b>
Title of the document/page/section
Collocation of the document/page
Date of publication
Aim of the document
Targets of the document
<b>Aim/mission of Social Media</b>
Dialogue with citizens
Criticisms, requests
Access to service
Inform citizens
Promotion
Cost reduction
Conformity to laws, guidelines for public sector organizations, ...
Not for ...
<b>Kind of contents that will be published</b>
Service and institutional information, deadlines, events, ...
Participation and opportunities for citizens
Information in emergency situations
Contents taken from other sites, accounts, platforms
<b>Management</b>
Management/administration of the Facebook page/accounts
Frequency of publishing activities on social media
Contacts for further requests
Monitoring
Moderation of discussions
<b>Terms of use for users</b>
Privacy
Responsibility for the published posts (comments, ...)
Anonymity of users' posts
Treatment of unappropriate contents (i.e., defaming, illegal, violent)
Treatment of Facebook page/accounts not compliant with social media rules
Posts with commercial contents
Restrictions of uses of the contents
Treatment of errors
Advertising on social media
Possibility to signal content of interest for citizens
Possibility for employees to participate

Table 1: Themes and sub-themes found in Facebook social media policies of Italian municipalities

*The document*

The titles of the document in this study are heterogeneous, as they include for example “Social media policies”, “Legal notes”, “Terms of use and others”. This indicates that the habit to issue a specific document containing indications is quite new and there are not institutionalized practices among municipalities. The documents collected are generally collocated in the “General information” section of the Facebook page. Very seldom they present a date of publication, making impossible knowing if they are recent and regularly updated, confirming the general trend underlined in other Italian studies (cf., Alovisio & Chiesa, 2014; Arata, 2013;). Anyway, probably all of them have been published recently, as when present, the oldest date is 2012.

The documents are usually very short, in some cases few lines of text. The explicit targets of the documents are indicated only in two documents with the general expression “external users”. None of the documents in the analysis report or mention journalists and media as strategic publics, indicating that hardly they are conceived as a means for press office management or for relating with Internet new journalists (Mcnamara, 2014; Supa, 2014b).

*Aims/Mission of social media*

Most municipalities declared that the aims of social media use for them is the dialogue with citizens (7 documents), as for example: “SM presence aims to service information diffusion, dialogue and collaboration with citizens, transparency”. Following, other aims are to inform citizens (4), facilitate citizens’ access to public services (3), promote the territory, events, and activities (3), be an opportunity for citizens to express requests and criticisms (3). As stated in one social media policy: “SM are open to interaction with citizens for [...] opinions, proposals, requests, criticisms”. Very interestingly, some municipalities explicit that social media are not for dialogue with digital publics and/or for expressing requests and criticisms (3). For instance, “Not for complaining and signaling [...] Not for dialogue: please use other contact name”; “Comments about the Municipality are allowed, but comments about posts are discouraged”. These municipalities seem to have the concept of using social media as a broadcasting and one way communication tool, as noticed also in previous studies in the Italian public sector field (D’Agostino, 2013; Lovari & Parisi, 2012, 2015). This use could be related to the fact that these pages are directly managed by municipalities’ press offices, although journalists and media are not cited or mentioned inside any social media policies as specific public to relate with. Furthermore, although very limited, it is worthy to notice that some municipalities reported to adopt social media as a cost cutting strategy for communication (1) and for compliance with law (1).

*Kind of contents to be published*

There are three main contents to be treated on Facebook municipalities’ press office pages according to the documents in the analysis. First, service and institutional information, deadlines, events (6), and information in emergency situations (6), indicating a use of this platform as a way to improve information access and spreading in ordinary and extraordinary times. Second, a relevant number of municipalities are open to host citizens generated contents (6), as for example: “Citizens

can publish contents”; “Inform us, we will publish a post”; “Citizens can promote initiatives on Municipality’s social media accounts”. This indicates that municipalities try to encourage citizens to use Facebook for content sharing among them, and to establish a dialogue with them via social media (Jaeger, Bertot & Shilton, 2012).

*Management*

The administrator of the Facebook page is in all cases the press office, even if, in few cases, the page is managed together with a digital team. This confirms and implies that these Facebook pages are under the influence and strategy of the municipalities’ press offices, thus, they should articulate objectives and strategies of these offices in the public sector.

The moderation of the discussions is one of the most spread theme in the social media policies (6) and this activity is carried out always after contents’ publication. This means there is not a preventive monitoring approach for the page. Few municipalities specify the aim of moderation: “Only to limit not proper behavior in a reasonable length of time”. Instead, some of them specify that: “All messages will be taken in charge during working hours”, showing a lack of monitoring messages during week-ends, holidays and nights.

The frequency of publication is considered a marginal aspect, as only 1 municipality assures a daily updating of contents, while few declared that publication will take place randomly and two municipalities specified that “The Facebook page is not an online newspaper”, warning audiences that they will not find daily news. This last passage underlines how some press offices do not seem to be aware of the possibility to use these platforms for enhancing digital journalistic practices.

*Terms of use for users*

This is one of the most present themes in the gathered documents, indicating a concern for social media policy as an instrument to avoid troubles. The main concern is about the treatment of inappropriate contents (7), as stated here: “Will be cancelled and eventually signaled to authorities”. Also the responsibility of the users for the contents they publish on the municipalities’ Facebook pages is widely specified (6): “The Municipality will verify, possibly, the correctness of contents it publishes but it is not responsible”.

Posts with commercial content are in many cases explicitly not allowed (5). The treatment of Facebook accounts not compliant with social media rules will be blocked or banned (5). Moreover, the use of contents present on the Facebook pages are under specific restrictions (4): “Contents should be considered under Creative Commons license” or “Contents are protected by copyrights”. The municipalities warn users that the advertising on their social media platforms is not under their own control (3), admitting the possibility of failures in the monitoring. Only two municipalities in the study specified how they will treat errors, declaring that when signaled, they will be cancelled, while not taking responsibility for them.

Privacy is weakly protected declaring that “Personal data treatment is ruled by social media” (2). How to say: the privacy of users is a matter of Facebook, and administrations are not fully involved in this issue. Anonymity while posting is discouraged (2). Only one municipality mentions

the possibility for employee to participate (1) and to engage in social media activities as an internal communication tool.

Overall, we can say that the empirical analysis of these ten social media policies published by Italian municipalities' press offices allows to remark some findings. It emerges a legal concern, as "Terms of use for users" is the most relevant theme and it points out the responsibility for users. This factor could be related to the fact that social media policies are not yet considered as PR documents but mostly as legal ones, as guidelines to respect in order to protect organization and not to open it to strategic publics. Moreover, among this small sample, two documents are exactly the same. Probably they were developed by the same legal consultants while not considering any specific features of the municipality issuing the policy.

Although not very spread, is worth to underline the possibility for citizens to promote their own activities and the intention to use the Facebook as a communication tool in emergency situations. Furthermore, a relevant limitation is the presence of a moderation activity only during working hours, so that to exclude any interaction with digital publics during week-ends and holydays.

Coming back to the research questions, we can conclude as follow. First, the most covered themes (RQ1) present in the social media policies published by municipalities' Facebook pages managed by press offices are: a) the terms of use for users; b) three kinds contents, namely service and institutional information, deadlines, events; information in emergency situations; and citizens generated contents. Secondly, from the analysis emerges that social media policies are mostly dedicated to a general public (RQ2), while media and journalist are not cited and mentioned in the documents. Beside these social media policies are issued by press offices, there is not a specificity of these documents, since they present the same topics and characteristics of those policies issued and managed by other offices within municipalities (Alovisio & Chiesa, 2014). Third, social media policies, and consequently social media pages, as they appear from this analysis are used mostly for citizens' engagement instead of media relations (RQ3), although they are administered by the press offices.

## Conclusions

This paper investigated the role of social media policies and the kind of relationships press offices engage with these strategic publics on a convenient sample of Italian municipalities' Facebook pages. Indeed, a limited attention has been dedicated to investigate the use of social media to relate with journalists and mass media by public sector organizations.

Results have showed how, although these organizations have modified their PR mixes, enriching it with new digital platforms, municipalities are not fully catching dialogical opportunities enabled by these platforms, since the quality of their presence on social media for media and journalists engagement is poor as it appears on the Facebook timelines.

We are aware of the number of limitation of this explorative study; for instance the limited number of cases investigated, the decision to explore only Facebook pages and not to analyze Twitter

accounts where media relations practices seem to find a suitable collocation. Further steps of the research could include qualitative interviews with press officers in order to better explore objectives and adoption's dynamics of social media; content analysis of Facebook messages and/or tweets whether the study will be extended to this social media.

Findings confirm how Italian local administrations suffer from a dearth of good practices in their social media management; the use of social media policies lacks of formal institutionalization, and it represents a very rare practice up to now in Italy. Moreover, Italian municipalities' press offices seem not to be aware of the importance to have a social media policy to relate with journalists and other strategic publics. Furthermore, municipalities seem to be interested in coping with the legal side of these documents, highlighting constraints in the use of social media, beside developing the conversational and relational properties of these documents.

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## Money in brand-blogger relations: Sin or virtue?

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### Abstract

As bloggers become more influential due to their credibility and reach, brands began to see them as potential collaborators and aim at forming tight brand-blogger relationships that should benefit both parties. The main issue that emerges is how to perceive monetary incentives aimed at bloggers in the newly formed brand-blogger relations – as a sin, or virtue? We address this question in detail by providing evidence from a survey conducted on Italian bloggers. Our findings help develop a better understanding of brand-blogger relations and the role of monetary incentives, and shed a new, even counterintuitive, light on an aspect that is most of the times overlooked. We find that monetary incentives play a determining role in bloggers' assessment of brand relationships, as well as in their general perception of brand relationships.

Keywords: blog, blogger, brand-blogger relationships, monetary incentives

### Introduction

Bloggers are new influential figures in digital markets, due to the impact they exert over audiences, so companies develop complex influence management programs, to facilitate the development of positive relationships, earn relevant coverage for their activities, and even transform these new market reference actors into advocates. Often these programs and incentives include monetary benefits.

While brand-blogger relationships have become increasingly common, the literature regarding this phenomenon is still scarce. Particularly understudied are questions regarding management and appropriateness of using monetary incentives to stimulate bloggers coverage of brand's activities and products, and even explicit brand advocacy. Our study addresses this issue and attempts to generate preliminary answers to relevant research questions, but also help generate a research agenda on this subject. The existing literature about brand- blogger relationships is dominantly focused on the brand's or blog readers' perspective.

The main purpose of this paper is to fill this gap by exploring bloggers' practices, perceptions and opinions in more depth. More specifically, we report our findings from a survey conducted with Italian bloggers.

The paper is organized as follows. We first present a theoretical framework that addresses the blogging phenomenon, brand-blogger relationships and their key benefits. We then outline the research methodology followed by a presentation of results and discussion. Lastly, we discuss the results in addition to drawing conclusions from the findings and to highlighting the study's limitations. Finally, we propose considerations and recommendations for further research.

### Literature review

#### The blogging phenomenon

The emergence and the recent ubiquity of the Internet have dramatically transformed businesses and the way they build and manage relationships with customers (Singh et. al. 2008). While the Web 1.0 was driven by a company-centric model that did not focus on consumer interactions, the Web 2.0 era brought forth many changes, among which the crucial one was a shift of focus from the company to the consumer, which resulted in a proliferation of user-generated content, emergence of different types of online communities and an overall collaborative approach to consumers (Berthon et. al., 2010; Singh et al., 2008). Among the many tools in the Web 2.0 era, blogs and blogging have emerged as one of the fastest growing phenomena in the digital media landscape (Singh et al., 2008; Hu et al., 2011; Doyle et al., 2012)

The term 'blog' first appeared in 1999 (Garden, 2011: 485) and is derived from a contraction of 'weblog' – meaning log of web sites. Blogs have been defined as “frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence” (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright, 2004, p.1). Similarly, Hourihan (2002) suggests that one of the distinctive features of a

blog with respect to a traditional webpage is the reverse-chronological order, which – ensuring the newest posts to be at the top – provides a “sense of immediacy” while setting the expectations for further updates, which should be frequent (Matheson, 2004a). Kelleher and Miller (2006) argue that a conceptual definition of blogs will consist of five characteristics of Web-based postings: (1) frequent updating, (2) reverse chronological order, (3) inclusion of personal journal material, (4) ability of readers to make comments and (5) inclusion of hyperlinks (p. 399). Similarly, Singh et al. (2008) list four elements that are common to all blogs, which provide continuity and facilitate the ongoing collective conversation: (1) comments, (2) categories, (3) trackbacks and (4) permalinks. Among these, the most radical change characterizing the blogging phenomenon is ascribable to the development of the software allowing blogs to include the comments-facility (Garden, 2011, p. 485). This means that blogs started being the place where interaction and dialog are fostered (Quiggin, 2006). The communicative practice of blogging allows people to interact with a global reach typical of the digitally networked environment (Gulvady, 2009, p.2). However, despite the previously described communicative practice of blogging, it is important to distinguish blogs from other social media platforms that have emerged subsequently. For example, Hollenbaugh and Everett (2013) argue that blogs represent “a more isolated space with less interactivity that may reduce users’ awareness of their audiences” compared to social network sites such as Facebook.”

Many authors have argued that blogs represent a shift from the traditional, uni-directional communication towards ongoing interactions and two-way conversations, where the audience is the active co-producer of digital content (Rettberg, 2008; Berthon et al., 2010, Balague and de Valck, 2013). From the late 1990’s, when the first contributions appeared, blogging has become conscious and powerful, evolving from undefined rambling expressions to an original and creative web phenomenon. During its maturation blogging also experienced an increasing degree of professionalism.

As repeatedly stated, blogs are versatile media that bloggers – driven by a heterogeneous multitude of motivations. According to Huang et al. (2007) there are five dimensions of blogger motivations: (1) self-expression, (2) life documenting, (3) commenting, (4) forum participation, and (5) information search. However, it is important to note that these diverse motivations are not mutually exclusive and can occur simultaneously.

### **Brand-blogger relationships**

As noted earlier, blogs are one of the fastest growing medium of personal publishing. Given their popularity, it is no surprise that blogs have been rated by consumers as more reliable and trustworthy when compared to traditional media, which discloses proprietary, detailed and timely information (Hu et al., 2011). Because of the usefulness, importance and impact of blogs, many companies decided to incorporate organizational blogs or collaborate with influential bloggers to make use of the benefits they have to offer. For example, it has been argued that blogs are interactive means to interact with consumers due to their cost efficiency, ease of use, potential reach and opportunity to solicit consumer feedback (Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli, 2005;

Balague and de Valck, 2013). Furthermore, Singh et al. (2008) argue that “blogs have a better ability to manage customer relations, facilitate internal collaboration, aid knowledge management, improve media relations, and test new ideas for products and services” (p. 286). For public relations practitioners, blogs have undoubtedly become means for developing and maintaining relationships between organizations and publics (Kelleher and Miller, 2006; Porter et al., 2007; Sweetser and Metzger, 2007; Seltzer and Mitrook, 2007).

Clearly, blogging constitutes a channel for public relations practitioners to represent organizational interests, either through organizational blogs (Xifra and Huertaas, 2008; Kent, 2008) or via collaborations with influential bloggers (Smith, 2010). Organizational blogs are more easily controlled; however, when planning collaborations with independent influential bloggers, it is important also to address the bloggers’ viewpoints and their considerations and willingness to collaborate with public relations practitioners (Smith, 2010). Smith (2010) examined the blogging phenomenon in terms of the clash of interests, which may potentially occur and the process through which bloggers make meaning of the public relations activities addressed to the blogosphere. Bloggers are driven by both personal and community-oriented interests resulting from an evolution process – introduction, community membership and autonomy – whereas each stage is characterized by a certain degree of personal and/or community-oriented interest (Smith, 2010). The optimal stage for practitioners is the second one, which – enhanced by the desire for new content – make the relationship with bloggers mutually beneficial, even if also during the autonomy phase some opportunities may arise allowing deeper and more personal interaction (Smith, 2010, p.177). The blogging experience changes somehow the motivations of bloggers as well as the willingness to catch public relations practitioners’ attention, although over time bloggers become more selective with their content (Smith, 2010).

### **Key benefits of brand-blogger relationships**

The benefits of brand-blogger relationships for both brands and bloggers tend to vary in nature depending on the main objectives of marketing and communication strategies set by the companies as well as by the blogger in question. In any case there are tangible and intangible benefits that may allow both parties to enhance their performance and status.

For brands, the benefit is the possibility to market products or services in a more engaging and conversational way with customers by developing a relationship with influential bloggers (Singh et al., 2008). By doing this, brands have a deeper understanding of the value that can be generated by bloggers through word-of-mouth (Goldman, 2013). Such marketing partnerships with bloggers allow the company to gain authenticity because of the more personal relationship and the consequent trust customers have toward bloggers (Goldman, 2013). Furthermore, bloggers are crucial brand advisors and narrative creators as they are capable to generate stories or create myths around brands or some of their products (Belk, Askegaard, and Scott, 2012). With this respect, the blogosphere is becoming particularly attractive to new marketing activities (Segev, Wang and Fernandes, 2014: 17). It primarily depends on the trusted relationship between the bloggers and their readership.

For bloggers there is a diverse set of tangible benefits that emerge from a relationship with the brand. These are, for example, collaboration is often characterized by the presence of monetary incentives, more specifically, providing bloggers with financial income. Brands evidently regard them as a rather steady approach to convince bloggers to collaborate once being contacted. Müller, Goswami and Krčmar (2011) identify several potential revenues streams resulting from blogging. Among the several results obtained, advertising – in its different forms and with different techniques – represents one of the most employed mean to monetize one's blogging activity. Blogging has definitely become a flourishing business “not a mere self-indulgent personal hobby anymore” (Sloan and Kaihla, 2006). Other relevant common revenues streams identified by Müller, Goswami and Krčmar (2011) are the paid content and affiliate marketing, donations, paid subscriptions, consulting and journalistic work for other media.

The presented monetary incentives are not the only ones used. By now bloggers are also offered to participate in special events, to collaborate for limited edition product lines or to become the ambassador of the brand at national or global level. Such incentives cannot only represent revenues streams for bloggers but also a way to increase their awareness in the blogosphere and receive public acknowledgements. The benefits are in these cases intangible and may have an impact on the bloggers' status. An increase in the press presence and the respective implications might also be produced.

In summary, networks of influence represent a form of power and enable companies and brands to improve their performance. From the brands' perspective it is relevant to identify the bloggers with the highest influence so to have the higher positive impact in terms of desired objectives. In that context, it is particularly important for public relations practitioners and companies to be conscious of bloggers' preferences and expectations, their interests and motivations as well as their willingness to collaborate. The benefits deriving from the relationships between brands and bloggers can be intangible or tangible; however there are still risks that may emerge from collaborations. These are primarily related to the issues of credibility, reputation and independence of bloggers, who need to consciously consider them when deciding for the acceptance of a given incentive and collaboration.

## Methodology

The original research questions were inspired by the research of La Rocca, Mandelli and Snehota (2014) that used a case study method to examine the use of netnography as a market research method in the business context. The core of the case study in question evolved around “mommy bloggers” that collaborated with a renowned multinational company, and the degree to which the company can use netnographic research to gain valuable insights that emerge inbound and outbound the blogosphere.

Our general understanding was that the problem seemed more complex than originally appeared, and deserved a deeper investigation into expectations, perceptions and attitudes of the bloggers, with concern to brand-blogger relations. For that reason, we formulated several research questions

that we aim to answer through a quantitative study on a sample of Italian bloggers. These are:

**RQ1. What are bloggers' motivations for starting a blog?**

**RQ2. What are the bloggers' experiences with brand-blogger relationships?**

**RQ3. How do bloggers perceive the impact of brand-blogger relationships on their credibility, reputation and independence?**

## The survey

The survey was conducted on a convenience sample of Italian bloggers active in different sectors. The aim was to investigate the adoption of monetary incentives in brand-blogger relations, and how these incentives could be correlated with bloggers' satisfaction with brand relationships, and the perceived impact on blogger credibility, reputation, and independence – three primary professional “values” for news making. The questionnaire was consisted of four sections: (1) personal blogging activity, (2) general viewpoints about brand relationships, (3) brand-blogger relationships' impact on performance and (4) bloggers' evaluation of brand-blogger relationships. The questionnaire had thirty-eight questions in total. Before administering the questionnaire to bloggers, the final version has been pre-tested among students attending the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI) for clarity and the univocal meaning of the questions and of comprehensiveness of answering options provided. Where applicable, existing scales were adopted and modified for the purpose of our study. For example, since the aim was to investigate the satisfaction of bloggers with the relationships occurred and still occurring with brands a relationship satisfaction scale was initially adopted. Diverse study' approaches were consulted including the one by Archuleta, Grable, and Britt (2013) which focuses on financial and relationship satisfaction. Finally, the online questionnaire developed via SurveyMonkey was administered to 589 Italian bloggers by email.

The bloggers can be grouped in five major categories according to the main topic of the blog: food (24,957%), fashion (23,599%), beauty (17,487%), design and lifestyle (16,977%) and travel (16,977%). Out of 589 bloggers contacted, we received 232 completed questionnaires, with a response rate of 39,388%. ( $232:100=RR:100 \rightarrow 232*100/589 \rightarrow RR=39,388\%$ ).

## Findings and discussion

### Bloggers' motivations and personal blogging activity

When asked about the reasons for opening a blog, most of the bloggers answered that they were not interested in raising money ( $M=2,22$ ;  $SD=1,14$ ) but to use the platform to share their passion and experiences ( $M=4,70$ ;  $SD=0,64$ ), or share knowledge and expertise ( $M=4,00$ ;  $SD=0,93$ ) (see Table 1a-b). However, the results also suggest that a certain number of respondents (25,86%) is neutral when considering interaction as a motivation for starting a blog ( $M=3,75$ ;  $SD=0,99$ ). As noted earlier, interaction is believed to be a crucial element of the blogging activity. However, according to respondents' responses, it does not seem having such prominent relevance as a motivator when compared to other possible reasons. The second interesting result relates to the

perception of monetary benefits as motivation for starting a blog. Indeed, when deciding to open their blogs, a very small percentage of bloggers (2,6%) set up their blogs with the specific intention to raise money based on their blogging activity (M=2,22; SD=1,14).

Table 1a: Motivations for opening a blog (descriptives)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Share passions and personal experiences	232	1,00	5,00	4,7069	,64489
Share knowledge and expertise	232	1,00	5,00	4,0043	,93743
Interact with people and build a community	232	1,00	5,00	3,7543	,99565
Raise money	232	1,00	5,00	2,2284	1,14509
Valid N (listwise)	232				

Table 1b: Motivations for opening a blog (frequencies)

Answer choices	Frequencies					Valid percent				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Share passions and personal experiences	3	1	3	47	178	1,3	0,4	1,3	20,3	76,7
Share knowledge and expertise	3	13	44	92	80	1,3	5,6	19,0	39,7	34,5
Interact with people and build a community	6	18	60	91	57	2,6	7,8	25,9	39,2	24,6
Raise money	85	49	64	28	6	36,6	21,1	27,6	12,1	2,6

Additionally, we asked bloggers to indicate which elements contribute to the overall quality of a blog. Based on their answers, we can conclude that author's personality (74,67%) is one of the key elements that contribute to blog quality. Interestingly, according to results, a consistent percentage of respondents (55,90%) indicate the readership interaction as a relevant element of blog quality. A high percentage (52,84%) of bloggers also believe that building audience relationships based on trust is important, and a good indicator of blog quality. This result confirms findings from previous studies and is strictly related to the credibility, reputation and independence issues that are of our interest. In addition, honesty, transparency and sincerity toward the readership with respect to brand-blogger relationships as well as the posts and pictures' quality and writing expertise are most mentioned elements by the respondents who selected the open-ended option 'other' to this question. Finally, only 18,34% of bloggers indicated the author's entrepreneurial spirit as relevant for blog quality (see Table 2).

Table 2: Elements that contribute to blog quality

Answer choices	Frequency	Valid percent
Author's personality	171	74,67
Author's entrepreneurial spirit	42	18,34
Post variety, also partially ensured by brand collaborations	72	31,44
Posting frequency	155	67,69
Interesting textual sections and effective visual elements	133	58,08
Readership interaction	128	55,90
Audience relationship based on trust	121	52,84
Other (please specify)	24	10,48

**Bloggers' general experiences and attitudes towards brand-blogger relationships**

With regards to brand-blogger relationships it is interesting to notice that more than 90% of the bloggers report they had been contacted by a brand for collaboration, but only about 38% were offered monetary incentives. This indicates that the phenomenon of brand-blogger relationships is extensively common, while monetary incentives are still relatively rare. A high percentage of bloggers (69,95%) reported they were usually contacted by PR agencies acting as intermediaries – confirming the crucial role of PR professionals discussed earlier in the paper. Still a high percentage of bloggers (61,97%) is usually contacted by Marketing and Communication brand departments spokespersons, which confirms that the bloggers' engagement process is conducted at a corporate managerial level. Of those bloggers who were offered a collaboration, the highest percentage of bloggers (38,54%) believe the figures dealing with them were professional. In terms of bloggers' attitudes towards monetary incentives in brand-blogger relationships, 47,89% of bloggers believe monetary incentives are completely optional (see Table 3). However, while such incentives may be perceived as optional, it does seem that a large portion of bloggers acknowledge their importance. For example, monetary incentives are considered as necessary either to compete and emerge in the blogosphere (27,70%) or to be successful and develop the blog as an organization itself (20,65%). Respondents also believe that such incentives may be relevant in order to build a strong reputation inbound and outbound the blogosphere (11,74%) which is consistent with available literature.

Table 3: Bloggers' attitude towards monetary incentives

Answer choices	Frequency	Valid percent
They are necessary to acquire a strong reputation inbound and outbound the blogosphere	25	11,74
They are necessary to compete and emerge in the blogosphere also in terms of quality of content	59	27,70
They are necessary to hit the big time and make the blog an organization itself	44	20,66
They are totally optional, at blogger's discretion	102	47,89
They imply so many benefits that not taking advantage of them would be penalizing	13	6,10
Other, please specify	45	21,13

Since the literature suggests several benefits for brands that emerge from brand-blogger relationships, we asked bloggers to evaluate the brand benefits of such relationships. According to the results, a large majority of bloggers (80,75%) believe the biggest benefit of brand-blogger collaborations for brands lies in the possibility of promoting their products to consequently raise sales (44,13%) but also in ‘humanizing ‘ the brand and have a closer relationship with customers (50,05%).

In terms of the types of incentives offered by brands, 85,45% of bloggers were offered free products to test and write about in their blogs, 60,56% were invited to participate in special events, while 42,72% were offered direct monetary incentives in the form of paid content to be inserted in the blog. Other incentives included journalistic contributions (22,54%), brand ambassador arrangements (22,54%), participation in advertising campaigns (15,49%) and developing a personalized collection or product line (6,57%) (see Table 4). This result is in line with the existing literature, as it again becomes clear that brands are interested in humanizing the brand and gaining credibility through brand-blogger relations, and are therefore more focused on getting credible support from influential bloggers.

Table 4: Types of incentives offered by brands

Answer choices	Frequency	Valid percent
Free products to test and show in the blog	182	85,45
Paid content (i.e. advertising) to be inserted in the blog	91	42,72
Participation to special events	129	60,56
Journalistic contributions (i.e. articles, radio, TV interviews)	48	22,54
Participation to advertising campaign	33	15,49
Being the brand ambassador representing the company at national or global level	48	22,54
Personalized collection or product line	14	6,57
Other, please specify	22	10,33

However, the results also show that a vast majority of bloggers (86,31%) refused a brand collaboration. This result is strictly related to the relevance monetary incentives have for bloggers. Bloggers’ refusal to collaborate might depend on the absence of such incentives. Further confirmation is provided by the data presented next. When asked of the reasons why they usually refuse to collaborate with brands, the principal reason was a disagreement between blogger’s personal and brand values (72,41%), or that bloggers felt their personal credibility might be at risk (49,75%).

Table 5: Reasons for refusing brand collaborations

Answer choices	Frequency	Valid percent
Personal values and brand values in disagreement	147	72,41
Any particular appreciation of the brand in question	70	34,48
Presence of monetary incentives and unwillingness to cede to the profit logic	25	12,32
Willingness to remain independent, also with respect to authored content and blog’s profile	66	32,51
Personal credibility at risk	101	49,75
Other, please specify	29	14,29

An interesting finding here is that that 49,75% of bloggers’ refusal depend on the personal credibility at risk – more specifically - not only the concrete presence of this risk and the consciousness of the blogger of it, but also their willingness to seriously avoid such risks. In addition to the issue of credibility, 32,51% of bloggers refused brand collaborations due to their willingness to remain independent. However, at the same time bloggers are starting to consider monetary incentives as something to be expected. As the data suggests, 14,29% of bloggers stated one of the reasons why they refuse to collaborate with brands depends on the absence of monetary incentives and financial retributions.

While the risk of loss of credibility, reputation and independence may lead bloggers to refuse brand collaborations, 94,84% of bloggers have (at least once) accepted to collaborate with a brand, while 76,00% of them stated they have benefited from monetary incentives. 91,60% of bloggers were re-contracted by a brand they once already collaborated with.

We then assessed the type of tangible/monetary incentives bloggers tend to prefer (see Table 6). According to the results, beside free products (63,21%) bloggers are particularly interested in incentives which could enhance their status within and outbound the blogosphere, such as the participation to special events (42,49%) and being the ambassador of the brand representing the company at national or global level. Compared to the incentives they actually get (see Table 4), being a brand ambassador seems to be an incentive companies and brands might use more often in their brand-blogger relations

Table 6: Tangible/monetary incentives preferred by bloggers

Answer choices	Frequency	Valid percent
Free products to test and show in the blog	122	63,21
Paid content (i.e. advertising) to be inserted in the blog	68	35,23
Participation to special events	82	42,49
Journalistic contributions (i.e. articles, radio, TV interviews)	48	24,87
Participation to advertising campaign	43	22,28
Being the brand ambassador representing the company at national or global level	80	41,45
Personalized collection or product line	45	23,32
Other, please specify	33	17,10

Finally, bloggers were asked to assess their attitudes towards brand-blogger relationships (see

Table 7a-b). According to the results, one of the key findings is the prevalent view that brand-blogger relationships require trust from both parties involved (M= 4,40; SD=0,73), are built on preliminary information gathered by the brand (M=3,92; SD=0,86) and that such relationships require time to build (M=3,92; SD=0,77) (see Table 7a). This is important since trust and the temporal dimension and commitment are typically considered as crucial factors for relationship building and maintenance.

Table 7a: Blogger's attitudes towards brand-blogger relationships (descriptives)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Built on preliminary information gathering	200	1,00	5,00	3,9250	,86784
Require time to build	200	1,00	5,00	3,9200	,77887
Durable over time	200	1,00	5,00	3,2200	,82766
Have defined duration	200	1,00	5,00	3,3100	,77906
Require mutual trust	200	1,00	5,00	4,4050	,73051
Valid N (listwise)	200				

Table 7b: Blogger's attitudes towards brand-blogger relationships (frequencies)

Answer choices	Frequencies					Valid percent				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Built on preliminary information gathering	3	10	35	103	49	1,5	5,0	17,5	51,5	24,5
Require time to build	2	6	39	112	41	1,0	3,0	19,5	56,0	20,5
Durable over time	5	27	96	63	9	2,5	13,5	48,0	31,5	4,5
Have defined duration	3	20	99	68	10	1,5	1,0	49,5	34,0	5,0
Require mutual trust	2	2	11	83	102	1,0	1,0	5,5	41,5	51,0

We then asked bloggers what are the most common implications on blog's performance that can be derived from brand relationships (see Table 8).

Table 8: Brand relationships' implications for blog performance

Answer choices	Frequency	Valid percent
Increase in blog visits	81	41,97
Increase in followers on other social media platforms	56	29,02
Increase in positive comments and sharing	40	20,73
Increased blog acknowledgements	58	30,05
Increase in further requests for collaboration	131	67,88
Other, please specify	27	13,99

Here we can also see a very interesting finding – 67,88% of bloggers indicate that the increase in further requests of collaboration is the top implication for blog performance, which again suggests bloggers are very interested in the monetary incentives and benefits brand-blogger collaborations tend to bring. In addition, increase in blog visits based on brand relationships also received a high score (41,97%), followed by an increase in blog acknowledgments (30,05%) and increase in followers on other social media platforms (29,02%). This again implies that, aside from the much-sought and expected monetary incentives, bloggers seek to gain additional visibility and credibility

in the blogosphere and beyond.

We then asked bloggers on what the preference of receiving offered some monetary incentives rather than other ones depended on (Table 9a).

Table 9a: Reasons for accepting monetary vs. non-monetary incentives (descriptives)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Increase popularity	193	1,00	5,00	3,1295	1,17651
Strengthen reputation	193	1,00	5,00	3,4870	1,07582
Strengthen competitiveness	193	1,00	5,00	3,4767	1,11371
Maintain credibility	193	1,00	5,00	4,1969	,96425
Valid N (listwise)	193				

Table 9b. Reasons for accepting monetary vs. non-monetary incentives (frequencies)

Answer choices	Frequencies					Valid percent				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Increase popularity	22	33	59	56	23	11,4	17,1	30,6	29,0	11,9
Strengthen reputation	12	20	54	76	31	6,2	10,4	28,0	39,4	16,1
Strengthen competitiveness	15	21	43	85	29	7,8	10,9	22,3	44,0	15,0
Maintain credibility	6	6	20	73	88	3,1	3,1	10,4	37,8	45,6

According to the results, the credibility issue once again emerges (45,60%) as well as the bloggers' willingness to strengthen their reputation (36,38%) and ability to compete and emerge in the blogosphere (44,04%) (see Tables 9a-b)

**Perceived impact of brand-blogger relationships on blogger credibility, reputation and independence**

Finally, the last dimension of the questionnaire aims to investigate the bloggers' assessment of brand relationships and its impact on blogger credibility, reputation and independence. According to the results even though over 47,15% of bloggers claim they are satisfied with the relationship they have with specific brands, there is still a relatively large portion of them (33,68%) not fully satisfied with brand relationships (M=3,50, SD=0,86). This might depend on the aspects previously highlighted, as well as on the approach adopted in the relationship management.

Since credibility, reputation and independence emerged as main concerns of bloggers, we also aimed to investigate the perceived impact of brand relationships on credibility, reputation and independence. According to the results the net majority of bloggers (52,01%) believe their credibility remained the same after the brand collaboration. However, a certain percentage of bloggers believe their credibility has improved (36,46%) or strongly improved (10,42%). Similar tendency occurs with respect to the bloggers' perceived impact on reputation and independence (see Tables 10a-b). This is an interesting finding since it appears most bloggers are still unsure of the brand-blogger benefits in terms of credibility (M=3,56; SD=0,69), reputation (M=3,66; SD=0,72) and independence (M=3,33; SD=0,67). While the monetary incentives can be relatively quick and

easy to measure, the effects of brand-blogger relationships on bloggers' credibility, reputation and independence take time to emerge and become visible. For that reason, a potential solution is to conduct a longitudinal study that would examine specific brand-blogger relationships in a longer period of time to assess these effects.

Table 10a. Descriptive statistics

		Satisfaction	Credibility	Reputation	Independence
N	Valid	193	192	192	192
	Missing	39	40	40	40
Mean		3,5026	3,5625	3,6667	3,3385
Std. Deviation		,86074	,69119	,72598	,67489
Variance		,741	,478	,527	,455

Table 10b. Blogger's perceived impact of brand-blogger relationships on their credibility, reputation and independence

Variable	Frequencies					Valid percent				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Satisfaction with brand-blogger relationship	5	16	65	91	16	2,6	8,3	33,7	47,2	8,3
Impact on credibility	0	2	100	70	20	0	1,0	52,1	36,5	10,4
Impact on reputation	0	3	84	79	26	0	1,6	43,8	41,1	13,5
Impact on independence	0	8	125	45	14	0	4,2	65,1	23,4	7,3

## Concluding remarks

Our findings help develop a better understanding of brand-blogger relations and the role of monetary incentives, and shed a new, even counterintuitive, light on an aspect that is most of the times overlooked or underrated. Monetary incentives play a determining role in bloggers' assessment of brand relationships, as well as in their general perspectives of brand relationships. Even though this research represents a step forward in developing an understanding of brand-blogger relations and the role of monetary incentives, there are several issues that require our attention.

These issues present certain limitations of the current study, and mostly focus on the sample and methodology used. For example, the first limitation pertains to the structure of the sample – as it does not adequately represent all relevant areas (e.g., tech blogs). Another factor relates to the demographic features of the sample. Most bloggers participating in the study are women. Some differences might have emerged in the presence of a sample better balanced according to the gender of respondents. Moreover, since the survey was conducted only in Italy, there might be a cultural bias that should be addressed in future research. Another limitation concerns the pre-test of the online questionnaire conducted among students instead of bloggers themselves, due to the lack of time and resources available. Finally, even though the response rate was relatively high, the questionnaire was administered by email, so the researchers had no way of knowing whether all questions were clear.

Future research on the topic may focus on investigating the dual perspective of brand-blogger relationships and the implications they pose for both brands and bloggers. Since marketing and PR practitioners occupy managerial positions and are often key decision-makers regarding the blogging phenomenon, their opinions about present brand-blogger relationships could be of great interest. Further research of this type could also elucidate whether the two perspectives converge or, in some cases, diverge, if not conflict.



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## Conceptualising a framework for effective government communications in a new media age

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### INTRODUCTION

While there has been an intense focus in recent years on how successfully, or unsuccessfully, political parties are employing new online tools to communicate during election campaigns, there has been very little attention paid to how effectively governments, and in particular government organizations, are engaging these tools in their daily communications with media and citizens. This lack of research interest in day to day government communications has resulted in a general scarcity of research into how well governments are performing online, and also, a general lack of theory driven research (Horsley, Liu, & Levenshus, 2010).

With no overarching theory in the field of government communications, there is consequently little consensus on what constitutes effective online government communications. Until now political communications researchers have tended to apply *inter alia* public relations theory, democratic theory and theories of the public sphere. This has often resulted in a focus on the deliberative aspects of online communication, the extent to which a new democratic public sphere has been created online. It is clear that research in this field has been driven by a normative agenda (Davis, 2010). This study argues that research which focuses solely on the deliberative aspects of government communication misunderstands how people interact online. A new theoretical approach is required that can provide a wider understanding of effectiveness in a digital age, one that better captures the complex networked nature of the online environment. Government communications must strike a balance between fulfilling its normative responsibilities

in relation to, for example, transparency, openness, and engagement, and at the same time taking a communicative approach that corresponds with how people communicate online.

This research involves a conceptualisation of a theoretical model for effective online government communications that can be applied to the analysis of communications by government organisations in different countries. The framework acknowledges that not only do government organisations face different environmental pressures compared to, for example private organisations, but these constraints vary across different countries depending on the political, media and legal system in which they operate. We have conceptualised a theoretical model of analysis for measuring effective communications that can be applied to the comparative analysis of government communications in different countries. In the case of this research project, elements of the model will be incorporated into an online content analysis of the websites and social media pages of government ministries and ministers in Germany, Great Britain and Italy.

While different fields of study have attempted to apply theories from their own fields to the analysis of government communications, we believe that in today's digital age a networked strategic communications approach presents the most suitable theoretical approach. Despite increasing evidence that a non-linear approach to communication is required, government communication continues to be characterised by top-down communications practices pushing information at citizens (L. Young & Pieterse, 2015). To date there has been little evidence of genuine attempts at interaction or connectivity on the part of governments (Gurevitch, Coleman, & Blumler, 2009). We believe that until governments begin to adopt a networked strategic communications approach, they will continue to engage in ineffective online communications. This has consequences both for relations between governments and citizens, but also between government and media.

The theoretical framework presented in this paper is a first conceptualization of a framework for effective government communications. This framework will continue to be developed further in the coming years and operationalized as part of a comparative online content analysis.

### BACKGROUND

Government communications as a field of research has in general garnered less research interest in comparison to the wider field of political communications and the study of political campaigning. According to Young "a focus on elections only obscures the real nature of political communication and the way in which it is practiced day in and day out, outside the sound and fury of periodic elections" (S. Young, 2007, p. xxiv). Graber views this oversight within political communications as particularly "puzzling" when one considers the enormous impact that public organisations have on the daily lives of every citizen (Graber, 2002, p. 7). There is a critical need to understand how public organisations – including government organisations - select, manage and communicate information, and how effectively they do this. Sanders and Canel also lament the current situation saying "the focus on election campaigns – by political actors as well as by researchers – has led to

a general neglect of routine political communication processes” (Sanders, Canel, & Holtz-Bacha, 2011, p. 4).

Communication is essential to democracy and governing, and at the heart of effective democracy is effective communication “how well governments do, however, will in part be a function of how effectively they have communicated what they do” (Sanders, 2009, p. 73). Understanding how effectively governments and elected officials use public funds to communicate with the media and the public is of critical importance. Sanders sees a clear link between the lack of trust in politics and governments who use public funds for their own political gain “For government communication to be effective, especially persuasive communication is not enough. This is the great lesson of Blair’s time in office...effective communication, then, should inspire trust and to do this it must know and listen more to its audience” (Sanders, 2009, p. 90). It is the view of this study that online communications requires more than simply listening to your audience; it demands new forms of interacting and connecting with others.

One of the characteristics of government communications is that it doesn’t fit neatly into any one field of research; it is interdisciplinary in nature. It represents a field of interest for inter alia political communications, public relations, legal studies, political science, and comparative communications researchers. Therefore, it is necessary to draw from a range of fields in order to understand current developments in online government communications. One cannot understand the development of government communications in the online sphere without looking to the wider political communications environment and other fields of study such as public relations. The interdisciplinary nature of government communications means also that any theoretical approach for effectiveness will inevitably be interdisciplinary in nature.

It is necessary to first look to the wider political communications environment in order to understand how effectively, or ineffectively, governments have been communicating until now. It is clear that the focus to date has been on political organisations, specifically how political parties, trade unions and new social movements are employing new media and technologies and how these technologies are reshaping organisations (Anstead & Chadwick, 2009; Ward & Gibson, 2009). New technologies are having less of a revolutionary effect on traditional political organisations than newer organisational forms such as protest movements (Gibson & Ward, 2009, p. 34). Chadwick (2011) examines developments in online election campaign communications as part of The Hybrid Media System. While his hybrid approach is mostly understood using examples from UK election campaigns, there is some focus given to government communicators. His findings from interviews with government communicators reveal that the underlying basis for online communications is to try and get attention in traditional offline media (Chadwick, 2011, p. 196). Governments and political organisations are taking advantage of new media opportunities simply to be seen to do so (Chadwick, 2011, p. 197). There is little evidence of any participatory logic behind their online efforts. Gurevitch, Coleman and Blumler, who similar to Chadwick, examine the integration and overlap of old and new media relationships, reveal that there are very few examples of good government practice online (Gurevitch et al., 2009). They highlight the lack of any substantial participation or debate online between politicians and citizens “politicians speak

with increasing frequency about the need for government to listen to and converse with the public, but there are very few examples of good practice” (Gurevitch et al., 2009, p. 174). In order to be taken seriously in the online sphere governments must engage in interactive and networked communication (Gurevitch et al., 2009). Unfortunately, governments to date have mostly engaged in one way mass communications (L. Young & Pieterse, 2015).

In a recent study, Hoffmann and Gusko (2015) examined whether mass media is becoming less important for German trade unions and public interest organisations (“Verbände”) as a result of social mediatisation. Instead they found that mass media is growing in importance and that this is being supported by social media. In a similar finding to Chadwick, they found that organisations are using social media channels to reach journalists quicker. Within the interviews that they conducted, participation, discussion and mobilisation were cited as the underlying basis for their online presences. However, the content analysis of their social media profiles showed that top-down communication dominated and they presented little opportunities for interaction (Hoffmann & Gusko, 2015, pp. 106-107). These results support Chadwick’s findings that new media tools are often nothing more than an add-on.

### **Theoretical approaches to government communications**

As mentioned in the introduction, government communications suffers from a general lack of agreement on a suitable theoretical approach for the field (Horsley et al., 2010). Without an overarching theory or an agreed theoretical approach, there will continue to be little understanding of what constitutes effective government communications. Research to date could be criticised for failing to consider a number of integral aspects of effective online communications and interaction, for example, the importance of connectivity (i.e., networking), and also understanding users as active participants in shaping messages as opposed to simply receivers of messages.

The theoretical approach to the study of online government communications has until now often taken one of the following two approaches: the application of public relations theory (for example, Jackson & Lilleker, 2004) or deliberative democratic theory (for example, S. Coleman & Blumler, 2009). These approaches allow for the analysis of a number of aspects of online government communications, such as, the extent to which conversations between politicians and citizens are two-way symmetrical (PR theory), or the extent to which citizens are afforded the opportunity to deliberate on public policy matters. However, for the purposes of this study, these theoretical approaches to interactivity and participation provide too narrow an understanding of interactivity in today’s online sphere. This study believes that a network logic must be at the heart of effectiveness.

Sanders and Canel, who examine the professionalisation of government communications structures at the executive level of government, adopt a strategic communications approach. While their approach provides a valuable theoretical starting point for this study, there seems to be a presumption that a management approach to strategic communications will in itself result in effective communications. They say that “strategic communication can be characterised as a

driver towards more effective communication. Typically it is coordinated and planned at senior management level” (Sanders & Canel, 2013, p. 279). They view professionalisation and strategic communications as interchangeable concepts; and they also presume that professionalisation will result in more effective government communications. While strategic communications provides a valuable approach for the analysis of government communications, we believe that it must also be understood in terms of strategic practices and tactics, and not limited to the structural level in an organisation.

In a defining article on strategic communications, Hallahan et al write that “strategic communication focuses on how the organisation itself presents and promotes itself through the intentional activities of its leaders, employees, and communication practitioners. Of course, this does not exclude their use of relationship building or networks in the strategic process” (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Vercic, & Sriramesh, 2007, p. 7). The value of a strategic communications approach is that it allows for the examination of organisational communication from an interdisciplinary perspective, and therefore provides a more holistic view of communications. In a recent overview of developments within the field since Hallahan et al’s landmark article, Holtzhausen and Zerfass write that “the notion that communication can be controlled and regulated is now largely redundant. In fact, one of the most important emerging perspectives in strategic communication is the rejection of linearity in the communication process” (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014, p. 7). They speak about the increasing influence of the constitutive model of communication and the need to consider how meaning is shaped, interpreted and recreated in the interaction process (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014, pp. 8-9).

An increasing number of scholars are adopting a networked perspective, and updating traditional communication theories to take account of this emerging network logic. This network perspective stems from theories of social capital, which views social capital as existing “in the relations among persons” (J. S. Coleman, 1988, p. 101). The increasing adoption of a network perspective within these fields stems from a recognition that traditional public relations theory, which focused on dyadic relationships, is no longer relevant in an online sphere. Yang and Taylor (2015) recently incorporated a network perspective into public relations theory. They argue that the traditional dyadic approach to relationships is no longer relevant and fails to capture the complexities of relationships within the online world. They say that a network perspective is needed within strategic communications that “views all organizations as networks embedded in other networks” (Yang & Taylor, 2015, p. 100). According to this networked approach to strategic communications, organisations can strategically manage where they are located within networks (Yang & Taylor, 2015).

While Yang and Taylor focus on organisational communications, Young and Pieterse focus specifically on government communications. They say that governments can better manage how information is distributed in today’s society by focusing on how information flows within networks. They argue that due to revolutions in information technology, information is no longer distributed in a linear fashion, instead it is distributed through non-linear networks (L. Young & Pieterse, 2015). They believe that governments must “harness the power of network flows

in order to engage in more effective communication with citizens”, and to avoid exacerbating ineffectiveness (L. Young & Pieterse, 2015, pp. 93-94). They propose a network communication framework for the practice of strategic communication by government organisations. Elements of this framework will be elaborated on in the next section.

In his research on political participation on social media platforms in Sweden, Svensson writes that it is important to focus not just on the interactive elements of social media, but also on the networking functions (Svensson, 2015). In a previous paper with Klinger, he wrote about the rise of network media logic alongside mass media logic. According to this network logic, social media platforms follow different “rules of the game” to offline traditional media, in relation to content production, information distribution and media use (Klinger & Svensson, 2014, p. 11). Knowing how to network is at the core of this new media logic. He writes “An important consequence of network media logic is that political communication on social media platforms cannot be directed at mass audiences since there are no mass audiences. Therefore, being connected to many others is important, because it signals popularity” (Klinger & Svensson, 2014, pp. 12-13). Similarly, Van Dijck and Poell in their examination of social media logic list connectivity and popularity as two key elements in this logic (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

The whole basis for online communication (in particular within social network sites) is to be connected to others, not to simply broadcast information. However, it appears that communications scholars writing about the online communications efforts of politicians and governments have also missed this point until now. There has been an assumption that “good” online communications must show evidence of dialogue or public deliberation. While this is just one important aspect of online government communications, it fails to understand the networked logic of communications in a new media age and the importance of connectivity, non-linear communication, and the role of users as both recipients, producers and distributors of information. New approaches to established communications theories, such as networked strategic communications, are required in order to develop a better understanding of effective communications in an online age.

### Theoretical models of analysis

This research seeks to establish a theoretically grounded framework of analysis for measuring the effectiveness of online communications by government organisations. An important aspect of this framework is that it can be applied to the comparative analysis of government communications across different countries. While no such framework currently exists, there are a number of theoretical frameworks in the fields of government communications, comparative communications and international public relations that can provide important contributions to the proposed comparative framework. According to Ward and Gibson “one of the weaknesses of internet studies is a failure to link research to existing literatures or place it within current political and social contexts” (Gibson & Ward, 2009, p. 37). Svensson – in reference to (van Dijck, 2006) – highlights the non-neutrality of social media “the media we use and the society we live in cannot

be studied apart" (Svensson, 2015, p. 348). This research seeks not only to create a networked strategic communications framework of analysis, but to also create a framework that can be applied across different countries by taking account of differences in the political system, the media system, legislation governing government communications, and public expectations of government communications. The following section first lists a number of frameworks that are of particular relevance for this study.

The first framework that merits attention is Hallin and Mancini's "Three Models of Media and Politics" in the field of comparative communications; a landmark study analysing the media systems of 18 different western countries (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Their framework adopts a most similar design and organises each country into three different clusters according to similarities in the development of their media systems. Their framework has provided a valuable tool for communications scholars in the selection of countries for use in comparative studies, allowing for a most different design or most similar design approach. It also provides the basis for the selection of countries for this study which have been selected as a most different design – Germany (Democratic corporatist), Great Britain (Liberal model), and Italy (Mediterranean). It provides an insight into how the political system has shaped the media systems within the three countries at the centre of this study. While it is clear that this model requires updating, in particular in relation to the development of digital media, there are a number of macro-level elements that are necessary to understanding effectiveness in online communications across different countries, in particular, in relation to the role of the State in the media, the level of political parallelism, and the type of political system.

In the area of government communications, Sanders et al have created a framework for analysing the professionalisation of central government communications. They applied their framework to a number of different countries, including Germany and Great Britain (Sanders & Canel, 2013; Sanders et al., 2011). The authors understand professionalisation as the development of clear rules that clearly demarcate government communications from party political communications (Sanders et al., 2011). While this model focuses on professionalisation at the structural level, for example, where government communications is rooted within an organisation and the formal rules governing communications practices, it still provides an important element (or level of analysis) for inclusion in a framework for effective government communications. Most importantly they position their analysis "within a political communication system framework where actors and structures are related to each other and their environment" (Sanders & Canel, 2013, p. 227). An aspect which the authors admit is lacking in their research is the analysis of how effective government communications is in practice. We believe it is therefore important to consider effectiveness at two levels within an organisation, both at the management level and also in terms of communication practices.

Another important framework within the field of government communications is Horsley et al's "Government Communication Decision Wheel" framework (Liu & Horsley, 2007), and their expanded framework (Horsley et al., 2010). While their theoretical framework is only suitable for analysing government communications in the United States, their framework represents

a significant advance for the field, as it explicitly identifies the differences between public and private sector communications. They criticise previous theoretical approaches to government communications, which approached government communications purely from a corporate centric perspective. Some of the key differences – and which are important for this study – include: intense media scrutiny, legal constraints, weight of politics, goal of public good, devaluation of communication by management, and lack of professional development (Horsley et al., 2010). Their findings reinforce the need to understand communications by government organisations within the unique highly politicised environment in which they operate. In particular, their reference to legal constraints and the goal of public good are particularly important for understanding effectiveness in government communications.

Liu and Horsley strongly criticise the fact that the field of public relations tends to adopt a corporate perspective that takes little account of the wider political environment; however, this is not true for international public relations. For example, Sriramesh and Vercic (2002) created a comparative framework for analysing and understanding public relations practices in different countries. They insist that a country's public relations practice must be understood through the prism of its political system. The authors created a three-factor framework that links together environmental variables and public relations practice (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2002, p. 105). The three factors include: a country's infrastructure (e.g., political system, legal system, level of activism, and economic development), media environment (e.g., media relations, media control) and societal culture. They also highlight that the study of public relations practice cannot avoid the relationship of PR practitioners to the media, and this is equally so when one examines online government communications.

Young and Pieterse seek to correct what they refer to as "the misalignment between the communication realities of citizens and the practices of government communicators" by creating a networked strategic communication framework for the practice of government communications (L. Young & Pieterse, 2015, p. 94). While their framework is particularly suitable for applying to a local government campaign that utilises both offline and online communication channels, some of the principles of this framework can be incorporated into this study. They say that it is important that governments view and understand the multi-dimensionality of online audiences, that they are viewed as both information receivers as well as producers. They also emphasise the importance of understanding and capitalising on the preferences embedded in people's online presences and interpersonal networks (L. Young & Pieterse, 2015, pp. 108-109). Another useful framework is that by Raupp, who conceptualised a theoretical framework for strategic organizational communication in a networked public sphere (Raupp, 2011). This model once again highlights the importance of new approaches to traditional perspectives, and the relevance of a networked approach in the study of organizational communication in the digital age.

A final important theoretical contribution for this framework of analysis stems from a public relations approach to the theory of organisations. In order to create a framework of analysis that can be applied to government organisations, it is necessary to also include an organisational understanding of public relations. In trying to understand public relations from an organisational

theory perspective, Szyszka identifies three different levels of analysis. Firstly, he sees public relations as a network composed of the relations between an organisation and its environment; secondly, public relations management as an organisational management function, and finally, public relations operations as specific activities (Szyszka, 2008, p. 97). He creates a general public relations model that includes three levels of analysis. While he specifically looks at public relations as opposed to strategic communications, we believe that this concept is also applicable to a strategic communications framework.

### Conceptualising a framework of analysis

This is the first conceptualisation of a model for effective online government communications that will be developed further in the coming years. The model is interdisciplinary in its design and draws from public relations, strategic communications, theories of social capital (networked approach), comparative communications and government communications. The central premise of this framework is to illustrate how government organisations can become more effective in communicating online, while at the same time acknowledging that these organisations operate within an environment that is influenced – to different degrees – by the political, the media system, laws directly impacting government communications and the public’s expectation of government communications.

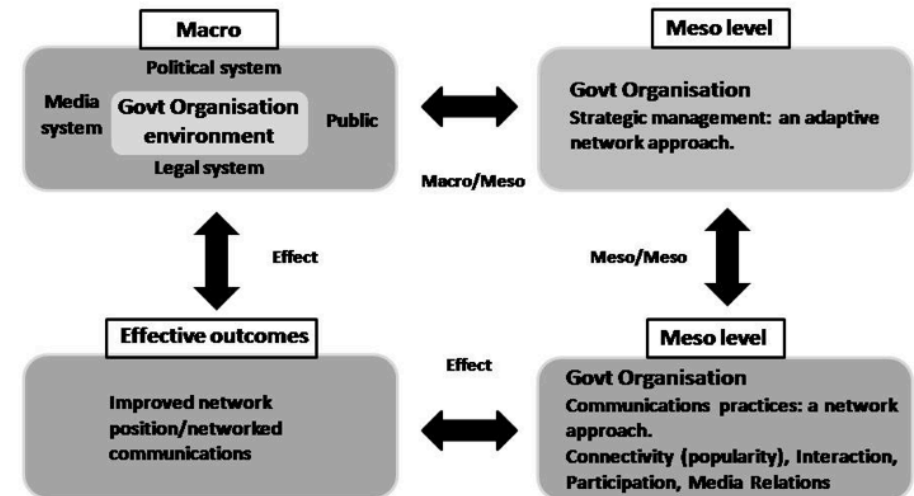


Figure 1: A conceptual model for effective online government communications

It is the view of this study that a conceptual model of effectiveness must include a number of levels of analysis. This includes a macro level of analysis and two levels of analysis at the meso (organisation) level. The elements at the macro level draw from previous theoretical frameworks and theoretical contributions that have already been outlined in this paper. The macro level takes account of the impact of the media system, the political system, the legal/regulatory environment and also public expectations of government communications in different countries. At the organisational level, both the management approach to communications and also the communications practices of government organisations are considered. A networked strategic communications perspective is incorporated into these two levels.

According to Farwell, within politics effective strategic communication is that which is flexible and able to respond to unforeseen political events or to evolving situations, “Evolving challenges that may not have existed or been apparent when the elements of a strategy are first conceived may require reframing or readjusting strategy...What may seem to work in theory may prove implausible in practice” (Farwell, 2012, p. 154). While the author is specifically referring to matters of national security in the United States, it remains a valid point also for daily strategic communications. Farwell suggests that when designing strategy, government communication strategies should take the approach that there is no end point, strategy must be ongoing, “Nothing

in politics is static. It flows, changes, and evolves constantly” (Farwell, 2012, p. 224). In addition, Yang and Taylor, who create a conceptual model of a network approach to organisation-public relationships, highlight that a conceptual model must present network strategies and outcomes as constantly evolving (Yang & Taylor, 2015, p. 106). The framework presented in figure 1 attempts to demonstrate effective government communications as an evolving process.

Following this idea that the strategic process should be flexible and non-linear, this framework seeks to demonstrate that each element influences the other. There is no one direction. It is not the case, for example, that the macro level first affects the management level within an organisation, and that the management level then impacts the communications practices resulting in particular outcomes. It does not follow such a linear process. The macro level impacts all stages. But equally communications management and practice affect the wider environment in which they operate. According to Hallahan et al “Focusing on practice brings a much-needed critical approach to the field of strategic communication. From this perspective, the notion of practice as part of the strategic process that influences society and in turn is influenced by society allows scholars, rather than studying communication practice as an organizational function, to study how communication practices transform both organizations and societies” (Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 14).

## SUMMARY & DISCUSSION

This paper is a first attempt at conceptualising a theoretical framework for effective communications in today’s digital age. While many different theories have been applied to the study of government communications, they often only provide an understanding of one particular aspect of communications. According to Holtzhausen and Zerfass “The notion that communication can be controlled and regulated is now largely redundant. In fact, one of the most important emerging perspectives in strategic communication is the rejection of linearity in the communication process” (2014, p. 7). Therefore, we have sought to establish a wider understanding of effectiveness that takes connectivity and non-linear communication as the starting point for the strategic planning and practice of online communications. This applies as much to government citizen relations, as to government media relations. Additionally, the framework also seeks to understand effectiveness within the political and media systems in which government communications takes place so as to enable the analysis of government communications across different countries. This paper has outlined why we believe a networked strategic communications approach represents the most suitable theoretical approach going forward.

However, the development of a theoretical framework for effective online government communications presents a number of tensions within the field. While this paper argues that a new theoretical evaluative framework is needed for the analysis of government communications in an online age, it is clear that the normative basis of government communications cannot be

overlooked. Government communications must strike a balance between fulfilling its normative democratic responsibilities, while at the same time adapting to the new environment and to the new realities of how people communicate and connect online. There is also a contradiction within the network approach, which needs to be addressed. Many theorists of the network perspective suggest that organisations can actively manage their positions within network and therefore control the flow of information. However, on the other side, the network approach seems to suggest that communication can no longer be controlled within this complex online networked sphere. Future research must address both of these tensions.

The conceptual model presented in this paper identifies some of the key elements for analysing the online communications of government organisations, in particular, different elements at both the macro and meso level. This model does not purport to be a final model, but an initial attempt at incorporating a networked strategic communications approach. Future research must elaborate on each of the elements within the model. We must also consider how the non-linear networked nature of online government communications can be better represented within the model. A future model must also consider the influence of organisational culture as an important element in understanding why certain government organisations are effective and others aren’t. We must also consider how the various elements of this framework can be operationalised and applied to the empirical analysis of online content in different countries.

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## 12

## The impact of social media activism on elite newspaper outlets: Lessons for public diplomacy

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### 1. Introduction

In addition to the military war on terrorism fought by the U.S., the government is currently engaging in soft power or public diplomacy efforts with the aim to present various publics across the world with the American and Western realities and values (van Ham, 2003). Presenting the American reality abroad may help fight terrorism by preventing the indoctrination and aggressive recruitment of terrorists (van Ham, 2003) by the Al Qaeda and Isis.

Past research studies (Cull, 2011; Zaharna, 2001) indicate that, to date, the U.S. public diplomacy efforts involve a one-way communication style, and recommend that the U.S. engage in intercultural communication and tailor messages cross-culturally so as “to reflect the cultural sensitivities of foreign (usually Muslim) publics” (Cull, 2011, p. 4). Yet, there is currently a gap in the public diplomacy literature with regard to how the U.S. and its allies can foster dialog with publics of various cultures about the Western cultural, political and economic values.

The current study builds on public diplomacy research to propose additional communication strategies that the U.S. government and its allies can use in their attempt to globally address the terrorism threat. The authors contend that the current U.S. public diplomacy efforts can be informed cross-culturally by the communication strategies enacted by the #JeSuisAhmed social movement

in the aftermath of the January 2015 terrorist attacks at the Charlie Hebdo offices in Paris.

The 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, which left 12 people dead at the offices of the Charlie Hebdo magazine, spurred extensive discussion around the failure of the French Intelligence to prevent the terrorist attack as well as the ever increasing (self) recruitment of terrorists within Western countries. Above all, the attacks engendered discussion around freedom of speech and social media users expressed their solidarity with France under the well-known #JeSuisCharlie hashtag (I am Charlie). Further, an additional social movement ensued under the hashtag #JeSuisAhmed, and made reference to the death of Ahmed Merabet, a 40 year-old Muslim French police officer shot dead by the terrorists while protecting the freedom of the magazine that had actually ridiculed his religion.

In this study, the authors argue that the effects of the social movement #JeSuisAhmed, which set the media agenda and, as a result, influenced the public opinion (Curtin, 1999) can be further used for public diplomacy efforts since the movement was generated and promoted by regular people and the very purpose of public diplomacy is to address the general public. Hence, the analysis of this form of social movement is important because the latter's core values have the potential to trigger dialogue when employed within the realm of public diplomacy.

This study employed the grounded theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to analyze the #JeSuisAhmed Facebook group which was created on January 9th 2015 and comprised over 3,800 members. The analysis determined the main and recurrent themes that emerged within the activists' online discourse from January 9th until January 31st 2015. It was considered that this period of analysis was sufficient based on the agenda setting theory (McCombs, 2004; Weaver, 1977) and the effects of news relevancy. Second, the study enacted the grounded theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to analyze the media coverage of the #JeSuisAhmed movement in the U.S. and its allied countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Israel, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrein and Jordan. A total of 39 newspaper articles were collected and analyzed in their original language (Hebrew, Arabic, French, German and English) between January 9th, the start of the #JeSuisAhmed movement, and January 31st, 2015 when the media coverage of the #JeSuisAhmed movement ceased. Finally, the analysis involved a comparison between the activist groups' social media use and the media coverage and ascertained the agenda building effects.

### 2. Literature review

#### 2.1 Activism and social media

During its initial stages, the public relations field was immersed in a journalistic approach both from a theoretical and a practical perspective. Specifically, the main concern of public relations practitioners was to create publicity through the execution of one-way models of communication (Avidar, 2011). However, today, the realm of public relations has evolved to encompass lobbying, investor relations, employee communications, and crisis management, among others. Many practitioners view public relations as one of the main elements of the marketing mix that, along with advertising, marketing

and direct sales, allows an organization to achieve its goals at a relatively low cost (Avidar, 2011). Academically, public relations is a relatively new field that started to generate identifiable theories around three decades ago and is today recognized as an area of applied communication (Avidar, 2011).

While in the past, public relations depended solely on mass media to spread its messages to the general public, the Internet opened new opportunities for a direct, two-way communication flow between organizations and their stakeholders (Avidar, 2011). The latter's power to interact with organizations online added to traditional offline communications an element that was "faster, cheaper, more direct and uncensored" (Avidar, 2011, 403). Furthermore, as a result of its dialogical structure, this new means of communication enabled the emergence of online relationship building (Avidar, 2011). When organizational websites, e-mail addresses, online surveys first emerged, they allowed for two-way communication but did not permit the public to generate content to a Web page. However, at a later stage, the advent of the Web 2.0 brought about new dialogical features that allowed a company's stakeholders to actively participate and contribute content online. Blogs, social networks, virtual social worlds and wikis represent a few examples of online platforms whose dialogical elements enable users to co-create content and collaborate online (Avidar, 2011). Above all, the Web 2.0 changed the media landscape in that, in the West, it replaced the once monopolized government-affiliated newspapers and politically associated magazines with social media platforms that can be accessed for information freely and at a relatively low cost (Ghannam, 2011). Social networking sites inform the public, mobilize the masses, entertain audiences, create communities, increase government transparency and seek to hold organizations accountable (Ghannam, 2011, p.4). In addition, recently, social media sites became important tools for the mobilization of community action and for ensuing establishment, organization and application of social movements around the world (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). The development and popularization of social media led to opportunities for Web-based social movements, also known as cyberactivism, to change how group action is undertaken. Social media have been used particularly in staging collective actions, fostering a sense of community and collective identity among sidelined group members, establishing more open and transparent political spaces, and promoting causes to gain support from wider communities (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011).

Notable activism movements based on social media comprise antiwar and anti-globalization actions. For example, during the Iraqi antiwar movement, activists used the Internet to communicate, plan rallies schedule collective actions and raise awareness, thus leading to worldwide protests that brought together about 10 million activists in hundreds of cities (Cortright, 2007). Further, in addition to providing support for political and social movements, social media also play a new influential role. Specifically, social networks allow individuals with limited financial resources and power to efficiently promote their message to larger audiences (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). For instance, Muslim feminist activists in Middle Eastern countries used social media in the past and established an online community of activist whose purpose was to promote women's initiatives (Moghadam, 2000). Finally, social media played a momentous role in the toppling of Arab regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and the social unrest that followed in various Arab countries, such

as Lebanon, Yemen and Jordan (Ghannam, 2011). The blocking of Facebook and Twitter by the Egyptian and Tunisian governments for several weeks demonstrated the importance these social mediums played in orchestrating these protests (Ghannam, 2011).

Social media have been arguably changing the nature of news and engagement, which continues to evolve with increased convergence between social media and traditional news sources (Ghannam, 2011).

## 2.2 Media effects

Research on media effects was influenced predominantly by two approaches: the agenda setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, 2004; Weaver, 1977) and the framing theory (de Vresse & Boogaarde, 2003; de Vresse, 2005; Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1992). The agenda setting theory, known as the Chapel Hill study (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, 2004; Weaver, 1977) contends that media select to cover specific events over others. Specifically, because space in newspapers and on TV is limited, the journalists can only choose certain issues and events based on the latter's impact and importance for the readers and viewers. Therefore, it becomes paramount for public relations practitioners to understand how to set the media's agenda and what kind of events journalists are more likely to cover. Several studies in the past explored the agenda setting theory in the context of public relations (Kiouisis, Mitrook, Wu, & Selzer, 2006; Kiouisis & Stroembaeck, 2010). Undoubtedly, public relations practitioners should set the media's agenda while adhering to ethical guidelines. The current study looked into the #JeSuisAhmed campaign and ascertained the extent to which it managed to set the media's agenda. An understanding of the impact of this online social movement on news coverage can prove beneficial to the practitioners and theorists of public diplomacy. Furthermore, the study enacted the framing theory, discussed next, in order to determine what specific frames within the campaign managed to set the media's agenda.

Past studies that employed the framing theory revealed the fact that frames the communication of a piece of information or a frame exerts influence upon the human consciousness from one location such as a speech, utterance, news, report- to that of consciousness (Entman, 1993, p.56). For the purpose of the study, framing was defined according to Entman (1993, p.52), who contended that "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described." Further, for Gamson (1992) frames diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe but they also define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest solutions.

Entman (1993, p.55) argued that frames have four locations in the communication process: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture. Guided by frames or schemata that organize their system of beliefs, communicators make framing judgments either consciously or unconsciously. The text they communicate consists of frames that could be manifested by certain key words, phrases, or stereotyped images that may reinforce clusters of facts into the reader's mind, influencing his or her perspective upon a certain issue, fact, or event. An important element

taken into consideration for this study is culture. The term was defined by Entman (1993, 52) as “the stock of commonly invoked frames” as well as the “empirically demonstrable set of common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping.” Framing, as manifest in the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture is characterized by the selection or highlighting of certain aspects over others with the purpose of describing and evaluating an issue and/or proposing a solution. Culturally familiar images or symbols, as well as the way in which information is placed or repeated lead to the salience of certain aspects that could exert strong influence upon an audience.

deVresse (2005) considered that there is a clear distinction between two types of media frames: issue-specific (the frames of an event) and generic frames (identifiable across several events or issues). In addition, frames were classified by Williams and Kaid (2003) as substantive (frames that provide detailed information) and ambiguous (frames that offer a general perspective upon an issue) and Iyengar (1991) distinguished between episodic and thematic frames as explained next. The episodic frames refer to a coverage of an event or issue which is reported as specific or particular, whereas the thematic coverage places the event into a somewhat general context. Further, five news frames were identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2004) and referred to as the conflict frame (describes the conflict between individuals and institutions so as to attract the attention of the audience), human interest frame (inserts emotion in covering an event), economic consequences frame (an event is covered from an economic perspective presenting the consequences that the former will have on the audience), morality frame (discusses the moral tenets of an event), and the responsibility frame (presents the event in such a way that responsibility for its occurrence is bestowed upon an individual or institution). Later research introduced the concept of metaframing (Constantinescu & Tedesco, 2007) which refers to the way in which journalists cite other media coverage in their articles.

These aforementioned generic frames are related to general conventions of journalism and are present in the investigation of varied topics (de Vreese, 2005). For example, a cross-national analysis of the news frames in three European countries revealed emphasis on the generic and universal nature of the conflict and economic consequences frames (de Vreese, 2005). Moreover, news organizations provide an important “spin” to the framing of news. This either local or national “spin” relates the generic resonance of the frames to a more particular focus (de Vreese, 2005). The wide use of frames in varied political and journalistic cultures highlights their nature of these frames and make cross-national comparisons more salient. Specifically, past research showed that the frames of conflict and economic consequences had a higher presence in the coverage of political and economic events and, in turn, exerted influence on the audience’s thoughts on the issues covered (de Vreese, 2005). Additionally, studies showed that news frames with an intrinsic direction, namely those that clearly highlight the positive or negative aspects of issues, can significantly influence the audience support for them (de Vreese & Boogaarden, 2003). Therefore, it becomes paramount to understand the nature of the frames used in the news, as frames are the precursors of the public’s understanding and analysis of current news affairs (de Vreese, 2005).

Based on the aforementioned literature review this study asked: (1) What the dominant

frames were in the social media activism as this appeared in the Je Suis Ahmed Facebook group and (2) what the dominant frames were in the coverage of the Je Suis Ahmed campaign as this appeared in the media in the US and US- allied countries.

### 2.3 Public diplomacy and war against terrorism

The 9/11 tragedy was not just an attack on US military competences, but also an attack on the American identity. Americans were shocked to have to face such blatant hatred of their country and everything it stood for (van Ham, 2003). The US answer to these attacks via military force on the one hand, namely the anti terror campaign in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq, and via public diplomacy efforts (van Ham, 2003) on the other hand. Public diplomacy in general and that of the US in particular aims to portray the cultural values, goals and intentions of a country to the rest of the world and through different means and channels. Public diplomacy efforts are a testimony to the change in the field of international relations and the transition in communicating with publics. While in the past, communication used to be restricted to accredited ambassadors, today it involves a variety of message senders and can involve representatives from the private sector, media, the civil society and/or religious communities. All of the aforementioned representatives address the publics of a different country directly, thus circumventing the traditional diplomatic affairs and, in turn, can exert influence on the publics’ perceptions of their country, its culture and its political and economic systems (Khanna, 2003; van Ham, 2003).

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the American public diplomacy efforts were focused on attempts to present the American reality to citizens of Muslim countries so as to prevent the latter’s exposure to radical Islam which would distort the US values and may lead to the recruitment of young terrorists (van Ham, 2003, 428). According to the US government, negative images should be neutralized, and eventually changed, in order to prevent the indoctrination of young Muslims by Al Qaeda (van Ham, 2003) and more recently, Isis. Therefore, the United States is not only leading a war on terrorism in a traditional, military way, but is also immersed in efforts to win the moral support and political backing of the Muslim world (van Ham, 2003).

US public diplomacy does not see Islam as a convincing or even viable political program proposing an alternative to Western modernity. For US public diplomacy, Islamic culture and Muslim society are considered compatible with Western values and institutions (van Ham, 2003). President Bush has continually argued that the USA is fighting a war against “evil”, not against Islam. US public diplomacy appears to believe that the Muslim population naturally accepts all basic constituents of modernity and that all Muslims have an instinctive but repressed desire to support Western values of liberal democracy and capitalism (van Ham, 2003). American public diplomacy further implies that although ordinary Muslims may be opposed to current US strategies in Middle Eastern countries, they continue to be attracted to “American values” of individual choice and freedom (van Ham, 2003). However, some research outcomes indicate that parts of the Muslim world deeply opposes many of the core “American values” and although the two cultures share some of the same values, they also each set different priorities (van Ham, 2003).

Another main principle of USA's public diplomacy is the differentiation between antagonistic, extremist Islamic governments and groups on one hand and the "silent majority" of a bigger global Muslim community on the other. According to this principle, Arabs ruled by unelected leaders are Americans' true allies, with both people sharing a want for freedom and democracy and facing common enemies, specifically the dictatorial regimes (van Ham, 2003). However, several opinion polls show that the majority of Muslims do not adhere to "American values" and they regularly blame the USA for many of their misfortunes (Rubin & Rubin, 2002; Murachvik, 2002, 2003). Therefore, one of the main criticisms of US public diplomacy is its failure to recognize fundamental differences between Americans and Muslims (particularly Arabs) (van Ham, 2003).

Another criticism of US public diplomacy concerns its communications style. In order to be successful, public diplomacy needs to pinpoint target audiences in each country and tailor strategies and tools to reach those audiences in a variety of different ways (van Ham, 2003). Differences in language and cultural subtleties obstruct the efficacy of generic, uniform public diplomacy efforts, and specialized knowledge is primordial to develop a more thorough understanding of audiences in the Muslim world (van Ham, 2003). Furthermore, US public diplomacy has so far relied on a one-way communications style (van Hamm, 2003). The US government has used the wave of patriotism following the 9/11 attacks to force through its international agenda, starting with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and constant pressures for "regime change" in the Middle East. It has used "9/11" to overshadow the political conversation and to restraint potential critics within the United States and abroad. The temptation has been strong for the US government to use public diplomacy as a "soft power" tool to control and dominate the political discourse, both at home and abroad.

Furthermore, past research studies (Cull, 2011; Zaharna, 2001) indicate that, to date, the US public diplomacy efforts involve a one-way communications style, and recommend that the U.S. engage in intercultural communication and tailor its messages cross-culturally so as "to reflect the cultural sensitivities of foreign (usually Muslim) publics" (Cull, 2011, p. 4). Yet, there is currently a gap in the public diplomacy literature with regard to how the U.S. and its allies can foster dialog with publics of various cultures about the Western political and economic values. The current study builds on public diplomacy research to propose additional communication strategies that the U.S. government and its allies can use in their attempt to globally address the terrorism threat. We contend that the current U.S. public diplomacy efforts can be informed cross-culturally by the communication strategies enacted by the #JeSuisAhmed social movement in the aftermath of the January 2015 terrorist attacks at the Charlie Hebdo offices in Paris.

In this study, we argue that the effects of the social movement #JeSuisAhmed, which set the media agenda and, as a result, influenced the public opinion (Curtin, 1999) can be further used for public diplomacy efforts since the movement was generated and promoted by regular people and the very purpose of public diplomacy is to address the general public.

The present study used the aforementioned literature on public diplomacy and counter terrorism so as to provide further practical guidelines based on the research findings.

### 3. Methods

The current study employed a thematic analysis to determine the presence of the frames described previously under the literature review, namely: issue specific vs. generic frames (de Vresse, 2005), substantive vs. ambiguous frames (Williams & Kaid, 2003) and episodic vs. thematic frames (Iyengar, 1991). In addition, the coding process aimed to ascertain the presence of additional frames, more precisely those developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2004): the conflict frame, the human interest frame, economic consequences, morality, responsibility as well as metaframing (Constantinescu & Tedesco, 2007).

Based on the methodology required for conducting a thematic analysis, first the patterns for a coding book were derived from the literature on framing (Aronson, 1992, as cited in Aronson, 1995) and adapted to the present study. These patterns consisted of text as well as implied meanings, feelings and topics as these emerged within the text (Aronson, 1995). Second, the data were analyzed for the purpose of identifying categories that fell under each specific pattern. Finally, the last stage of the analysis included combing the patterns into sub-themes. Each theme represented a unit that was derived from the initial patterns (Aronson, 1995). The purpose of a thematic analysis is to make inferences based on the emergent themes that, if analyzed on their own, would not render a meaningful and comprehension description of the phenomenon studied (Leininger, 1985, as cited in Aronson, 1995). Only taken collectively, are themes building valid arguments (Aronson, 1995). Finally, because the interpretation of the themes relies heavily on the researchers' various perspectives and, hence, intercoder reliability is not a requirement, it behooves researchers to rigorously determine "the coherence of ideas" as well as how those "fit together in a meaningful way" (Leininger, 1985, p.60, as cited in Aronson, 1995).

Since the purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which social media activism set the media's agenda, the data were collected from both new and traditional media outlets, as discussed in the next paragraphs.

First, to assess social media activism, the authors used the Je Suis Ahmed Facebook group which was created on January 9, 2015 and comprised over 3,800 members at the time of the analysis. The sample of analysis consisted of the posts (N=37) that appeared between January 9 and January 31, 2015. It was considered that the selected period of analysis was sufficient based on the agenda setting theory (McCombs, 2004; Weaver, 1977) and the effects of news relevancy. Second, to analyze the cross-cultural agenda setting effect of the aforementioned Facebook group, we used the same period of analysis, namely January 9- January 31, 2015 and collected the news articles that appeared in elite outlets in the U.S. and its allied countries as follows: United States (The New York Times, N= 7), United Kingdom (The Guardian, N=6), France (Le Monde, N=10), Germany (Frankfurter Allgemeine, N=4), Israel (Haaretz, N=), the UAE (The National, N=2), Kuwait (Al Kuwaitiyah, N=2) and Saudi Arabia (Saudi Gazette, N=1, Al Sharq Al Awsat, N=1). Because the newspaper coverage in the Arab countries was scarce, the researchers analyzed the Arab media collectively.

The decision to collect the sample from solely elite newspapers was made based on past empirical studies on intermedia agenda setting according to which, elite newspapers themselves

set the agenda for the general coverage (Lim, 2011). Therefore, it was considered that, as long as the JeSuisAhmed campaign exerted influence on elite newspaper outlets, the campaign would be present in the general coverage of other media outlets as shown in past research studies (Lim, 2011). A total sample of 32 newspaper articles were collected and analyzed in their original language (Hebrew, French, German and English). The only exception to this were the articles that appeared in the Arab newspapers. They were published in English and did not require further translation.

## 4. Results/ Discussion

### 4.1 Social media

The analysis of the Je Suis Ahmed Facebook group took into account 37 posts as explained in the methods section and revealed the emergence of 120 frames. The next paragraphs provide details about the frequency of the frames as well as the themes in which they emerged.

The most employed frame was that of ambiguity (15.9%) and appeared in themes that made reference to Ahmed’s death as not having been in vain. Further, Muslim proverbs and sayings were also coded under ambiguous frames as they transcended the discourse toward the abstract. For example, one post noted that “kindness [was] a mark of faith and whoever [was] not kind, [had] no faith.”

The next most employed frame was that of responsibility (14.2%) and was present in themes that discussed the fact that Ahmed Merabet died defending the freedom of speech, the value of the country that welcomed him as an immigrant. For example, posts quoted Ahmed’s brother saying that the latter loved his job as a police officer and was proud to serve and protect France’s values.

Next, both the frame of human interest and the substantive frame appeared in a high proportion, namely in 10.8% of the posts. As expected, the human interest frame was highly enacted so as to put a human face to the heroic act of defending the freedom of speech. Not surprisingly, the substantive frames were employed to a great extent as well because they aimed to provide the online users with detailed accounts of the event. For example, posts quoted the short exchange between the terrorists and Ahmed, moments before the former shot him dead. Several posts focused solely on depicting Ahmed’s death and its symbolism. Hence, they were coded as issue-specific (10%). Their presence was higher than that of the generic frames (9.17%) which mentioned several similar events and made reference to Ahmed’s death across additional issues related to the Charlie Hebdo attacks. Further, several posts focused on morality (9.2%) and their conveyed meaning revolved around Voltaire’s famous words “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to death your right to say it,” implying that, for Ahmed Merabet, the value of the freedom of speech prevailed over his own beliefs.

The posts that placed Ahmed Merabet’s death directly or indirectly within the context of the Charlie Hebdo’s attacks and their repercussions were coded as episodic (8.3%). For example, one post connected Ahmed’s death to other heroic acts performed by Muslim immigrants in

France during or in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. One such example was that of Lassana Bathily, a shop assistant who managed to save the lives of his Jewish customers in a kosher restaurant in Paris where the terrorists involved in the Charlie Hebdo deaths had taken hostages. The post mentioned that, Lassana Bathily was granted the French citizenship as a result of his gesture. Additionally, other episodic frames made reference to marches for the freedom of speech that were taking place in Paris such as the “Unity March” and related Ahmed’s death to the need to continue to defend the right to freedom of speech.

Ahmed Merabet’s death was also placed into a more general context, namely that which referred to his passing as making the difference between a Muslim and a terrorist. For example, some posts quoted Ahmed’s brother as saying that “extremists have no color or religion” and were coded as thematic frames (6.7%). Finally, the least employed frame was that of conflict and no economic consequence frames or metaframing emerged within the text.

### 4.2 Traditional media and social media comparison

In order to better illustrate the emergence of frames on social media and their agenda setting effects on traditional outlets, Table 1. Illustrates the frequencies below.

Table 1. Comparison of frame enactment percentages on Facebook and traditional media.

Frame type	Facebook	NYT	FAZ	The Guardian	Le Monde	Haaretz	Arab news
Issue specific	10	8.1	20.8	14.2	6.72	6.25	16.1
Generic	9.1	13.5	5.94	4.25	12.6	14.06	13.7
Substantive	10.8	14	8.91	17.73	10.08	10.93	7.3
Ambiguous	15.9	3.8	1.98	6.38	3.36	5.46	8.1
Episodic	8.3	11.9	10.89	9.21	13.45	11.72	6.5
Thematic	6.7	8.1	3.31	7.09	8.4	14.06	16.9
Conflict	5	11.4	15.84	16.31	6.72	16.4	14.5
Human interest	10.8	7.1	14.85	2.83	15.97	7.82	8.9
Economic consequences	0	0.54	0	0	0	0	0
Morality	9.3	9.2	6.93	4.96	10.92	7.82	2.4
Responsibility	14.2	2.7	7.92	11.35	9.24	8.59	5.6
Metaframing	0	9.3	12.87	5.67	2.52	4.67	0

As shown in Table 1 the social media activism on Facebook revolved substantially around the ambiguous frame (15.9%) especially by transcending the events to abstract concepts from Islam and its teachings. One illustration of this is the example mentioned in the previous paragraphs that related kindness to faith. The results revealed that the only newspapers that reflected the ambiguous frame in their coverage to a high degree were those in the Arab countries under study

(8.1%). The presence of the ambiguous frame dropped considerably in the coverage from the UK (6.38%) and Israel (5.45%) and was significantly lower in The New York Times (3.8%), Le Monde (3.36%) and Frankfurter Allgemeine (1.98). Based on the implications of the agenda setting theory and the power of the traditional media to influence the public opinion (Entman, 1993), the results imply that in countries like Israel, the UK and France, the activists' attempt to communicate about their perceptions on religion, failed to reach the publics. These results can be used in public diplomacy efforts that aim to avert the indoctrination and the potential recruitment of terrorists by exposing the publics to a message that unifies religions and brings their common precepts to the core.

Further, the Facebook group "Je suis Ahmed" also made extensive use of the responsibility frame (14.2%) and referred mostly to the responsibility that everyone bears to be united in fighting against terrorism and in protecting the freedom of speech. The responsibility frame appeared frequently in the Guardian (11.35%), Le Monde (9.24%) and Haaretz (8.59), to some extent in Frankfurter Allgemeine (7.92) and had a small presence in The New York Times (2.7%).

The human interest frame, known in journalism to be the most persuasive in coverage through its story telling power, had a presence of 10.8%. The Facebook posts told the story of the police officer, a forty-year old immigrant from Morocco who was about to be promoted to detective in just two months, had it not been for the attacks. The Arab news coverage reflected the presence of this frame in a proportion of 8.9% and so did the one in The New York Times (7.1%) and Haaretz (7.82). On the other hand, in Germany and France the coverage of the human interest frame exceeded that of the rest of the media and appeared in a proportion of 14.85 and 15.97 respectively. The human interest frame was, however, significantly lower in the Guardian (2.83) as journalists did not provide specific details about the circumstances surrounding Ahmed Mebarek's life in France. Because the human interest frame increases persuasion through story telling, these results show that the activists' message regarding the fallen police officer was less effective in the UK than in the rest of the countries under analysis.

Further, the substantive frame, which denotes concepts, phrases and meanings that make reference to the details regarding a situation or event, appeared in the same proportion as the human interest frame, specifically in 10.8% of the Facebook posts. By providing exact details regarding a situation or event, substantive frames make the text more memorable as some of the specifics are likely to be remembered by the readers. For the purpose of this study, the substantive frame was coded when details about Ahmed Merabet's passing appeared in the text. For example, the news articles mentioned the exchange he had with the terrorists before he was shot. The substantive frame had a high frequency in The New York Times (14%), The Guardian (17.73%), Le Monde (10.08%) and Haaretz (10.93%) and appeared less in Frankfurter Allgemeine (8.9%) and the Arab newspapers (7.3%).

Around ten percent of the activism on Facebook revolved around issue specific frames, namely posts that focused primarily on Ahmed's death without denoting other themes. Issue specific frames appeared twice as frequently in Frankfurter Allgemeine (20.8%) and had a high presence

in the Guardian (14.2%) and in the Arab newspapers. The extent to which media in Germany and in the UK entailed issues specific frames is indicative of the emphasis the former lay on the specific event and, as a result, the degree to which policeman's death and its symbolism would reach the publics abroad. Contrary to the extensive coverage through issues specific frames in the UK, the Arab world and Germany, media in France, Israel, and the US covered issues specific frames significantly less.

The morality behind Ahmed Mubaret's gesture did not go uncovered and appeared with high frequency in Le Monde (10.92%), The New York Times (9.2%), Haaretz (7.82%), and Frankfurter Allgemeine (6.93%). These results are closely mirroring the posts on social media (9.3%) that employed the morality frame to discuss the fact that, despite Ahmed being a Muslim, he defended the freedom of speech even if the latter involved, at times, the mocking of his faith.

Finally, the last frame that dominated the Facebook group (9.17%) was the generic one. Generic frames place an issue or event across others. In this case the generic frames present in the text placed the policeman's death in relation to the other killings of police officers both during the Charlie Hebdo massacre and beyond in articles that referred to past terrorist attacks in which police forces lost their lives. The international coverage was mostly dominated by generic frames in the Arab newspapers (13.7%) and in The New York Times (13.5%).

## 4. Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to ascertain, based on the agenda setting and the framing theory, how and to what extent the social media activism in the aftermath of the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, managed to set the media's agenda. Activism on social media is a collective and global effort. Therefore, studying it in the aftermath of terrorist attacks enables one to gain an understanding of the general perceptions of the events which in turn, can inform public diplomacy efforts. Additionally, based on the agenda setting effects, determining which emerging frames within social media activism managed to set the media's agenda in various countries, provides an insight into what journalists abroad view as important for their publics and what they choose to cover. Because media exert tremendous influence on the public opinion through their potential to select certain issues for coverage and to place them, inadvertently or not, within specific frames, analyzing media coverage in the aftermath of terrorist attacks helps to determine the way in which public opinion is shaped within various cultures. Such analyses can reveal the most relevant aspects of the events and, therefore, these insights can assist in addressing terrorism through communication and soft power cross culturally and based on what is the most relevant issue and frame for each country.

The results of our study revealed five major insights that can assist in the public diplomacy efforts of the US and its allied countries when engaging in soft power to prevent the potential indoctrination and recruitment for terrorist purposes. First, the results imply that ambiguous frames should be present in the public diplomacy discourse that addresses terrorism. Specifically, universal precepts that are at the core of each religion should be addressed. Such precepts can make reference to morality, tolerance, doing good, etc. These precepts, if embedded in the discourse, demonstrate

the commonalities among religions and religious views. Second, the frame of responsibility was covered with regard to the publics' responsibility to defend freedom of speech and in relation to Ahmed Merabet's responsibility to perform his duty. Yet, while the former had a high presence in Western newspapers, it appeared to a much lesser degree in the Arab media. However, when responsibility did appear in the Arab newspapers, the articles mentioned that freedom of speech, while being a societal value of the Western countries should be limited so as to avert offending others. In this respect one can talk about a cultural clash of values. While the West cannot give up on its freedom of speech as it represents the very value of democracy, the Arab world would like for the government to restrict it. Undoubtedly, neither parts can give up on its value and compromise in this instance will be hard, if not impossible, to reach. However, what can be done is educate the publics in the West and the Middle East and engage them into dialogue about cultural discrepancies and respect for both parts.

Third, the human interest frame had a high presence across all of the media outlets. Therefore, the public diplomacy discourse should entail more stories and narratives that inspire and unify. The communication process should entail narratives of Middle Easterners and Westerners. In addition, the substantive frames were present in a high percent cross culturally in the media coverage. Substantive frames provide information about the context in which an event takes place. While past research distinguished between cultures that are high in contexts and cultures that are low in context, this study shows that, in terms of terrorism, publics do want to obtain detailed information about the circumstances in which a terrorist act has taken place. The need to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity can explain these findings.

Similar to the substantive frame, the morality frame had a high presence in all of the outlets under study. This finding points to the universality of morality as a value. Hence, public diplomacy practitioners should embed morality consistently in their communication process to provide the public with a sense of unity and cohesion.

The present study entails limitations. One such limitation is the fact that in the Arab states under study, media did not cover the Je Suis Ahmed campaign in Arabic. As a result, the researchers had to rely on the newspaper articles that were published in English. Since these articles were not in their original language, some of the meaning might have gotten lost.

While the sample of analysis took into account all of the articles that appeared in the aftermath of the Je Suis Ahmed campaign, it was too small to assess it via quantitative research methods. However, the sample provided sufficient information to ascertain, by qualitative means, the extent to which and how the social media movement succeeded in setting the media's agenda. Additionally, the authors considered that a qualitative analysis was more suitable for this context since an inductive-deductive approach ensured that no linguistic aspects such as word connotations, or cultural subtleties would be missed. Future research is recommended to study the framing theory and the agenda setting in the context of public diplomacy and counterterrorism. The results of this study could be strengthened by looking into various past terrorist attacks and their coverage on social media and traditional media to determine trends in agenda setting and framing.

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## A Game of Trust: Public Trust Attributions as an Evolutionary Mechanism

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### Abstract

This article is concerned with the importance of trust, attributed to organisations by mass media. Trust has become a key variable in the age of information society. Nowadays, an organisations *license to operate* (Coombs & Holladay 2007) is by and large issued within the arena(s) of public communication. Therefore, an organisation's trustworthiness and credibility (Carroll 2013) are not only a crucial component for maintaining the license to operate in times of crises. Furthermore, the attribution of trust and credibility by mass media and social media has become one evolutionary mechanism that determines the survival of organisations in the information age.

Keywords: public trust, evolution, attribution, situational crisis communication theory, responsibility

### Introduction

Already in 1999 Hon and Grunig considered trust to be one of six key constituencies with regard to building long-term relationships. They defined trust as “one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party.” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 2) Similarly, Ledingham and Bruning identified trust as a critical relationship dimension by stating that “an organization-public relationship centred around building trust (...) between the organization and its key public does have value in that it impacts the stay-leave decision in a competitive environment.” (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 61) In the European community, Bentele began developing his theory of public trust in the middle of the 90ies (1994) and has since then defined it as a “process and result of publicly generated trust in publicly observable actors and systems” (Bentele & Seidenglanz, 2004, p. 1). Building upon these works, many scholars have since then elaborated the understanding of trust as a basis for (cf. Hoffjann, 2011) and goal of the efforts of public relations (cf. Kruckeberg & Valentini, 2011). Especially trust as an element of social capital and its build-up by public relations has been examined closely by many in the academic community (cf. Ihlen, 2005; Sommerfeldt, 2013; Dodd et al., 2015). It is thus safe to assume, that trust is widely regarded to be an essential condition for the operation of any organisation in society and that public relations is a crucial contributor in establishing trustful relations between organisations and its environment(s). Following this view, the building of trust is essential to “develop (...) [and maintain] a license to operate” (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2007; see also Coombs & Holladay 2013) within society. This convergence on the role of trust in society bears a resemblance to Fukuyama's end of history and its victory of democratic societies: “If they do not believe in the legitimacy of the adjudicator, if there is no trust in the system, there will be no active and enthusiastic cooperation of the sort required to make the system as a whole function smoothly.” (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 114) Trust, it may seem, is key to an everlasting equilibrium of fruitful cooperation anywhere in society. However, the metaphor of the *license to operate* is misleading. Many scholars have argued that there is a steady decline in trust in western democratic societies (cf. Coleman, 1994, p. 95; Bentele, 1994). A long-term survey conducted by Pew, including data from six decades, shows a clear support for that hypothesis concerning the public trust expressed towards US government between 1958 and 2014 (Pew, 2014). Furthermore, Gallup data shows that since the 1970ies trust has also declined (in the US) for big business, the medical system, organised labour, television and newspaper, public schools, banks or organized religion (Gallup, 2014). The conclusion stemming from the trust hypothesis, as so many have suggested (Huang, 2001; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Bentele, 1994), would be to elevate the conduct of Public Relations, wherever possible, to the level of symmetric, dialogic, transparent and ethical responsible communication in order to regain trustworthiness, credibility and, finally, trust. Excellent public relations, so it would seem, is more vital to the operation of society than it was ever before.

However, the argument could also be developed in reverse direction. Despite the large mistrust towards politicians who seem to hit one all-time low in trust after the other, politics and democracy in the western world still (of course not according to all) go on to work. Many banks who participated in fraudulent practices are still in business despite the huge breaches of trust



they committed during the financial crisis 2008. The same is true for the health care system, where patients do not stop to attend to their physicians and hospitals, just because public trust towards the system is low. Only few scholars like Moloney have argued “against the traditional close relationship between public relations and trust” (2005, p. 550). For Moloney, the relation between the two should rather be described in terms of distance instead of proximity. Consequently in this view, “PR should be redefined as the communicative expression of competing organizations and groups in pluralist states.” (p. 554) Assuming that position means that trust is no longer a factor whose positive value is to be maximised by public relations by applying the right principles in public communication. Trust rather becomes a mechanism (among others) which is object to organisational reasoning and strategic communicative thinking and behaviour.

### Trust as an evolutionary mechanism

However intuitively instructive the trust-hypothesis might be, this paper argues that publicly expressed trust towards an organisation, is by no means a necessary prerequisite for organisations to survive in the present media society. Even though no organisation can allow itself to be insensible to the issue, the maximisation of positive trust attributions in public is not the key determinate of organisational survival. On the contrary, trust is rather an environmental factor (among others) that represents an adaptive challenge for strategic behaviour and strategic communication of organisations in order to gain advantages vis-à-vis organisational rivals. Public trust, in its normal mode, serves as a mean of organisational self-observation in order to determine an advantageous course of action.

Evolutionary concepts are by no means new to public relations theory. According to Cutlip, Center and Broom “public relations’ essential role is to help organizations adjust and adapt to changes in their environments” (1994, p. 199). Therefore, for Greenwood, “evolutionary theory is a [rather] well-trodden path” (2010, p. 458). And last but not least, Grunig and Hunt’s four models of Public Relations (1984) are evolutionary in their design as well, claiming the evolution of higher forms of public-organisational relationships over the course of history. The symmetric approach then represents the perfect equilibrium between an organisation and the respective publics and thus marks a preferred state of relationships. Hence, Murphy concluded, “the central concerns of game theory are the same as those of public relations. Like public relations, the theory of games focuses on the mediation of conflict, the establishment of an equilibrium among conflicting parties, the functions of power and domination, and questions of fairness and ethics.” (1991, p. 116).

The core hypotheses of this article is that public trust attributions usually do not influence the success of an organisations in its competitive environment. That is so, because public attributions of trust, carried out by journalists, do not necessarily touch the core of the relationship between stakeholders (or more precisely: persons) and the organisation. In fact, most of the time the public discourse on trustworthiness of organisations is decoupled (though never completely) from trust relations on the meso-micro level. These relations are executed between persons – a customer, patient, voter, etc. on one side and an organisational representative on the other

side – and are thus much more stable than the volatile public discourse. Therefore, in a normal state of operation, public trust is not much more than a background noise that seems to yield no immediate consequences for the organisation. However, there are some important exceptions to that rule, which I will discuss in detail at the end of the article. For the moment it is only crucial to note, that the importance of public trust dramatically changes in times of crises, that is – to speak in evolutionary terms – when the social environment changes fundamentally and forces the organisations to adapt itself to new conditions. In that very situation – no matter if it is a system crisis like the financial crisis in 2007/08 or an organisational crisis like the oil spill of BP in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 – public relations becomes crucial in order to define concrete steps of communicative adaptation and to carry them out. This view corresponds with Cutlip, Center and Broom’s (1994) idea of public relations as adjuster and adaptor to environmental challenges. And it fits with Grunig’s (2006; cf. Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002) concept of symmetrical communication insofar, as that dialogical and symmetrical communication could be seen as a dominant expression of the present *Zeitgeist*. Therefore symmetrical communication and dialogue orientation towards stakeholders would represent the most promising – albeit by far not the only one – strategy for survival in media society. The dominant paradigm recognizes trust to be an important factor, however it fails to grasp its full implications. Dialogue and symmetry do make sense in a setting, where there is a win-win-situation. But with the shadow of the future growing shorter (Axelrod & Hamilton, 1981) in times of crises for example, that means that the chances of retaliation become slim, the temptation to exploit the trust of a trustor grows. In such a prisoner’s dilemma “no matter what the other does, the selfish choice of defection yields a higher payoff than cooperation. But if both defect, both do worse than if both had cooperated.” (Axelrod & Hamilton, 1981, p. 1391) The challenge for an organisation in such a situation might be – and sometimes is, as I argue – to defect and try to get away with it. And since organisational behaviour is public in modern media society, public relations play a major role in it. Authors like Thummes (2013) and Merten (2008) argue that deception is a fundamental part of the public relations repertoire, a key feature in strategic communication. It should be clear, however, that organisational communication cannot work in a mode of permanent deception, because on the long run, repeated misuses of trust would come back and haunt the organisation. In this regard, the Excellence-Theory is right to model symmetric communication as the best way to organise relations. But it falls short of explaining, why some organisations despite their non-symmetrical public communication prosper nonetheless.

The reason for this, is rooted in a rather undifferentiated understanding of trust. According to Kohring, a trust decision consists of three distinct stages: trustworthiness, willingness to trust and declaration of trust. All three levels must come together in order to form a decision that deals with the inherent risk of a situation. If we understand public trust attribution as a mean to deal with publicly perceived trustworthiness, it becomes apparent that trustworthiness is much easier and more effective to operationalise and influence for PR than a declaration of trust itself.

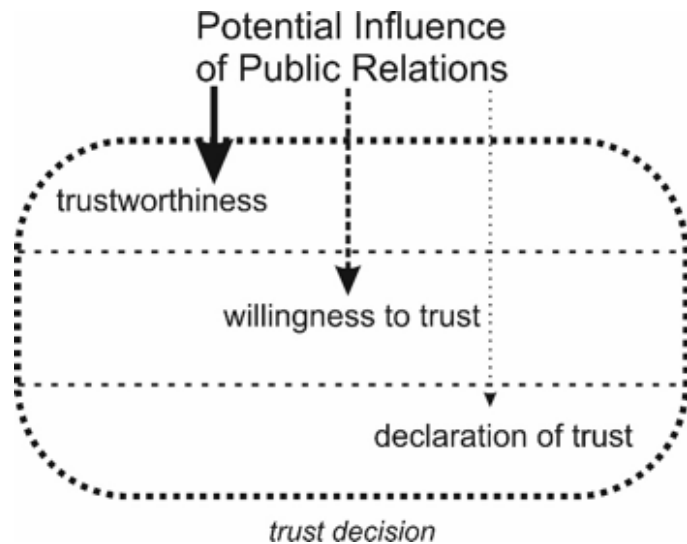


Figure 1: The three stages of a trust decision according to Kohring (2004) and Seiffert (2015)

During a crisis, organisations do not suffer an immediate breakdown in their trust relations. As Falkheimer and Heide have pointed out, during crises “organizations are rewarded for the qualitative trust capital they have acquired.” (2012, p. 517) According to the situational crisis communication theory – SCCT – (Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 1996), crises are all about attributions of responsibility: “People will make attributions of responsibility for events based on limited evidence.” (Coombs, 2012, p. 37). To get back to evolutionary terminology: With trust being one key to survival for organisations, responsibility becomes the medium of the process of adaptation. Therefore, to credibly blame an actor publicly for the event(s) that lead to the crisis in the first place, seems to be a promising strategy. Coping with responsibility determines an organisations’ fitness for survival in media society. The following empirical analysis will provide evidence, that there might be indeed a form of evolutionary process in which organisations learn to adapt in times of crises by dealing with responsibility.

### The organisation as a trust parasite

Having established, that responsibility is the key challenge for organisations in times of crises, the argument now proceeds by modelling one strategy<sup>1</sup> that enables organisations to cope with that challenge. It is well known that in critical situations the quest for those responsible begins

<sup>1</sup> As noted earlier, there are other strategies that cope with other challenges. Coping with transparency, for example, could be another field for adaptive strategies in order to master a crisis.

almost immediately, once the situation has entered the crisis stage. What then unfolds is a public blame game in which the organisations struggles to preserve her trustworthiness – by deflecting responsibility and dodging the blame. And therefore it is crucial to influence who the public believes to be responsible: “What is critical to resolving conflict is not addressing what the cause appears to be, but addressing what the parties involved believe the cause to be – i.e., who is to blame?” (Keaveney, 2008, p. 655) The logical choice for a culprit in such a situation, is an organisational member. Usually, organisations tend to sustain trustful relations with its members in order to ensure smooth and effective operations. Especially those members at the threshold of the system, who are surveying the outside world and are interacting with the environment, are naturally much trusted members – they maintain and establish relations with the outside world. Therefore they are rewarded by the organisation, usually with money, liberties, power or the perspective of a career. But they also bear the risk of being sacrificed in times of crises, when the system-person relation switches from co-existence to parasitism (Seiffert & Männle, 2013). The organisation will naturally try to avoid the impression that any misconduct that led to the crisis in the first place, is caused by systemic malpractice. A systemic failure would require the organisation to change, or, in the worst case, it would cease to exist. Compared thereto, blaming a member or a group of members and suspending them is much less risky and would allow the organisation to proceed with its accustomed operations, just with other persons executing it. Even though the present study will give only empirical evidence for the former, the upward way of the blame game is imaginable, too. Instead of blaming its members, the organisation might point at the higher societal level, trying to attribute responsibility there. During the Great Recession, aka financial crisis 2007/08, it was a recurrent phenomenon to watch banks pointing the finger at politics, blaming them for insufficient financial regulation. However interesting the whole variety of strategies might be, for the sake of this article, only the blame game between the organisation and its members is of concern. The empirical analysis will now show that organisations try to deflect responsibility in crises-situations at the expense of their members.

### Empirical analysis and research questions

The empirical data presented in this article, can only claim to indicate the correctness of the core hypothesis in regard to companies. Grünberg (2014) has shown, that low levels of public trust attributions towards the German health care system do not automatically imply a drop in trust expressed by patients towards their doctors and hospitals. On the contrary, the trustful relation between patient and doctor seems to remain intact even in the light of publicly discussed scandals in the system (Grünberg, 2014). Evidence concerning other societal systems are scarce. As mentioned above, the public willingness to trust seems to be declining everywhere, as different studies indicate (Nauert, 2014). However, it remains unclear if and in what way this general decline in willingness affects the direct relations between persons and organisations.

In order to inquire into the role of public trust for the survival of organisations, a part of the data

of the corporate trust index<sup>2</sup> (CTI) was analysed (cf. Bentele & Zerfass, 2008). The CTI surveyed public trust attributions by the means of content analysis (Blumhoff & Seiffert, 2014) in German newspapers and magazines<sup>3</sup> towards the DAX-30 companies between 2007 and 2012. But, the data analysed in this study just incorporates the period between April 2007 and May 2010. The survey included all articles that mentioned the respective analytical objects at least once. Every relevant article was then coded regarding the occurrence of seven distinct trust factors<sup>4</sup> according to the theory of public trust (Bentele, 1994; Sommer & Bentele, 2008). Once a factor occurred in one analytical unit, the value of the factor was rated on a scale with five grades (negative, slightly negative, neutral, slightly positive, positive) and its appearance in the article was assessed in the percentage the trust factor (or more precisely: the content that represents the factor in the text) was subject to the article (between 5% and 100%). The result was an all-embracing valuing of public trust attributions over the course of three years towards the companies<sup>5</sup> that were analysed in the study (Seiffert 2015). According to Bentele, the co-occurrence of many positively valued factors in the public discourse make gains in trust likely, while negative occurrences presumably cause losses in trust (1994). Therefore, high and dense occurrence of negatively or positively rated trust factors should yield outcomes in regard to the trust that is placed in the respective company. The raw data obtained in that way, however, would only be useful to calculate an index by assigning values to the rating of each factor.<sup>6</sup> In order to analyse the long-term development of the public trust attributions, the data was converted into the impact value of every trust factor (product of rating and appearance of the factor in the text). Therefore, a factor that was rated with -1 and that consumed 70% of the respective article, accounted for an impact of -0.7. Adding all factors regarding the same analytical object and the same day they occurred together, led to a daily impact of public trust attributions. In order to get a function of trust, every impact was added to the impact of the subsequent day. By determining the gradient between every two intervals, it was then possible to determine whether the public trust attribution was increasing or decreasing over the course of time. The conclusive data set then consisted of twelve sub-sets (one for each company) that showed the gradient of the trust function for every day in the research period. All in all, 55.990 trust factors were coded in more than 185.000 articles in a time span of 38 months. Of those, 9.082 were rated negative, 13.205 slightly negative, 7.896 neutral, 21.185 slightly positive

and 4.622 positive.

The empirical analysis was guided by three research questions. The first was concerned with the SCCT's prediction, that responsibility would be the key battlefield for organisations to deal with crises of public trust attributions:

**RQ1: Is responsibility the key issue of public trust attributions in times of crises?**

The second question then was directed toward a supposed pressure to act that would result out of increasing negative attributions:

**RQ2: Is there a correlation between the duration of a crisis/a period of prosperity and the rating of trust attribution during that time?**

The third and most important question then aimed at the hypothesised parasite-strategy. If organisations deflect responsibility by blaming their members, the data should yield the respective evidence by naming persons more often the longer the crisis lasts. Therefore the question was:

**RQ3: Is there a correlation between the frequency of occurrence of persons in public trust attributions and the duration of a crisis/or a period of prosperity?**

To answer research question three, it was necessary to extend and to code the raw data for a second time. The strings that were originally coded in order to mark the appearance of a trust factor were analysed once again with regard to the appearance of persons and systemic practices. Therefore, whenever a trust factor was coded, the secondary analysis looked for a predefined set of terms that would indicate a relation of that factor to either a specific person or an organisational practice. For example, the Siemens corruption scandal was often labelled as a Siemens-system, implying that the malpractice was an organizational practice and not the doing of a few individuals.

## Findings

In the course of the analysis four findings emerged that contribute to the argument that was brought forward in the theoretical part earlier.

First, the analysis showed that in times of crises, public trust attributions are (a) overwhelmingly negative – which is not surprising, of course – and are (b) made with regard to ethical behaviour and responsibility of the organisation in question. By analysing the 2%-quantile, i.e. the two percent of all intervals with the most negative gradients, it could be shown that the factors of the normative trust dimension, ethical behaviour and sense of responsibility, account for the vast majority of trust attributions (picture 2).

2 The corporate trust index (CTI) was a research project conducted at the University of Leipzig and the PMG Presse-Monitor GmbH. Its objective was to monitor and analyse public trust towards major German companies.

3 The panel included the following media: Der Spiegel, die tageszeitung, Die Welt, Focus, Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung, Handelsblatt, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Welt am Sonntag, WirtschaftsWoche, Bild (bundesweit), Capital, Financial Times Deutschland, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Frankfurter Rundschau, manager magazin.

4 These trust factors are: character, communicative behaviour, ethical behaviour, expertise, problem solving competence, sense of responsibility and social behaviour (see Seiffert et al. 2011).

5 Those companies were: Allianz, BMW, Commerzbank, Daimler, Deutsche Bank, Deutsche Börse, Deutsche Telekom, E.On, Münchener Rück, RWE, Siemens and Volkswagen.

6 Negative = -1; slightly negative = -0,5; neutral = 0,1; slightly positive = 0,5; positive = 1; The authors of the codebook assumed that a neutral appearance of a trust factor counts positive, since only mentioning a company in relation to a trust relevant issue would yield a positive effect over longer periods of time.

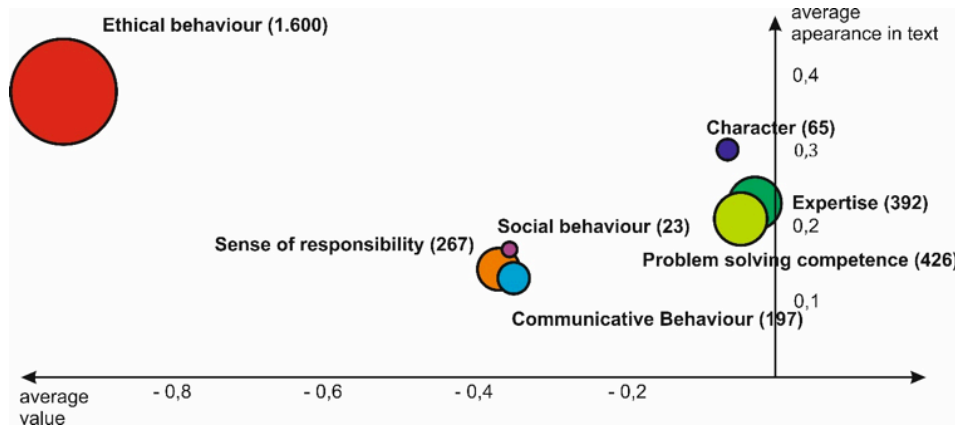


Figure 2: Public trust attributions in times of crises (cf. Seiffert 2015)

In accordance to the SCCT, responsibility and the failure to behave so, are indeed the battleground of public attributions in times of crises. Ethical behaviour and sense of responsibility account for more occurrences (1.867) than all other factors combined (1.103). Ethical behaviour was by far the most negatively rated factor (-0,9434) and had the highest average share in the articles in which he was coded (37,92 %). Sense of responsibility was the second most negative rated factor (-0,3667) and consumed an average of 14,36 % in an article. Surprisingly, the rather functional factors, namely a company's expertise and its perceived ability to solve problems, are hardly objective to negative trust attributions. Therefore, it can be said that the question of responsibility represents indeed a challenge for organisations in times of crises.

Second, the data shows that the higher the number of intervals with a negative gradient is, the lower is the average rating of the trust attributions made towards the respective company (see picture 3). In other words: The longer an organisational crisis lasts, the more negative are the public trust attributions. Even though figure three shows all intervals with negative or positive gradients together, the results reflect a real trend. The longest steady decline in trust attributions was surveyed in the corruption scandal of Siemens (501 consecutive days), followed by Deutsche Telekom (260 days) and Volkswagen (133 days) – precisely the three companies that were target of the most negative trust attributions throughout the whole study.

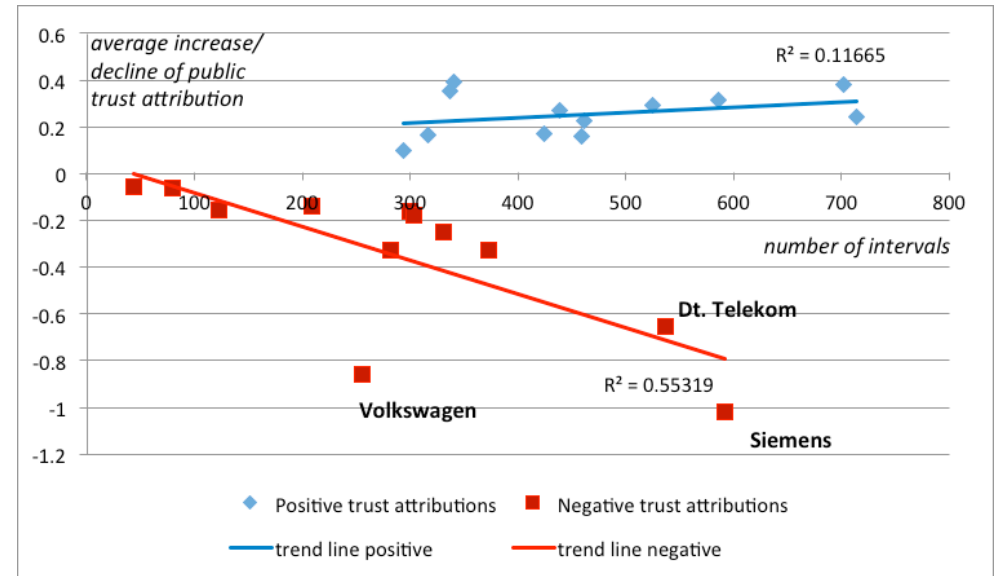


Figure 3: Average rise and fall of public trust attributions in relation to the absolute numbers of intervals. (Seiffert 2015)

Interestingly, the mechanism does not seem to work the other way round – at least not with the same intensity. If at all, there is only a slight correlation between positive trust attribution and their frequency. It would indicate that indeed, as Bentele suggested, public trust is much faster lost than it is gained (1994). With regard to the argument developed in this article, it is important to note that over the course of an ongoing crises the public pressure – in this case: negative trust attributions – grows. With that pressure mounting, the respective company is forced to take measures in order to deal with the situation.

Finally, the terms analysed in the sentence strings that marked each coded trust factor revealed that there is indeed a strong correlation between the appearance of persons and the duration of a crisis. Figure 4 shows, that the longer a crisis in public trust attributions lasts, the more often are persons related to that trust attributions (the unbroken red coloured line,  $R^2 = 0,9376$ ). If we do the same analysis with regard to the appearance of systemic practices and systemic terms (the broken red coloured line,  $R^2 = 0,7237$ ), the resulting correlation is much less pronounced. Even though it remains unclear how persons get into the focus of negative public trust attributions, it seems obvious that they are, the more severe the crisis gets. Combined with the findings presented in figure 2, it seems very likely that it is indeed the representatives personal behaviour' and their perceived responsibility which are objective to journalistic inquiry in times of crises.

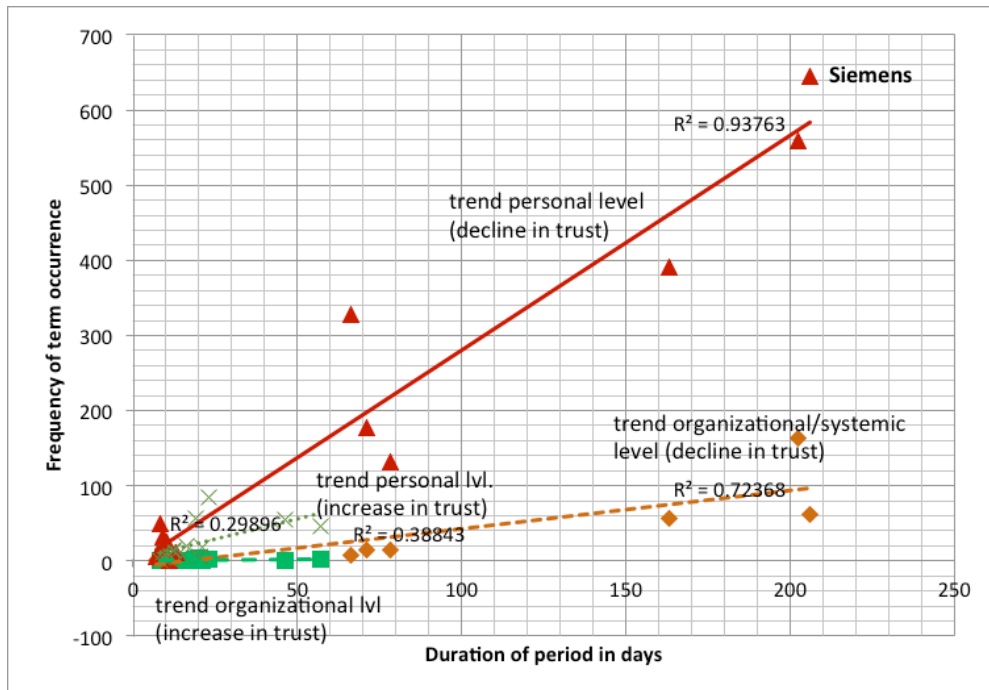


Figure 4: Occurrence of persons and terms of systemic practice in relation to the duration of a crisis (or period of prosperity) in public trust attribution. (See also Seiffert 2015)

As with the second finding above, the effect does not seem to work the other way round. Persons are disproportionately high attributed in times of public trust crises. But they do not prosper comparably in reverse in periods of thriving trust attributions. Here as well (as with finding 2), no correlation seems to exist between the attribution of trust towards individuals and the organisation and the duration of periods of prospering public trust. That confirms the hypothesis which was formulated above, namely that public trust is throughout normal modes of operation not an important concern for organisations. Of course, the data does only reflect the public discourse and disregards potential relation between organisations and stakeholders below the public level. But positive trust attributions appear to be rather irrelevant for organisations in normal times. That alone, however, does not prove that the organisation itself is pushing its members to take the responsibility for organisational malpractice. But a further look at the coded strings does indeed show, that, at least in the case of Siemens, individual managers had to bear a large share of the public blame. The then CEO of Siemens, Peter Löscher, who was entrusted with the rehabilitation of the company was quoted in the Spiegel in December 2007 (12/10/2007) saying, that 470 managers had already been sanctioned, and 130 had been fired due to the scandal. Furthermore, the former chairman of the board Heinrich von Pierer, nicknamed *Mr. Siemens*, and

the Ex-CEO Klaus Kleinfeld were sued by the company, resulting in a compromise agreement where both managers agreed to pay millions of Euros in compensation (cf. Süddeutsche Zeitung, 10/26/2009; Süddeutsche Zeitung, 11/13/2009). Even though this was not the only battleground<sup>7</sup> for Siemens in its public struggle for trustworthiness, it was a very important one. Shifting the blame for corruptive practice to single prominent persons and mid-level managers alike, was a strong signal for the public perception that the company became prey to the criminal energy of a caste of members. Interestingly, the systemic malfunction is discussed during the crisis, but as predicted, persons have to take the blame, not the organisation itself, as the following quote from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (4/21/2010) highlight: “It was about a *Siemens-system*, not operated by individual criminals, but by distinguished members at the centre of the corporation.” It is remarkable, that the drawn conclusion in the public debate leads to make managers responsible, and not the system itself.

## Discussion

The findings presented are limited in the following ways. Firstly, the analysis was only concerned with twelve companies. The entirety of public trust attribution crises is much larger and therefore, it is possible that organisations in other societal systems, such as politics, work in accordance to other mechanisms. However, it seems not very likely that a political party should deal with responsibility in a much different than a company. It is often politicians who take responsibility, e.g. for a lost election, and retreat from office and taking the public blame.

Secondarily, the data presented does not directly show that persons are being related to negative trust attributions. The term analysis just showed that an increase in negative trust attributions and extended periods of negative trust attributions are co-occurring with a massive increase in naming specific persons. Furthermore, it is also hard to establish whether a journalist, who makes the attribution by writing an article, is aware of the distinction between person and organisation or if she treats the representatives and the organisation alike.

Finally, a content analysis is naturally limited to the texts it examines. The correlation presented is just a statistical result and says nothing about whether the persons are really connected to responsibility in the respective articles or not. That would have been objective of a qualitative in-depth content analysis, which was not part of the study. Furthermore, the question, whether the public accusation of individuals is indeed strategically exploited by organisations, would be needed to be answered by using other methods of research. The present data can only establish the fact that persons are more and more drawn onto the public stage the longer a crisis lasts. Indications are strong, that this is the case. But it remains unclear if it really is a causal relationship.

<sup>7</sup> Seiffert (2015) has shown that cooperation with the justice system, new compliance regulations, the size of the company, i.e. Siemens was too big to fail, and its long history and tradition as one of the backbone companies of Germany's industrial sector, were other important factors, which Siemens was able to build upon in its public communication in order to survive the crisis.

## Conclusion

The study has presented evidence that in accordance with the SCCT responsibility is a key issue for organisations in times of crises. Dealing with the question of responsibility for events that led to a crisis in the first place, is therefore crucial to the survival of an organisation. However, the study also presented strong indications that public trust attributions are of no concern in times of prosperity. If at all, positive public trust attributions only slowly increase the perceived trustworthiness of an organisation over long periods of time. In crises-situations, however, the handling of trustworthiness becomes a main concern for the organisation. But unlike the normative view that prefers fulfilment of trust over breaches of trust at any cost, the evolutionary approach argues for a strategic view on trust: As an adaptive challenge to organisations among others in nowadays media society. By adopting ideas from game theory, it is easier understand why public relations often participates in practices that do not seem to foster public trustworthiness and credibility. Sometimes, when the danger of retaliation is remote, it is more profitable to take advantage of a trustor, i.e. in that case the employee of an organisation and the public who believes the person indicted publicly to be really responsible – on behalf of limited evidence.

Organisations, so it would seem according to the data presented, survive by pushing their members in the line of fire and by blaming them for organisational malpractices. Surely, individuals might be responsible for quite many misconducts in organisations. But often enough the strategic exploitation of the public discourse on trust obstructs the true responsibility of organisations for their own systemic failures. The public wants a culprit, the public gets a culprit. Organisations have learned to adapt to that challenge by using public relations as adjustors and adaptors, just as Cutlip, Center and Broom (1994) claimed. According to this evolutionary view, those organisations will survive best in media society who manage such challenges most effectively and who thereby sustain a maximum of their internal structure in the face of crises. Change processes are risky and effortful. They might lead to an enhanced organisation, a fitter company. But change might also lead into organisational dissolution. However, the findings and conclusion presented do highlight only one strategy. There are many more strategies to be analysed and researched to enhance the understanding of organisational evolution and public relations part in it.

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## How to Make Media Relations Work in Thailand: A Reflection from Thai PR practitioners and Journalists

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Media relations has been practiced in Thailand for approximately 80 years since the beginning of Thai public relations (PR) history (Srisai, 2011). It is described as a main task of Thai PR daily work. According to my PhD thesis and my student's research work, media relations job is not just about managing relations, but building impression to the media (Jittarn, 2013; Srisai, 2011). Media relations has been affected by Thai culture and relies mainly on personal and social relationship. For example, friendship and Namjai [giving without any expectation] were mentioned to be crucial for making journalists impressed (Srisai, 2011). Media are defined by PR practitioners to be 'friends', not only colleagues or PR distribution channels. "Scratch my back and I will scratch yours," is a significant proverb to describe how Thai PR and media support each other (Jittarn, 2013). Although social media emerged, this kind of relationship remains the same.

However, according to my literature review, there were few academic papers concentrating on media relations in Thailand. Although media relations is crucial to Thai PR practice, only few books mentioned about it- just a part of chapters. In practice, there were some of which that highlighted and suggested "how to deal with the media", but they were just short articles in online and offline magazines.

Hence, this articles aims to fill in the gap of study by addressing how Thai PR practices media relations. It also explores the opinions of Thai PR practitioners and journalists toward media relations to find out "how to make media relations work in Thailand". Thai culture is used to interpret in some parts of findings, when necessary.

This study will make a contribution to the academic literature on public relations and

media relations, not only in the West, but globally. It helps extend the understanding of media relations in Thailand. In addition, it is useful for PR practitioners or journalists who would like to work in Thailand.

### 1. Overview of Media in Thailand

The government and military control nearly all the national terrestrial television networks and operate many of Thailand's radio networks. Multichannel TV, via cable and satellite, is widely available. The radio market, particularly in Bangkok, is fiercely competitive. There are more than 60 stations in and around the capital. The media are free to criticize government policies, and cover instances of corruption and human rights abuses, but journalists tend to exercise self-censorship regarding the military, the monarchy, the judiciary and other sensitive issue. Restrictions on media output accompanied the introduction of martial law and an army coup in May 2014. The print media are largely privately-run, with a handful of Thai-language dailies accounting for most newspaper sales (BBC, 2014).

The vast majority of Thai people spend their time doing when using the Internet, be it on their PC, tablet or mobile phone. Out of the 23.9 million active Internet users in Thailand by January 2015, each user spends on average almost 5 and half hours per day using the internet from a PC or tablet and just over 4 hours per day from a mobile phone. Unsurprisingly, Thai people spend an average of 3 hours and 46 minutes on social media each, which compares to just 2 hours and 46 minutes spent watching the television. Facebook is the most popular social media network in Thailand (35 million users). (Zocial inc. online analysis, 2015). In January 2015, there were 4.5 million users using Twitter, 3.3 million clips and 99 million contents on Youtube, and 33 million users using Line (Kemp, 2015).

### 2. Relationship in Thai Style

'Relationship in Thai Style' can be used to explain how to do relation building with the media in Thailand. Relationship in Thai style was defined by me to reflect a specific relationship in Thai society. It is mainly related to 'personal' and 'social' relations. For the Thais, personal relationship and social relationships are usually uninhibited in every single area of Thai society. Thai society is "relational". The Thais are very much aware that the right relationship, the right connection, or being in the right place at the right time, could be the means of advancing oneself. This gives rise to the careful culturing of relationships (Talyor, 1997: 14).

Historically, Thai collectivist society originates from Thai occupation as rice farmers in ancient times. Without advanced mechanical tools, all of these farmers needed as much help as they could get from their neighbours, especially at harvest time. Traditional Thai Farmers took turns helping one another as agricultural labour. This reciprocal conduct in agricultural life is reflected



today in cooperative activities and established collective values among Thai people (Srivardhana and Cater, 2006: 107-128). In fact, the collective society has impacted on relationships among Thai people- relationship in Thai style. Not only ancient Thai agricultural occupation influenced relationship in Thai style, but also Buddhism plays a crucial role to shape these relations. According to my previous findings (2011), relationship in Thai style [that was found to be significant in Thai media relations] consists of 4 types of relationship: Bunkhun Relationship, Pen-Mitr Relationship, Namjai Relationship, and Sanook Orientation. The details are as follows:

### 2.1 Bunkhun Relationship

'Bunkhun relationship' describes a psychological bond between someone, who out of sheer kindness and sincerity, renders another person the needed help and favours, and the latter's remembering of the goodness done and his ever-readiness to reciprocate the kindness. It is opposite to the "etiquettical" or "transactional" relationship. It is based on the value of gratitude. Reciprocity of kindness, particularly the value of being grateful is a highly valued characteristic trait in Thai society (Komin, 1991: 139-143). The Thai have been socialized to value this Grateful (*Katanyuu*) quality in a person. A person should be grateful to persons who render *Bunkhun* (goodness, help, favours, etc.) to him.

By being grateful, it implies two aspects—*Roo Bunkhun*, which means to know, acknowledge, or constantly be conscious of and bear in heart the kindness done; and *Tob thaen bunkhun*, which means to reciprocate the kindness whenever there are opportunities (Vichit-Vadakan, 1990). *It is an exchange relationship that is not bound by time nor distance* (Komin, 1991: 139-143). Although the person who renders help, kindness, and favours, usually does it without expectation of anything in return, the obligated person must be Grateful. And *Bunkhun* must be returned, often on a continuous basis and in a variety of ways, because *Bunkhun* should not and cannot be measured quantitatively in material terms. It is an ongoing, binding of good reciprocal feelings and lasting relationship. In addition, society provides way (ceremonies) for expressing gratitude (Soupap, 1975: 7). Therefore, being Grateful to *Bunkhun* constitutes the root of any deep, *meaningful relationship and friendship*—be it a grateful bond towards one's parents, or to a relative who supports one through school, or a teacher who provides one with knowledge, or a good friend who helps one out in times of trouble, etc (Komin, 1991: 139-143). Time and distance are not the factors to diminish the *Bunkhun* (Komin, 1991: 139-143). It is an important base for relationships.

The "I scratch your back, you scratch my back" mentality and obligation generated by Bunkhun maintains some form of cohesion in a society where individualism would otherwise reign (Holmes and Tangtongtavy, 1995: 61). To succeed as a manager in Thailand, you should (1) earn their friendship in order to get their trust, (2) earn their respect (in order to earn their respect you have to be in a position of seniority or you have to command fear resulting from your power), and (3) make them owe you something (always give and make them see that you are always sacrificing and giving; your staff will thereby be fearful of you, but they will also be obligated to you (Holmes

and Tangtongtavy, 1995: 61). Then, they will do everything for you (Holmes and Tangtongtavy, 1995: 61).

In summary, *Bunkhun* relationship has deeper meaning than 'just having a relationship'. Rather, it is concerned with 'friendship,' 'goodness,' and 'respect'. To earn *Bunkhun* relationship, you must treat people as friends and give them many good things (either material or help) with respect. It is a continual exchange relationship that helps build good feelings between people. Ultimately, it helps support *Saang Kwaampratabjai* toward that person.

### 2.2 Pen Mitr Relationship

Apart from *Bunkhun* relationship, *Pen Mitr* Relationship is also found as a *Wattana-dharm Thai* [Thai culture] aspect that influences Thai PR practice. 'Pen Mitr Relationship' is equivalent to a 'friendly' relationship. It presents the smooth interpersonal personality of Thai people as well as Thai PR. It means a non-overconfident, polite, and modest type of personality (expressed through appearance, manners, and interpersonal approach). These types of personality are reflected through relaxation, smiling, and friendly aspects of Thai people.

*Pen Mitr* Relationship also includes many traits such as caring and considerate, kind and helpful, responsive to situations and opportunities, self-controlled, tolerant, restrained, polite and modest, calm and cautious, contended, and social. 'Caring and considerate,' according to Komin (1991), is the Thai cultural-laden value that is significant and cannot be found in American culture. It indicates the deepest reason for smooth and pleasant interpersonal interactions. It is to maintain or preserve one another's feelings and ego.

### 2.3 Namjai Relationship

*Namjai* (literally meaning 'water from the heart', kindness, considerateness, and sincere concern) in being kind and helpful, is something to give out without any expectation in return. The Thais are not calculative in the showing of kindness and help. This is why it has been overtly observed by foreigners that Thai interactions are usually smooth, pleasant, and "often accompanied by genuine kindness and an interest in the well-being of the other" (Mulder, 1978: 66). *Namjai* is based on the same concept of *Bunkhun* relationship. It focuses on 'giving' things or help or advice as Bunkhun relationship. However, you can offer *Namjai* to people that you may not know. It can do once or many times, depending on the place and time.

### 2.4 Sanook Orientation

*Sanook* refers to having fun, enjoying oneself, and having a good time. Thailand has been known as the 'Land of Smiles', a stereotyped image that comes along with the much-talked-about myth of the Thais being easy-going, enjoying every day routines and pleasures of life with a happy carelessness, not letting troubles touch them easily, viewing life as something

to be enjoyed not endured, and will not do anything that is not *Sanook* (National Identity Office, 2005: 496-497). They are easily bored, not because of having nothing to do like Westerners, but because the repetitive activities they are doing are not *Sanook* (Macdonald and Parkes, 2001). They not only like to have fun during free time, but also during work. They also like to put money or effort in work that is fun rather than in work that may not be fun, but basic (Apapirom, 1976). As *Sanook* is deeply ingrained in Thai culture and society, it is passed on through child socialisation, from generation to generation (National Identity Office, 2005).

*Ceremonies and Celebrations* are also highlighted as one element of *Wattana-dharm Thai* to support *Sanook*. Ceremonies are needed for honour. They give position and help lift their organisations up so others can see them and give them recognition (Soupap, 1975; Apapirom, 1976). The pursuit of 'face and eyes' is the reason for most ceremonies (Soupap, 1975; Apapirom, 1976). They, in addition, convey rich meaning to Thai people, and bring fun (Johnson, 2006). Apart from being fun, ceremonies could bring *samakhii* harmony [united harmony in English terms] to society (Johnson, 2006: 146). Also, Thais like to have luxury and prefer eating out with plenty of food and drink (Global Market Information Database, 2005). Hence, it is no surprise that Thai ceremonies and celebrations are normally filled with luxury food and drinks.

### 3. The Beginning of Media Relations in Thailand

According to my previous research findings (Srisai, 2011), Media relations emerged at the beginning of Thai PR profession history. Due to a fundamental change in the country's administrative system from absolute to constitutional monarchy, the Publicity Division was established with the aims of publicizing official and general news, propagating good image of the country, rectifying misunderstanding both in and outside the country, providing general knowledge, and promoting Thai culture in 1933 (Srisai, 2011: 109). Media relations played crucial role during that time. The Press Section was set up. It had tasks concerning with writing and monitoring news: following up on news and information from government agencies and compiling them for the press while coordinating with reporters from all news papers and monitoring print media in and outside country, and neighboring countries in particular (The Government of Public Relations, 2006). Until 1937, the Press Division was enlarged, comprising the domestic press and foreign press section, showing the government's increased interests in the press, which as then entirely in private hands. (The Government of Public Relations, 2006 cited in Srisai, 2011).

In state enterprises and government agencies, it was found that media relations such as news release, press party<sup>1</sup>, and press tour, were used as PR tactics to provide information to the public as the major role of government's PR was an information provider. New releases were the most popular tactic during that time (The School of Public Relations, 1976: 210-213). As same

as in the private sector, the Shell Company of Thailand Limited, a regional branch of Dutch Oil Company, set up a PR division with responsibility for publicity and image building. Media relations was included as one of important role of Shell PR (Pitipattanacozi, 2000).

In summary, media relations in Thailand emerged in Rattanakosin period (after administration change). At the beginning of PR history, it was used as one of PR tactics mainly to generate news publicity through maintaining relationship with the press.

## 4. Thai Media Relations in 2000's

### 4.1 Media Relations by the End of 1990s and Early 2000s: The Arrival of ICTs & Media Relations

Media relations had evolved with the same task, to support organization publicity through maintaining relationship with the media. It remained one of crucial PR roles and jobs by the end of 1990s and early 2000s. Media relations role consisted of communication liaison, relationship building, press conference, news monitoring and writing, and executive coordination. In fact, media relations was responsible with everything that makes media feel good (Thamwipat, 1999). It was revealed that 4 of 6 PR consultancies in Thailand have a service of 'media relations' for clients (Kleechaya, 1999: 89-93). Moreover, it was considered as a significant indicator for public relations performance evaluation in Thailand. Kleechaya's research (1999) found signs that indicated the success of PR in Thailand through media relations as follows: 1) receiving a call from journalists that your work get published; 2) intimacy between PR and journalists; 3) extending scoop deadline for PR; 4) succeeding in asking journalists not to write/publish negative news about organization; 5) a request of any PR materials from journalists 6) an alert from journalists in about upcoming negative impact; and 7) receiving a call from journalists to check mistakes and re-edit news. However, some Thai scholars stated that media relations role in Thailand was not dominant and special in PR's opinions since Thai practitioners believed that it's a routine job of PR to coordinate with all groups of stakeholders-it was a job that PR must do.

Although Information Communication and Technologies (ICTs) arrived in this period, there was no record about the impact of them on media relations. According to the study of Anunnab (1997) and Pitipattanicozi (2001), together with interviews of Pattanocozi and Banvorn (interview, 2008 cited in Srisai, 2011), it was clear that ICTs had not been dominant in Thai PR practice until 2000s, due to the limitations of ICT infrastructure such as low bandwidth and the high cost of equipment. However, ICTs were initiated in Thai PR practice for the purpose of internal communication, not yet media relations.

<sup>1</sup> Press party is one PR tactics. PR organizes or creates a party for journalists or press in order to thank them

#### 4.2 Media Relations from 2006 to 2012: High Competitions and the Impact of ICTs on Media Relations

From 2006 to 2012, the situation of media relations in Thailand had changed dramatically. Thai PR practice still relied predominantly on media relations (Lertwongworakul, 2006; Tanawichakorn, 2008; Srisai, 2011). The majority of business organizations gave importance to 'media relations' in the highest level. They pointed out that they would consider choosing PR agencies that 'have good relationship with media' (Lertwongworakul, 2006).

Press conference was still the most popular media relations tactic that business PR used during that time (Lertwongworakul, 2006; Tanawichakorn, 2008). Other tactics were 1) making media relations through journalist's clubs, 2) visiting and greeting media in special occasions such as organization birthday or anniversary, Press Party, 3) Giving privileges to journalists, 4) Press Tour, 5) Sport activities with journalists, 6) Organizing executive meeting with the press, 7) media symposium, 8) organizing a concert for press, 8) media luncheon, and 9) any request from the media.

However, due to the change in high competition in business sector, but few numbers of journalists, PR practitioners had paid more attention to 'gimmicks' in media relations to attract the media. 'We try to make press conference colorful and sanook [fun]...the ultimate outcomes are the good feelings of journalists toward us' (Tonawanik, 2007: 91). The format of press conference in Thailand, for example, had changed from 'plain and formal press conference'- having backdrops behind executives panel press conference, to 'Event press conference'-more relaxing and lively (Srisai, 2011). Event press conferences were defined by Prownpuntu (interview, 2008 cited in Srisai, 2011: 178):

Press Conference formats have changed from previously. In the past, we had only backdrops and a room for press. Now, it's more colourful. I can say it becomes an event press conference. For example, we launched 'Samui Island Trip' project. We organised a press conference with a theme of the sea. We had beach umbrellas and our executives were dressed up in Hawaii concepts. They had to dance as well. We also made journalists excited by putting Leelawadee [Name of flowers] garland around their necks...Sometimes, the styles [of press conference] are like variety shows...

In fact, media relations in this period remained giving importance to building and maintaining personal and social relationship with the media as an early period. PR still used old activities such as press party, press greeting, and press tour to make relations with the media. However, the changes in Thai media relations were that it moved to be 'gimmick' 'lively' 'event', 'fun', 'special', and 'more listening to the media', and 'media reachable'.

Not only had the formats of media relations, but also channels of sending news been changed. According to my previous research (2011), media relations jobs were mentioned to be one of the areas practices most impacted by ICTs. ICTs forced PR to change their styles of work as one of my interviewees stated that:

...We have to adjust our work styles to be faster due to the quick changes of technology...

sometimes, value and credible news releases might be worthless if you are not concerned about timing... (Boonak, interview, 14 February 2008, cited in Srisai, 2011).

In fact, ICTs helped reduce the process of sending news releases, save time, increase speed of communication, and generate direct interpersonal communication between PR and journalists. E-mail was additionally used to send new releases instead of messengers while Short Message Service (SMS) were used for reminding journalists to see their e-mail boxes. However, ICTs did not influence everything in media relations. A connection remained a core of Thai media relations. ICTs were used to satisfy, accommodate, and support 'friendship' between PR and journalists rather than change it as one of my interviewees stated:

...Journalists are likely to go online, accept e-mail, and play Hi5..I think Hi5 can help maintain personal connections between PR and journalists. The best way to do media relations is making them become friends with us. Journalists usually blame PR that PR lures them to publish news for them. 'I am your friend' can reduce their suspicion...(Nawawat, Interview, 7 April 2008, cited in Srisai, 2011: 230)

Additionally, Thai PR people have not completely changed their channels of sending journalists news releases to ICTs. Many of them still used traditional ways such as Fax, depending on the preference of journalists. In addition, the strong seniority principle in Thai PR media organisations can be seen as a main reason for Thai PR practitioners still using traditional ways for new releases (Srisai, 2011: 231).

Some practitioners revealed that some materials such as invitation cards were better sent by post rather than electronically. Psychologically, seeing and touching things were better than visually seeing. Moreover, something that was worth keeping, such as all things about the King, should also be sent manually.

In conclusion, many practitioners advocated that Thai PR media relations practice in this period had been impacted by ICTs. Because of their efficiencies, ICTs help reduce processes of sending news releases, saves time, increases speed of communication, and generates direct interpersonal communication between PR and journalists. However, ICTs do not change 'all' of media relations practice. Due to Wattana-dharm Thai, the core of Thai media relations --personal relationships--was still the same.

## 5. Research Methodology

This research aims to address two research questions as follows: RQ1: How does Thai PR practices media relations during 2013-2015? RQ2: How to make media relations work in Thailand through the opinion of Thai PR practitioners and journalists? Two research methods are employed in-depth interviews to address my questions.

## 6. Research Site and Sampling Frames

### 6.1 Research Site

The research took place in Bangkok, Thailand where many PR offices are located. The population in this study are divided into two groups: PR practitioners and journalists. It is difficult, if not impossible, to estimate the number of PR practitioners in Thailand. According to the interview with Jaichansukkit, the President of the Public Relations Society of Thailand, there might be more than 100,000 PR practitioners in Thailand. However, there are only 2,000 PR people who are apparently registered as members of the society in 2008 (cited in Srisai, 2011). In the same way, it is difficult to identify the numbers of journalists in Thailand. However, it can estimate that there are approximately 2,459 journalists who registered with Thai Journalist Association (2013) and Thai Broadcast Journalists Association (2013).

### 6.2 Sampling Frames

Unlike quantitative research, the sample size is not significant in qualitative research, as it analyses small samples (Dencomsbe, 2010; Daymon and Holloway, 2002; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). In this study, my principal participants are 6 Thai PR practitioners who have at least 5 years working in media relations for government and state enterprises or the private sector or PR consultancies, or in education, and 7 journalists who have at least 5 years experiences and used to deal with PR practitioners. I used purposive sampling as the first step to select my participants. Then, I added further interviewees through the snowballing technique, asking my interviewees to recommend somebody else.

## 7. The Findings

### RQ1: How does Thai PR Practice Media Relations?

To answer this RQ1, I conducted in-depth interviews with 6 Thai PR practitioners and 7 journalists. The results were as follows:

#### 7.1 Activities for Media Relations in Thailand

The results revealed that media relations in Thailand between 2013-2015 has focused on four areas of practice: Firstly, it focused on “news writing and monitoring”. Several interviewees pointed out that the majority of PR job concentrating on media relations is ‘writing’ and ‘sending’ all releases such as news, photos, voices, invitation cards and letters, articles, and scoops. Some PR practitioners stated that sending all releases were proactive media relations. An organization sent these releases in order to provide information to the media and wish media would publish positive news for it. However, sometimes, an organization needed to handle with reactive media relations. Media, frequently, had their own agenda and contacted PR to find out information for them. In addition, PR does media monitoring every day. “We have news monitoring team that

tracks news from newspapers, magazines. For televisions and radios, we used outsource...We monitor news in order to calculate news values for clients”. (PR practitioner 4, interview)

Secondly, media relations in Thailand had concentrated on “organizing any forms of creative events or activities with the media” Events of media relations included press conference, press tour (fieldwork and travelling), thank press party, exhibitions, and other events. Many of PR practitioners I interviewed believed that organizing events could create and maintain relationship with the media, and enhance a chance for getting media coverage:

“Many of press tours we organized don’t have any news issue, all we wanted were that PR and journalists can spend time together and got more intimately familiar...” (PR practitioner 3, interview)

In the same way, journalists agreed with the belief of PR practitioners. They stated that events made PR and journalists become closer.

Thirdly, it focused on “facilitation and communication liaison”. Besides being an organizer, most of PR practitioners pointed out that they acted as “facilitator” at the same time. It was a PR task to support and provide all facilities such as internet, telephone, food & beverage, and reserved parking for journalists on a press conference day. In a typical day, PR usually provides a press room or a working space for journalists at the office. In addition, communication liaison was one of the main PR tasks that my interviewees had mentioned about. PR needed to coordinate with other units about media relations or in case media needed any information.

Finally, it focused on “relationship building”. According to all of my interviewees, relationship building was very significant to media relations. PR usually built relationship with the media through 3 ways: 1) friendship; 2) all forms of activities; and 3) giving things or help:

#### 1. Building relationship through ‘friendship’

Media are defined by PR practitioners to be ‘friends’, not only colleagues or PR distribution channels. ‘Friendship’ or ‘Pen-mitr’ relationship was used to describe the relationship between media and PR practitioners:

“If we are friend with them [the media], they would write good things about our company. If not, they may write negative news.” (PR practitioner 2, interview)

“...media and PR are sisters-brothers or friends. We must look after each other as we are a family. We can have straight talks. Sometimes, we get angry. The media would understand us.” (PR practitioner 1, interview)

“..The way to build acquaintanceship is that all employees as well as the media called me ‘Pii’ [sister]. This reflected the fraternity.” (PR practitioner 2, interview)

However, one PR practitioner from a PR agency gave different perspective about relationship. She pointed out PR should not be too closed to the media:

“I think PR should maintain level of relationship with the media appropriately. PR should

not be too closed to the media because it resulted in Kwam Krengjai<sup>2</sup> (PR practitioner 4, interview)

In the same way, many of journalists I interviewed stated that they had better relationship with in-house PR than PR agencies. "I have closer relationship with in-house PR practitioners than PR who work in PR agency. It's because many of PR agencies have high rates of turnovers. They [PR agency] do have deal with me on work, but don't have much personal matter". (Journalist 7, interview)

## 2. Building relationship through 'all forms of activities'

According to my interviews, activities are not only for getting media coverage, but also building and maintaining relationship with the media. These activities were based on Sanook orientation:

"I always create familiarity with the media through activities such as asking them to join my company's activities..." (PR practitioner 2, interview)

"Sometimes, I organize press activities such as badminton day in order to make relationship with them [the media]" (PR practitioner 3, interview)

"We usually organize an informal executive-media meeting. The meeting is just for enhancing good relationship between our executives and the media. It is a chance to talk relaxingly. Nothing is about company's news, but relationship. Indeed, it's not only for an executive, but also the staff..." (PR practitioner 2, interview)

"We asked media to join our activity—being a bus ticket boy. We asked media to help people who got in trouble...we got free coverage". (PR practitioner 2, interview)

## 3. Building relationship through 'giving things or help'

Giving things or help is an additional way to show Namjai relationship and to build relations with the media. All PR practitioners advocated that they had given things such as souvenirs, money, and support to the media to make relations with them. Moreover, things that PR gave to the media were not ordinary, but special, cool, and memorable. For instance, a PR practitioner in material business stated that she gave the media reused cement bags as a company souvenir to make media impressed and finally get news published. Some of journalists I interviewed were appreciated with things that being offered. However, they suggested that the price of these things

should not be too high.

Moreover, many PR practitioners pointed out in the same way that it was a PR job to support media on any of their special occasions. For example, a company might allow media to use its meeting room for any purpose or provide any financial support on media's sport days. On special occasions such as a company's birthday, New Year, and Songkran Day, all of PR practitioners advocated that they visited the media to give at least a fruit basket to greet them. Indeed, giving could create Bunkhun and Namjai relationship between PR and journalists.

## 4. Building relationship through 'personal matters'

According to the interviews of journalists, many of them felt impressed when PR had been in every moment of their life. They stated that they felt good when received a birthday gift or when PR practitioners joined their family funerals. One of journalists I interviewed mentioned that: "They are truly with me in every moment of life...they greeted me on my birthday ...they visited me at the hospital and gave me a banquet...when my house was flooded, they helped me clean my house...it was very impressed." (Journalist 7, interview)

All PR practitioners I interviewed agreed that they gave importance to personal information of the media. They created a database which contained a 'memory of mindful thought' (Srisai, 2011). A memory of mindful thought is a database that keeps details about journalists. It is also used to keep all records about journalists' personal information such as date of birth, number of children, their favourite activities. Knowing personal information is a good way to show Namjai [help offering] at the right time.

## 7.2 Channels Used to Contact between media and PR

Surprisingly, the results of this research revealed that PR had used fewer social media than telephone and FAX to contact with the media. According to my interviews, PR prefers sending news releases or invitation letter via traditional media such as FAX and e-mail. Face to face communication was mentioned as the most effective channel used to build relations with media. Thai PR usually visit media once a week. In the same way, journalists agreed that they preferred face to face communication. "Some PR practitioner would visit us only when they want to ask us publish news for them. I don't like it. They should come to see without any business purpose sometimes." (Journalist 4, interview)

However, few PR practitioners stated that they had used social media to support media relations job. For example, one of PR practitioners who work in PR agency stated that she added friends with media. Only 5% of her friends were not journalists. "Social media are useful for me. I learned a lot about those journalists. I saw their personal information from facebook..." According to my interviewees, many PR practitioners refused to use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Website, and Video calls to contact the media because they do not want to disturb media's personal life. I did interview journalists about using social media for media relations, the results

<sup>2</sup> Thai noun that foreigners find especially difficult to understand. It combines two distinct words: kreng (to fear something or be afraid to act) and Jai (of the heart or mind). Its nearest English equivalent might be: to have consideration for another person's feeling, to be reluctant to disturb or offend, or to be fearful for approaching someone. In this case, it means to be reluctant to reject a request of another person.

were that Thai journalists did not prefer contacting through social media. Social media in their opinions were appropriate for communicating with closed friends, not PR.

## **RQ2: How to make media relations work in Thailand through the opinion of Thai PR practitioners and journalists?**

### **7.3 What is 'Success' (Work) in media relations?**

Before start talking about how to make media relations work in Thailand, I did interview PR practitioners and journalists about the meaning of 'success' in media relations in their opinions. The results revealed that there were 8 indicators that can measure the success of media relations in Thailand as follows: 1) numbers of journalists who join events; 2) numbers of media coverage; 3) a chance to consult journalists on issues; 4) free media coverage; 5) interest of journalists on the events; 6) a call from journalists to alert when an organization faces negative image; 7) the trust of journalists toward an organization, especially when a company faces a crisis; and 8) contents that get published.

### **7.4 How to make media relations work in Thailand?**

#### **1. Being professional: Do the best on your job**

According to my interviews, the most important factor that makes media relations in Thailand work is 'being professional'. The result indicated that PR and journalists mainly focused on 'content' of news together with personality, skills and experience of PR practitioners.

All of journalists I interviewed stated that to make media relations work, news should contain either outstanding content or outstanding persons in news or content that leads to talk of the town or content that has benefit to society and community. In addition, journalists reflected that they would not select news that was too commercial even though they have closed relationship with PR.

Moreover, one journalist stated that she preferred a story to photo releases. "It was better to write news scoop to indicate how to succeed in something to show how clever organizations are...Again, I don't like photo releases that have all executives stand side by side. They were boring. No one wants to read it." Beside content of news, PR practitioners were required to sending news releases continually.

For personality, skills and experience of PR practitioners, all interviewees agreed that PR in Thailand must be nice, friendly, know who to contact and their teams, like reading, be able to find out solutions for journalists. Many journalists reflected that they didn't like to be consulted, but preferred PR who was professional and well planned. In addition, PR must give information as much as they can when they faced a crisis in order to build long term relationship with the media.

#### **2. Understanding Wattana-dharm Thai [Thai culture]**

Understand Thai culture that involved with PR practice is very important for doing PR in Thailand. Personal relationships have been mentioned to be crucial for PR work. 'Friendship' is a keyword for media relations in Thailand. Moreover, the relationship in Thai style such as Bunkhun, Namjai, Pen Mitr relationship, Sanook, and samakkii have obviously influenced Thai media relations. Hence, media relations in Thailand rely on strong personal bonds, which are based on Wattana-dharm Thai. To make media relations work in Thailand, PR should concern about Thai culture that mentioned above.

#### **3. Being gimmick and different**

The results revealed that Thai journalists preferred media relations that have gimmicks and differentiations. News or events that are strange or big or fresh, or talk of the town can attract media in Thailand. In the same way, several PR practitioners stated that they tried to make events creative and attractive.

#### **4. Maintaining Level of Closeness**

The results revealed that it was important to maintain level of closeness between media and public relations. These levels help smooth Thai media relations. PR practitioners can keep media closer by visiting them frequently, greeting them their special events such as birthday and wedding. Moreover, PR should be mindful and remember their personal information such as numbers of kids or their favorite food. 'Giving' is a key activity that makes media impressed. PR may offer help or give a gift to the media. Especially, PR should say thank you to the media when their news get published.

## **8. Conclusion**

According to the findings of my current research and previous study (2011), it can be confirmed that media relations in Thailand during 10 years (between 2006-2015) has not changed much. Media relations still relies on 'Relations in Thai style' with the core of making journalists impressed although technologies such as social media moved forward. Making media relations in Thailand work need to have at least four things: being professional, knowing Thai culture, being gimmick and different and maintaining level of closeness. Indeed, Thai media relations based on personal and social relationship together with news values.

'Giving' is another interesting point to explain how the meanings of practice are constructed in PR occupation. Thai PR likes giving help, things, and gifts to journalists, as it is a way to show 'Namjai' and to return 'Bunkhun'. It is the norm for Thais and the Thai PR occupation. All PR practitioners in all businesses give presents to journalists on special occasions and even on non-special days. It is part of Thai PR culture to do Saang Kwaamprataabjai to journalists. To see this from a Western business ethics perspective, this practice would be considered as bribery or

corruption, but in Wattana-dharm Thai, it is normal.

My research also implies that the popular win-win strategy of many Western businesses might not be understood in Thai media relations practice. Rather, Namjai and Bunkhun would work in this case. I suggest that to do PR in Thailand is not only 'give' or 'take', but to share emotions, minds, feelings, and so on. You have to be mindful to small details and personal information. Finally, I suggest to PR in the rest of the world to keep in mind that 'we are different in our logical priorities, in 'what comes first' and 'where a circle starts'. To understand logical priorities of Thailand is the best way that leads to the success in doing media relations in Thailand.

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## Online Activism vs Corporations: New Enemies, Old Challenges

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### Abstract

Various authors highlight the relationship between the frequency of social media use and different ways of civic engagement in protests, groups and, more in general, movements (Valenzuela 2012; Tufekci 2014; Sandoval-Almazan, Gil-Garcia 2014; Ghobadi, Clegg 2015). These differences in behaviour may vary between mere expressions of ones' opinion to actual online activism. The majority of contributions focuses on the relationship between online activism and state actors, but the activism through social media is an increasing reality facing corporations as well. This article aims at exploring activism facing corporations through the lenses of the model developed by Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia (2014), observing online communications (social media, intranets, blogs, etc.) related to two case studies (Yin 2009) involving Italian corporations: Barilla and Moncler. On the basis of the case studies, it can be argued that the model designed to analyse political protests could be fruitfully used, without major adaptations, to analyse the protests targeting corporations.

Keywords: Online Activism, Social Media, Multinational Corporations, Social movements,

### 1. Introduction

The development of electronic communication technologies such as Facebook and Twitter has had a deep impact on social activism changing the developmental and organizational process of traditional street protests (Scherman, Arriagada & Valenzuela, 2015; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia 2014; Wang C.J, Wang P.P & Zhu 2013; Triga & Milioni, 2014; Hara & Huang, 2011; Earl & Katrin, 2009). Online activism refers to the use of electronic communications tools such as Twitter, Facebook, You Tube and e-mails to instantly communicate local information globally and to organize off-line protests (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia 2014). Recent research describes common features that can help understand online activism' complex phenomenology (Ghobadi & Clegg, 2015; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia 2014; Strizzolo, 2010). Many studies indicate that short-term and slaktivism (Christensen, 2011; Gladwell, 2010), i.e., the tendency to click a link or a "like", instead of undertaking concrete actions, are potential weak points of online activism. In fact, online protests seem to display their actual potential mostly in the short-term, where they show the capacity of drawing public sphere attention on a specific issue, bypassing censorship and being central for the coordination and logistics of the manifestations (Tufekci, 2014; Nielsen, 2013).

Many studies focus on online activism against state actors (Ghobadi & Clegg, 2015; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014) whereas little attention has been given to online activism against private organizations.

To this aim in the present work we applied a consolidated 4-stage model of analysis used for online protest against political actors to online protests against private organizations. Specifically we analysed two case studies (Yin, 2009) of online protests against two leading Italian companies – Barilla and Moncler.

The model applied was developed by Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia (2014) to analyse political protests in New Mexico. It describes four essential phases in the development of protest using social media: 1. triggering event, 2. media response, 3. viral organization, and 4. physical response.

The first phase is characterized by an extraordinary event promoting a social reaction that corresponds, in the theory of social protest, to the "political opportunity" (Ghobadi & Clegg, 2015). The main feature here is the breaking up with a previous state that does not depend upon the people who will protest, but represents, instead, the cause of their actions. The triggering event activates a sort of drive belt between traditional and social media, often each one following the flow of the other, in a synergy that crosses and amplifies the scale of the informational flow. Traditional media responses are, therefore, connected to the triggering event and social media play the function of rapidly mobilizing protesters, of delegitimizing the organization and increasing the exposure, at global level, of their faults highlighted by the activating event appeared in the traditional media. Once information is spread, in the online social networks appear opinion groups that take side on the issue: these groups' essential features are to be open and non- hierarchical and represent, in turn, the transmission belt for concrete action.

Individual positions perception provided by the social media makes them assume a



collective force and lowers the threshold to overcome to start concrete responses (Rheingold, 2003). Finally, online flow of information, through cooperation, organization, identification and the sense of belonging to a collective movement in the interest of the wider community, translate into concrete action: street manifestations, demonstrative actions, guerrilla-marketing activities.

However, the short time available to take fundamental decisions on strategic and operational level, never actually allowed online movements to elaborate long term visions, like traditional protest movements, thus often finding themselves without solid bonds, lacking mutual trust and protection, missing experience and resilient communitarian identities (Ghobadi & Clegg, 2015). Often, after the initial explosive start characterized by high enthusiasm and an exponential flow of contents and information, protest movements face a repressive response with renewed control capabilities, experienced organizational disorientation, divisions and internal separations followed by a retreat to the private sphere and isolation.

Preliminary results are indicating that the framework proposed by Sandoval-Almazan e Gil-Garcia (2014) designed to analyse political protests could be fruitfully used, without major adaptations, to analyse the protests targeting to well-known MNEs (Multi National Enterprises).

## 2. Case Studies

We considered the cases of two Italian worldwide leading companies: Barilla and Moncler. In the first case, the triggering event was an interview with the president of Barilla, Guido Barilla, in the second case, an episode of Report, a famous Italian TV program of inquiry. In both cases, we have systematically taken a tweet every 10. Our goal was to get 100 tweets per day (from the triggering event up to the company's response). However, in the case of Barilla we saturated the day with less than 100 tweets (because we focused on the hashtag #boycottbarilla). Regarding Moncler, again we selected a tweet every 10: in the first and final day we quickly saturated 24 hours, while in the central day, we reached the number of 100 tweets stopping in the morning.

In the following sections, we proceed with a qualitative analysis of the selected tweets along with some quantitative information (frequency of tweets) and a content analysis through Tag Clouds and Facebook pages.

### 2.1 Barilla

On 26th September 2013 in a tight radio interview the president of Barilla, Guido Barilla, states: "I would never make a spot with a homosexual family. Not out of a lack of respect but because I do not see it like they do. Our family is a classic family where the woman has a fundamental role [...] We have a different concept than the gay family. For us as a company, the concept of sacral family remains fundamental [...] If they (homosexual) like our pasta and our communication that's fine, otherwise they can go and eat another brand of pasta. One cannot always please everyone [...] I do respect everyone [...] they (homosexual) can do what they want without disturbing others. I also support same-sex marriage, but no adoption by a gay family.

As a father I believe it is very complex growing up children in a same-sex couple' [www.radio24.ilsole24ore.com/notizie/guido-barilla-spot-famiglia-122352-gSLAlqYzV].

Following the above statement, it begins a viral exchange of tweets relative to #boycottbarilla leading to two actions of the CEO: within a few hours a statement of apology was first disclosed, and 24 hours later, a video was diffused in which, with visible suffering, Guido Barilla declares his mistake.

In the first statement, that does not however appease the wave of tweets, Barilla points out:

"In the interview I simply wanted to highlight the central role of women within the family [...] I want to clearly state that I have the utmost respect for any person, without distinction of any kind. I have the utmost respect for gays and for freedom of expression. I also said and I repeat it once more that I support gay marriage [...] Barilla's group in its advertising represents the family because family welcomes anyone and our brand identifies itself with it" [www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2013-09-26/guido-barilla-spot-famiglia-124005.shtml?uuid=AbdOCLcI ].

In the next 24 hours another video appears on Barilla's Facebook page, first in English, then in Italian, in which Guido Barilla, visibly upset, apologizes further:

"It's clear that I have a lot to learn from the ongoing debate on the evolution of the family: I have heard the many worldwide reactions to my words that sadden and depress me [...] I had respect for all the people I met, including gays and their families, without distinction [...] I heard the many reactions to my words around the world that made me feel very sad [...] it is clear that I have a lot to learn on the lively debate about the evolution of the family [...] I look forward to meeting members of the groups that represent in the best way the evolution of the family, including those who I have offended with my words" [www.ansa.it/web/notizie/rubriche/associata/2013/09/26/Guido-Barilla-mai-spot-famiglia-omosessuale\_9363080.html].

Finally on November 5th, it appears on the newspapers that Barilla created a Diversity and Inclusion Board (Committee for diversity and inclusion) guided by David Mixner, gay, opinion maker, writer, spin doctor and activist for civil rights. Newsweek had called him the most powerful gay of America. [www.lastampa.it/2013/11/05/italia/cronache/la-svolta-di-barilla-in-azienda-il-gay-pi-potente-damerica-0cMDIs3jLnvPZxO574mHyN/pagina.html].

Meanwhile a storm of tweets carrying the hashtag #boycottbarilla has been created in just 3 days (from the triggering event to the apology). Moreover, traditional media, reporting the facts and the wave of tweets has had the consequence to amplifying the viral mechanism triggered in the social media.

The hashtag #boycottbarilla encompasses not only attacks to Barilla, but also the defense of freedom of thought of Mr. Barilla. As an example, opinion maker Selvaggia Lucarelli, explains that Mr Barilla's mistake was simply to reveal the company's communication strategy

[www.linkiesta.it/boicottabarilla], mistake that other brand, with a communication profile much more open-minded, however do not. About 8% of the tweets we selected strongly agreed with Ms Lucarelli supporting “the hypocrisy of #boicottabarilla”.

The majority of tweets we selected are ironic. For example, a tweet represents Barilla's board of directors as young “Balilla”, another reports a satirical video, where a republican american mother of Italian origins prepares a pasta dish for a traditional “criptofascista” family. While a few tweets refer to a music video against carbohydrates of Immanuel Casto, icon gay of porn grove, others make fun of a Barilla's commercial spot where famous actor Antonio Banderas lives familiarly with a chicken. On this regard a tweet recalls that the actor was a gay icon of Spanish movida. In other two tweets it was advertised a fake brand of pasta (pasta Garofalo) that would have supported gay friendly communication strategy.

Taken together, among all the tweets we selected, only the following invoke to take action:

- Let's help the campaign leaving sticky notes with the hashtag #boycottabarilla on supermarket shelves [author Bruno pumprunopompa, September 26, at 3:50; it follows a picture of sticky notes with the writing #boycottabarilla];

- I have read the apology of Mr Barilla. Are those words enough? No, we want actions. Commercial spot with gay family, thanks. #boicottabarilla [author Gatto Nergattonero, September 26, at 6:32];

- No Barilla pasta in my shopping basket #BoicottaBarilla [autore Russell W. Warnick @ russellwarnick, 26 settembre, ore 15.57];

- One more reason for not buying it ... http:// via @tirebouchon.tumblr.com/post/62330100284/da-twitter-boicottabarilla-boycottabarilla viatirebouchon [author AndreaPrimoBicchiere, September 27, 00.00];

- Guido Barilla: where there's love there's family http://www.change.org/it/petizioni/guido-barilla-dove-c-%C3%A8-amore-c-%C3%A8-famiglia?share\_id=RzbypAmetj&utm\_campaign=twitter\_link\_action\_box&utm\_medium=twitter&utm\_source=share\_petition ... Viachange #BOICOTTABARILLA [author Federico Baruffafedericobarutta; September 27, 05:43 hours].

This latest tweet is very important since it is connected to the online petition promoted by Italian Nobel prize in literature, Dario Fo, where he states the following: “Dear Guido (Guido Barilla), I appeal to you, since I believe you are now in the position to give back to Italy one of its symbol (Barilla group) and for your company to become ambassador of integration and voice of its president. I therefore ask you to do that with the next Barilla's commercial campaign where the family will finally be represented in its infinite and wonderful forms of our times “[www.change.org/p/guido-barilla-dove-c- % C3% A8-love-c- % C3% A8-].

Table 1 shows those tweets that have received a number of retweets greater than or equal to 5. It can be noted that the greater number of retweets are all placed in the first day.

Name	Date	Time	Content	Retweet	Preferred
<a href="#">Cotone Del Rey @lezhaveakiki</a>	<a href="#">26 set 2013</a>	03.55	@Barilla does not put gay couples in the ads because they believe in traditional family: a chicken and a former actor. #boicottabarilla	44	18
<a href="#">Costa d Gherardesca @CdGherardesca</a>	<a href="#">26 set 2013</a>	03.50	Barilla is a rich company. There's already active people on social networks aiming to defend Mr Barilla's statements. #boicottabarilla	40	30
<a href="#">Enzo @UnisonT</a>	<a href="#">26 set 2013</a>	07.35	Stop with homosexual. Traditional family is made by a mother and a father. A mother like Annamaria Franzoni (italian women accused to have killed her little child). #boicottabarilla	37	36
<a href="#">Sio @scottecs</a>	<a href="#">26 set 2013</a>	06.59	The great thing of doing a comic about #BoicottaBarilla is that when I read it again in a month I won't be able to remember what it was about	26	24
<a href="#">Eugenio Cipolla @EugCipolla</a>	<a href="#">26 set 2013</a>	05.08	Are those of #boicottabarilla the same people who complain that Italian companies are in crisis because they do not sell their products?	21	6
<a href="#">Iris Tinunin @IrisTinunin</a>	<a href="#">26 set 2013</a>	04.01	By the way their concept of “traditional family” is THE WOMAN IN THE KITCHEN. #BoicottaBarilla	12	10
<a href="#">Mauro Proietti @ProiettiMauro</a>	<a href="#">26 set 2013</a>	04.16	#boicottabarilla is a good tool to measure stupidity on #twitter. Take action!	11	4
<a href="#">Luke Sparrow @LukeSparrow</a>	<a href="#">26 set 2013</a>	12.06	Those who #boycottabarilla are those who boycott employees and their families. Then they all become hypocrites outraged syndicalists. #istaywithbarilla	8	3
<a href="#">Andrea Cappellini @Cappellini</a>	26 set 2013	15.05	Barilla prefers traditional family. In the next spot there will be a man a woman and the lover. #boicottabarilla	8	8
<a href="#">Andrea Di Sorte @andreadisorte</a>	<a href="#">26 set 2013</a>	06.14	#boycottabarilla, I will eat more than before!!!! In the face of those who go on strike!	7	5
<a href="#">Gatto Nero @gattoneo</a>	<a href="#">26 set 2013</a>	06.32	I have read the apology of @Barilla. Are those words enough? No, we want actions. Commercial spot with gay family, thanks. #boycottabarilla	7	1
<a href="#">Bruno Pompa @brunopompa</a>	<a href="#">26 set 2013</a>	03.50	One more reason for not buying it #boicottabarilla	6	2

Table 1  
According to our sampling the graph in Fig. 1 shows the frequency of tweets from day 1 onwards, every 2 hours. As can be noted there's a marked downward trend.

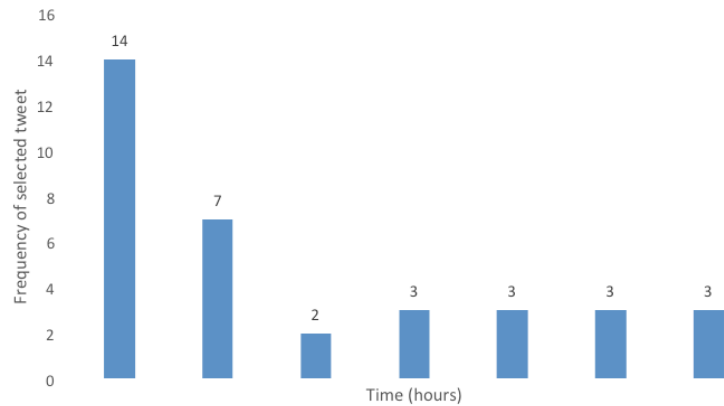


Figure 1.

In the first day of analysis we coded approximately (by multiplying by 10 the number of our sample of one every 10) 4 tweets every hour, in the second day, 20 and in the third 7 every hour: it is clear that the pick day was the third. Regarding Facebook we proceeded with a content analysis resulting in a Tag Cloud<sup>1</sup>. From Barilla’s official Facebook page we randomly sampled 200 comments in response to Guido Barilla’s video of apology posted on the 26th Sept 2013 [https://www.facebook.com/BarillaIT?fref=ts]. The time of sampling covers three days (26th, 27th, 28th) as for twitter sampling.



Figure 2. Barilla Tag Cloud.

From both the Tag Cloud (in the figure below) and qualitative analysis carried out reading the comments, it emerges that the family issue, whether it is traditional or homosexual, is of great importance for Facebook members. Importantly for our analysis, content-based analysis does not show words such as boycott or action.

**2.2 Moncler**

On the evening of November 4th 2014, Report, a famous Italian TV program of inquiry led by journalist Milena Gabanelli, broadcasts a documentary called “We are all geese” which reports animal and labour abuse in Hungary and Transistria. Animals were brutally plucked and poor quality material was used to manufacture duvets that were paid by Moncler one-thirtieth of the actual prize when sold on the Italian market. [www.report.rai.it/dl/Report/puntata/ContentItem-3e1844c1-87db-4948-b074-3715bb98e66a.html].

The broadcast on traditional media had an Audience of 3.14 million viewers and an audience share of 13.4 (data Auditel). The trigger event is represented by the corporate’s (Moncler) conduct that alters a status quo in the consciousness of consumers and focuses the attention of animal rights.

Social media response is immediate: Nielsen TV ratings, which reports the frequency of tweets relative to TV programmes, ranks the documentary as the 3th most tweeted with 15000 tweets seen 809600 times by 57300 viewers.

Regarding sampling methodology, we adopted the same methodology as for Barilla case. In contrast to Barilla case however, we first noticed that the hashtag #boycottmoncler did not appear. The reason why could be related to the fact that Moncler’s products are very expensive and therefore do not reach the vast majority of consumers as it was the case of Barilla pasta. We believe though that the company’s reputation was highly compromised as confirmed by the drastic drop of the stock market the days following the broadcast [www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/economia/2014/11/03/moncler-sconta-in-borsa-inchiesta-piume\_085d1b20-f8a1-471a-8df9-721210d44d67.html].

On November 2nd, the first tweet is from Report itself “Report @ reportrai3”, “How and where a duvet is made, Remo #Ruffini hopes one day we will call it Moncler #Moncler #Report »[12:56 hours]. This integrates traditional media with social ones.

From the preview appeared on Report web site, disagreement starts to appear, however tweets remain relatively low in that day, even during TV broadcasting (about 260 tweets, multiplying by 10 our sample of 16). November 3rd is instead the day of intense social hype: we saturated the target of 100 tweets at 09.10am (1000 multiplied by 10).

Three themes emerged from the qualitative analysis:

1. Those who did not buy Moncler’s products even before the broadcasting, such as the following tweets:
  - I do not buy the Hogan, let alone Moncler [author Federicaseipolpette, November 3, at 05:31
  - You show indignation about #moncler when until yesterday bought fake versions of Moncler’s

<sup>1</sup> We used the online software available at: <http://www.tagxedo.com/app.html>.

producs # jattarubbà [author Luigi Brizi LBrizi, November 3, at 05:54]  
 - Never had clothes by Moncler. Nevertheless, I also know how Gabanelli & C. work like FEATHER OF MONCLER <http://ita.moncler.com/news/la-piuma-di-moncler/> ... viamoncler [author Giovanni FavaGiovanniFava, November 3, at 08:46]

2. Those that refer to articles, comments of newspapers and blogs, eg:
  - #Moncler, Social networks do not forgive but forget. #report –Il Fatto Quotidiano <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/11/03/moncler-i-social-network-non-perdonano/1187998/> ... [author ofresiaeaullierre, November 3, at 05:58]
  - #Moncler “Virtual insults are not followed by the awareness of consumers” <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/11/03/moncler-i-social-network-non-perdonano/1187998/> ... [author Barbara CollevicchioColvieux, November 3, at 06:01]
  - Viral campaign against Moncler: “mistreats geese” (TWEET) <http://huff.to/1tzlpQw> viaHuffPostItalia [author Fabio Pariantefabiopariante, November 3, at 07:01]

3. Those who with indignant attitude refer to the TV programme that was uploaded on the TV programme’s website.

There were no forms of humour, if not sporadic and mild, nor calls to action. However, the critical mass of tweets was so intense to force Moncler to give a response, as it appears from the tweet of an economic channel:  
 -@Moncler: In Italy the company maintains collaborations with the best laboratories. Unreliable and misleading figures on markups reported by Report’s broadcast [authorclasscnbc Class CNBC, on November 3, at 06:46].

At 8:20am, a tweet reported the following message appeared on Moncler’s website: [Pier Luca Santoro @pedroelrey] “Press Release, 3th November 2014- Moncler, following the broadcast of Report on Sunday, November 2nd, specifies that all the feathers used by company come from highly qualified suppliers that adhere to the principles of EDFA (European Down and Feather Association), and which are contractually obliged to ensure that the principles for the protection of animals, as reported by the Moncler’s Code of Ethics are respected (section Governance in 6.4). These suppliers are today located in Italy, France and North America. There is thus no connection with the broadcasted strong images referring to breeders, suppliers or companies that operate improperly or illegally, which have been associated in a very instrumental manner to Moncler. “[Www.moncler.com/it/ news / the-feather-of-moncler /].

Meanwhile, at 07.24, we learned that Moncler had decided to take legal action:  
 - And finally, #Moncler replied: “No link with powerful images of Report, the company will protect itself in appropriate forums “[http://www.finanza.com/Finanza/Notizie\\_Italia/Italia/notizia/Moncler\\_nessun\\_legame\\_con\\_immagini\\_forti\\_di\\_Report\\_azienda-427931](http://www.finanza.com/Finanza/Notizie_Italia/Italia/notizia/Moncler_nessun_legame_con_immagini_forti_di_Report_azienda-427931) ...  
 We can now see that the reactions were from the company (press and lawsuits) and from the market

(fall in prices).  
 Again, we encounter the model: triggering event, traditional media, social media, and action.

Although an organized and conscious movement was not formed, the viral technology, connecting, sharing and co-operatingof social media has activated a leviathan, able to impact on the markets. An intentional will of boycott was not present since we believe this form of movement does not derive from the characteristics of the movement, but rather inherent in the medium. Table 2 contains the tweets relative to November 2nd, retweeted at least 10 times.

Name	Date	Time	Content	Retweet	Prefered
<a href="#">LAGGENTE @ SiamolaGente</a>	02-nov	14.13	THE PROBLEM OF #MONCLER ' IS THAT IF YOU BUY A FAKE, THIS CAN BE QUALITATIVELY BETTER THAN THE ORIGINAL. WPEPPE #REPORT	75	93
<a href="#">Report @reportrai3</a>	02-nov	12.56	How and where a duvet is made in the world, Remo #Ruffini hopes one day we'll call it #Moncler. #Report	37	22
<a href="#">Anna Rita Leonardi @AnnalLeonardi1</a>	02-nov	14.33	The #Moncler can relax, its buyers are not watching #Report. On Sunday evening, they join aperitif with Briatore!	33	37
<a href="#">Bauhaus @sajikur</a>	03-nov	23.52	before last night everyone thought that #Moncler duvets were stuffed with steel wool or other insulating materials #Report	27	24
<a href="#">Luca Bianchini @luca_bianchini</a>	02-nov	13.18	I don't desire to own a #moncler anymore #report #povereoché	21	30
<a href="#">E v e @ebbyit</a>	02-nov	13.21	9€ of poor quality feather, 30€ of materials, 40€ of labor and then the masses pay the jacket €800/1200. The smartest lives on the shoulders of the fools #Moncler	18	11
<a href="#">Silvia Di @silviade_marchi</a>	02-nov	13.48	#Prada, #Moncler e #Aspesi manufacture in Transnistria for 5€ hourly. With 30€ they manufacture clothing sold at 2000€. It tells @reportrai3	18	15
<a href="#">Annamaria Ferretti @annamariaferret</a>	02-nov	14.00	@matteorenzi do you still think it is the case of considering @remoruffini pride of the Made in Italy? #moncler offends the dignity of labor.	16	9
<a href="#">Dr.Apocalypse @ DrApocalypse</a>	02-nov	13.09	How to destroy #moncler and the hallucinatory world of luxury fashion - w Milena #Report	13	23

Table 2.



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## Exploring the link between Spirituality and Corporate Social Responsibility

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### Abstract

This paper explores the link between spirituality and CSR by drawing on the idea that a more cultural approach to CSR is needed in order to provide a deeper and more holistic understanding of individual, organizational and societal values that reflect and influence CSR in various cultures. This paper is conceptual in its nature and is based on the literature review of scholarly work on spiritual and religious dimensions of CSR. It suggests that spirituality and CSR can, in fact, relate to each other and that spirituality as well as religion can play a critical role in how people perceive, and practice, CSR. Three broad themes that emerge in the literature are identified and discussed. In addition, some main gaps in the literature reviewed, as seen by the author, are recognized with the aim to find new ideas for research and to open up new questions of how we can move the body of knowledge of CSR forward.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, spirituality, religion, culture

### 1. Introduction

Culture has always been considered an important element of core values in humans' lives that are reflected in people's attitudes and behaviors (Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede's (2001) findings about national and organizational culture showed that values are, in fact, culturally based, which speaks to the idea that culture can affect the competing values that people and organizations deal with, including those that are related to and drive corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Kim & Kim, 2010; Tobey & Perera, 2012). As CSR may vary depending on values that are embedded in culture, one should not undermine the importance of examining and understanding CSR perceptions, attitudes, and practices across different cultural contexts (Brammer et al., 2007; Kim & Kim, 2010; Shareef et al., 2014).

As inherent parts of culture, spirituality and religion have commonly been integrated into humanity and have influenced its progress over time (Ramasamy et al., 2010). Seele (2011) argued that everyday

decisions (whether personal, economic, political, military ...) are often motivated by and legitimated through religious convictions and backgrounds individuals may have. Moreover, religion, culture, core values, tradition, and history are all considered important traditional drivers for CSR (Habisch & Jonker, 2005). This suggests that spirituality and religion as core parts of many cultures can have critical implications for CSR values, perceptions, and practices. For instance, in the context of developing countries, Kochhar (2014) argued that the spirit and practice of CSR are "often reflective of the established communitarian ideals and religious notions" (p. 422).

While CSR has become common, if not taken-for-granted, concept in many developed countries (Bondy et al., 2012) and has gained a lot of attention in both academic and professional world (Angus-Leppan et al., 2010), spirituality has not been given a lot of attention in CSR research and practice (Bubna-Litic, 2009; Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2012). This might be due to the fact that CSR is often associated with "instrumental and utilitarian rationality", rather with a "deeper, noninstrumental, and nonutilitarian experience of life" in a form of spirituality (Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2012, p. 490). The dominant perspective in CSR research and practice has been business-oriented, emphasizing how corporations can do well financially by doing good (i.e., being responsible actors in the society) (Crane et al., 2008). Several scholars criticized such position and many supported the idea that there is a need to take into consideration cultural contexts that play a vital role in perception, legitimization, and practice of CSR (Pruzan, 2008; Bondy et al., 2012; Smith & Singer, 2012; Dhanesh, 2014). In this sense, spirituality and religion, too, have become important aspects of (socio)cultural contexts worth exploring in CSR research (Dhanesh, 2014). A brief look into the existing literature suggests that there is an emerging interest in and call for spirituality and religion in CSR domains, especially, if we take into consideration shifts in socioeconomic environment and changing stakeholder demands related to extended work hours, work motivation, searching for meanings of work, etc. (Fry, 2003; Hui, 2008; Bubna-Litic, 2009). Yet, many questions that have dealt with spirituality in the context of CSR in particular still provide a limited understanding of the role of spirituality in CSR and CSR practice. Moreover, several questions concerning the link between spirituality and CSR remain unanswered.

In this paper, we aim to explore this link by delving into the existing body of knowledge of spirituality, religion, and CSR, as well as other related areas and disciplines. While we primarily focus on spirituality, in our literature review we explore both spirituality and religion in CSR domains, as these two concepts are often defined with similar characteristics. Moreover, it has been oftentimes suggested that spirituality is a necessary part of religion (yet, not the other way around) (e.g., Fry, 2003). Therefore, our main purpose is to provide a brief overview of the literature and research on spirituality and religion in the field of CSR that will, hopefully, give us a better insight into the current knowledge and understanding of cultural aspects of CSR, including both spiritual and/or religious dimensions. Thus, we draw on the idea that a more cultural approach to studying CSR is needed in order to get a deeper and more holistic view of the interwoven individual, cultural, and societal values that may affect and reflect CSR across and within different cultures (Fry, 2003). In addition, this paper aims to explore new ways of looking at how individual values, as well as values that are embedded in culture, may be reflected in how people and organizations communicate CSR.

This paper is comprised of six main parts. Following this introduction, this paper first draws on scholarly work done in various research areas to explore the importance of spirituality in organizational settings, as well as the importance of a more culturally based approach to CSR that does not ignore or undermine spiritual and religious questions. Our next section explores how spirituality can be conceptualized and how various scholars see the distinction between spirituality and religion. Then, we focus on research on spiritual and religious aspects of CSR, recognizing and presenting the three broad themes that emerge in the literature. Our literature review is followed by the discussion, in which we reflect upon the readings and address some of the critical questions regarding to this particular area of research. In addition, we point out some main gaps in the literature that, in our view, could still be addressed and explored further. We conclude by summarizing the key findings from our literature review and provide some suggestions for future research on spirituality and CSR.

## 2. The emerging interest in spirituality and religion in organizations

Despite the fact that the interest in spiritual and religious questions related to workplace has grown in recent years, a relatively small amount of scholarly literature and research has been devoted to exploring spirituality and religion in the context of CSR specifically (Bubna-Litic, 2009; Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2012). Even in the older, and perhaps more established, fields such as management and leadership, questions concerning spirituality and religion in organizational settings remained unexplored, if not ignored, for a long time (Bubna-Litic, 2009). To some extent, this might still be the case today. For instance, Dent et al. (2005) observed that most of the texts on spirituality and leadership appear in popular press rather than in scholarly articles. Similarly, Bubna-Litic (2009) argued that the mainstream management discourse still dismisses or even resists spirituality to be included in organizational life.

There might be various reasons why these two specific components of humans' lives had been little explored in organizational and CSR contexts. One of the reasons might be the very conceptualization of spirituality as a complex, multilayered, and highly contested concept (Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2012; Ramasubramanian, 2014). In addition, drawing from Bubna-Litic (2009), there are three important aspects that lie in the heart of excluding spirituality from organizational (CSR) research. First aspect might be the economic system itself and its primary goal to make profit rather than caring about social issues and ethical values (Bubna-Litic, 2009). Second aspect might be separating religion from public institutions, particularly in Western societies, where religion is seen as a private domain, while work and economy are parts of a public domain of individuals' lives (Bubna-Litic, 2009). Third aspect might be that social scientists have simply overlooked spiritual and religious questions in their research, as they were busy struggling to gain their own legitimacy in the intellectual settings that were traditionally dominated by the natural sciences (Bubna-Litic, 2009, p. 2). The latter reason is not surprising. As argued by Stark & Finke (2000), even today many social scientists look down upon those who take religion seriously (p. 14).

Despite, the desire to explore the relationships between spirituality, religion and business organizations, and to learn how to integrate spirituality and religion into organizational life, has increased (Hui, 2008; Muniapan & Satpathy, 2013). In recent years, more scholars have expressed their interests in studying spiritual and religious questions in the fields of management, leadership, business ethics, and CSR. Several studies have focused on positive aspects of spirituality in organization settings, such as its effects on greater productivity in the workplace (see Dent et al., 2005). For instance, Fry (2003) argued that spirituality is necessary for organizational changes and learning and may lead to more commitment and productivity. Others (e.g., Pruzan, 2008; Corner, 2009; Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2012) have seen the need for more spiritual foundations in organizations in regard to business ethics and socially responsible behavior that is moving organizations away from solely business-oriented corporate practices. Drawing on Bouckaert and Zsolnai's view (2012), spirituality as "an inner experience of deep interconnectedness with all living beings" can move beyond "the pressures of the market and the routines of business as usual" (p. 490). This may lead to new ethical ideas and practices, the reestablishment of inherent motivation, and the pursuit of a more long-term orientation (Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2012). According to Corner (2009), key to unfolding the relationship between spirituality and business ethics is the notion of "connectedness", thus, considering and understanding the influence of individual's actions on other people (i.e., taking into account the entire collective and not just oneself) may lead to more ethical behavior. The questions, however, is what do we mean by being *spiritual*? As presented in the next section, when it comes to defining and conceptualizing spirituality, scholars as well as participants studied have used various definitions to describe its meaning (Hui, 2008).

## 3. Defining spirituality

### 3.1 Spirituality as a multilayered and contested concept

Like CSR (Dahlsrud, 2008; Moon, 2014), spirituality is a multifaceted, complex, and highly contested concept (Ammerman, 2013; Ramasubramanian, 2014). Bouckaert and Zsolnai (2012) argued that there is no standard definition of spirituality, as it is "experience-based" and therefore "a rich, intercultural and multilayered concept" (p. 491). They observed that among the most common characteristics that are being shared in many definitions of spirituality are reconnection to the inner self, search for universal values, empathy for all living beings, and willingness to keep in touch with the source of life (p. 491). Accordingly, inner identity, connectedness, and transcendence are three concepts that spirituality is mostly associated with (Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2012). Kolodinsky et al. (2010) wrote that spirituality is "an intrapersonal and metaphysical relationship with a higher power or transcendent force which provides motivation, purpose, and a sense of connectedness with others" (p. 171). Similarly, Rosnan et al. (2013) defined it as "a connection to something beyond the real world" that incorporates "a representation of transcendence" (p. 55). At a more organizational level, Kamoche and Pinnington (2012) discussed, rather critically, that the concept of *organizational spirituality* means "spirituality,



which is driven from the top and managed in a manner reminiscent of corporate culture” (p. 498).

Looking into the leadership aspects of spirituality, Fry (2003) and Fry's et al. (2005) described *spiritual leadership* as a way to intrinsically motivate individuals (e.g., employees) for the purpose of achieving some sort of organizational transformation that is based on the consensus among individuals in regard to organizational values, goals, and vision. In Fry's (2003) view, spiritual leadership is comprised of those “values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others” with the aim to get “a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership” (pp. 694-695). In this sense, two elements of spirituality may be present in organizational settings: transcendence (calling) and social connection (membership). While the first refers to how an individual might experience transcendence and give meaning to and value live or work through his or her services to others, social connection refers to searching for an understanding and appraisal through social and cultural interaction that is based on “altruistic love” (Fry, 2003). While some might associate the latter with religion, we shall see in the following section that there are, however, few characteristics of spirituality that scholars see as distinctive from religion.

### 3.2 The distinction between spirituality and religion

It comes with no surprise that Fry (2003) considered one of the main reasons for excluding spirituality from leadership and management research and practice being the confusion regarding the distinction between spirituality and religion. Literature suggests that spirituality is oftentimes related to, if not similar to, religion. For instance, Dent et al.'s (2005) analysis of 87 academic articles on *workplace spirituality* has shown that spirituality is mostly conjoined with religion. But while some may perceive spirituality as a close synonym for religious beliefs, others have argued that spirituality is not interchangeable with religion (e.g., Hodge, 2003; Solana, 2004; Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2012; Kamoche & Pinnington, 2012).

Hodge (2001, 2003) saw the difference between spirituality and religion in that spirituality is an intrinsic phenomenon that refers to an individual's relationship with God or Transcendence. Religion, on the other hand, is an external phenomenon that can be defined as a set of beliefs, practices, and rituals that are shared among people with similar existential experiences of transcendental reality, or with similar spiritualities (Hodge, 2001, 2003). In this sense, religion is considered to be more organized and institutionalized than spirituality (Hodge, 2003). Bubna-Litic (2009) defined spirituality as encompassing “something broader than religion, even if it returns us to some familiar religious questions” (p. 1). He argued that spirituality is a “new openness to our interiority” that can “invite” religion as a way of how people think about “fundamental issues that confront human existence in general” (p. 10). Similarly, Fry (2003) perceived spirituality as a broader term that describes an “inner quality” that can be independent of any religious belief system (pp. 705-706). He claimed that what both concepts, spirituality and religion, have in common is “altruistic love” or “appreciation for both self and others” (p. 712). He pointed to the ‘Golden Rule’ of ethical values that, according to him, can be found in all major religions. From this

perspective, spirituality seems to be a necessary element of religion, however, not *vice versa* (Fry, 2003).

Others (e.g., Muniapan & Satpathy, 2013; Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2012) also suggested that being spiritual does not necessary mean that one is also religious. Muniapan and Satpathy (2013) recognized that there are three main viewpoints of spirituality and religion in the organizational context: *intrinsic-origin view* (inner consciousness that lies beyond one's religion), *religious view* (spirituality that is specific to a particular religion), and *existentialist view* (exploring the meaning of work and existence of individuals in organizations). Bouckaert and Zsolnai (2012) agreed that spirituality is not exclusive within the context of institutionalized religions, but instead goes beyond their boundaries. They identified five functions of spirituality that may hold true for both believers and nonbelievers. In accordance with these functions, spirituality can be perceived:

- “as a transconfessional good and therefore a suitable platform for interreligious dialogue beyond the clash of religions and cultures;
- as a public and vulnerable good (and not just as a private matter) which as a public resource requires an appropriate form of public management;
- as a profane good that does not remove the spiritual to a separate level but integrates it as a component of political, social, economic and scientific activities;
- as an experience-based good that is accessible to each human being reflecting on his or her inner experiences of life;
- as a source of inspiration in the human and social quest for meaning” (p. 491).

Yet, on the other hand, Ammerman (2013) argued that there is no either-or distinction between spirituality and religion or “organized” religion, as the latter is commonly perceived as. Based on the empirical data, she concluded that spirituality is much more complex than being seen solely as “an individual experiential creation” or an alternative to religion that is “best measured by organizational belonging and tradition belief” (p. 276).

Importantly, Lips-Wireman and Morris (2011) made a critical point that in academia, as well as in management practice discourses, spirituality is often seen as something above religion in order to distance itself from the negative image of religion as being partisan, harmful, or dogmatic. They argued that spirituality might be more inclusive than religion as it seeks “to identify common ground and principles”, but also more democratic in a sense that it “leaves individuals free to choose their own beliefs and practices” (p. 326). Yet, there are several issues related to making such distinction: first, it ignores people without spiritual beliefs; second, it pays no attention to power relations within organizations; and third, it represents distinct worldviews of the authors, rather than speaking in more abstract terms – but without making those worldviews visible (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2011). Moving away from various definitions and views of spirituality, our next section focuses on the relationship between spirituality, religion and CSR.

## 4. Exploring the link between spirituality, religion, and CSR

While for a long time scholars have been interested in studying spirituality (Ammerman, 2013), the latter's link to CSR and CSR practices remains relatively little explored (Bubna-Litic, 2009; Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2012). The tendency to perceive and study CSR solely as a business case (Crane et al., 2008) and giving preference to instrumental and economic benefits of CSR, rather than relating CSR to “deeper, more fulfilling aspects of human and organizational life” (Pruzan, 2008, p. 557), may be seen as problematic from a more culturally based view of CSR that highlights the importance of (socio)cultural drivers of CSR (Dhanesh, 2014). Moreover, according to Smith & Singer (2012), corporations have often been ignorant to spiritual approaches in implementing CSR. Instead of emphasizing more humane corporate actions and behaviors, the current focus has been primarily on tangible and quantified goals and accomplishment (Smith & Singer, 2012). Pruzan (2008) wrote that there is something important missing in this “rush toward pragmatism” that focuses mainly on the operationalization of CSR (p. 553). Namely, “a sincere inquiry into what corporate leaders really mean when they speak of responsibility at the individual and organizational level” (p. 553). One could ask the same question about other organizational members, such as employees as potential ‘ambassadors’ for CSR in organizations (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2009), as well as various other stakeholders that play role in shaping CSR and who are (directly or indirectly) affected by corporate (ir)responsible practices.

In recent decades, major changes in the global economic and social environment have contributed to greater ethical concerns about the role and nature of corporations and their practices, including how corporations should operate and behave ethically, and how organizational and managerial practices could reflect more humane values (Stohl et al., 2007; Bubna-Litic, 2009; Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2012; Smith & Singer, 2012). Accordingly, several scholars (e.g., Pruzan, 2008; Corner, 2009; Smith & Singer, 2012) argued that CSR research and practice should give more attention to questions of spirituality and its role in organizational (CSR) contexts. Pruzan (2008) called for a more *spiritual-based perspective* of CSR that positions spirituality as a “firm basis for CSR” (p. 522). In line with this view, it is in the human nature that, as “spiritual beings”, people consciously or unconsciously seek truth about who they really are as individuals and as collectives (groups) (Pruzan, 2008). If one considers CSR as “doing what is right” (Pruzan, 2008), then spirituality might also be a source from which people seek answers to questioning their ‘right-doing’ (Bubna-Litic, 2009). Yet, since there are no strict sets of rules of what is right in CSR, spiritual inquiry may also go beyond the creation of rules and “challenge us to meet the open-ended question ‘What is it good to be?’” (Bubna-Litic, 2009, p. 12).

Despite the fact that there seems to be more research on religion and its link to CSR than there is on spiritual aspects of CSR, several scholars (e.g., Aribi & Gao, 2011; Dhanesh, 2014) saw that religion and religious teachings – in many cases important sociocultural drivers of CSR – should be addressed and explored more in CSR research as well. To respond to such needs, this paper explores how *both* spiritual and religious questions are being addressed and discussed in the existing scholarship on CSR. Our limited review of scholarly articles on spirituality, religion and CSR suggests that three broad themes appear in the literature: the exploration of religious

texts and religious teachings and the analysis of how these comply with and relate to CSR; the exploration of how religion and individuals’ religiosity may reflect and affect CSR attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and practice; and the exploration of the role of spirituality in individuals’ perceptions of and attitudes toward CSR. Accordingly, we illustrate main topics, research questions, and findings within each of these three themes.

### 4.1 Religious texts and religious teachings in the context of CSR

Organized religion and religious doctrines have always played an important role in establishing and dispersing moral, ethical, and spiritual values and principles (Brammer et al., 2007). In studying CSR across different religions, many scholars turned to sacred texts, teachings, and myths to explore how religious thoughts and belief systems relate to CSR values. Analyzing Christian sacred texts, Hui (2008) was interested in the common standards of CSR and how these can be reflective of Christian values in business organizations. He argued that the examined Christian approaches to responsibility might refine the existing CSR conceptions into what he named “faith-based CSR.” Beekun and Badawi (2005) explored the link between spirituality and ethical responsibility in the context of Islam from a stakeholder perspective. Looking into sources of normative Islam, they found that values that the Islamic ethical systems and CSR share are justice, balance, trust, and benevolence. Aribi and Gao (2011) explored how Islam influences CSR and CSR disclosure. Given that religion may serve as “a foundation in enlightening why organizations should engage in CSR and disclose CSR information” (p. 200), they analyzed how Islamic financial institutions in the Gulf region disclose CSR. Williams and Zinkin (2010) questioned whether the teachings of Islam (tenets) are consistent with the ten principles of the United Nation Global Compact, one of the largest CSR and corporate sustainability initiatives in the world. They found out that not only they are in close conformity, but tenets also go beyond the minimum standards of the Global Compact framework. Gupta and Gupta (2008) also looked into religious teachings to find out how they comply with the UN Global Compact principles. Instead, they focused on the preaching of Vivekananda, taking it as the Indian philosophical context of CSR, and argued that many Indian business organizations are already working in line with the Global Compact principles. Muniapan and Satpathy (2013) were interested how Bhagavad-Gita (BG) as philosophy and religious and spiritual text of Hinduism relates to CSR. Specifically, they looked at how the concepts of ‘dharma’ (duty) and ‘karma’ (action) could be applied to the context of CSR. According to the authors, BG provides “an inside-out approach to CSR” and suggests that CSR should begin “individual social responsibility” (ISR) and then go beyond CSR to reach so-called “global social responsibility” or “GSR” (p. 173).

### 4.2 How religion and individuals’ religiosity reflect and affect CSR

When it comes to religion, one of the main foci of scholars has also been the questions of how religion may reflect CSR values and influence the ways individuals perceive and practice CSR (e.g., Brammer et al., 2007; Ramasamy et al., 2010; Dincer & Dincer, 2013; Jamali & Sdiani, 2013). Moreover, when, where, and how can religion be seen as a driver of CSR (e.g., Vives,

2006; Dhanesh, 2014)? Scholars have looked at various cultures across the world to examine the relationships between religion and perceptions and attitudes toward CSR. Research has shown that people that are more religious have a broader understanding of CSR compared to individuals that are not spiritual or religious (see Muniapan & Satpathy, 2013). For example, Brammer et al. (2007) analyzed the relationship between individual religious affiliations and people's attitudes towards CSR among 17,000 individuals from 20 countries. Their study suggested that religion could play a significant role in how individuals perceive CSR. Moreover, there were differences in attitudes toward CSR among people from different religions (Brammer et al., 2007). Ramasamy et al. (2010) were interested in how religiosity and religious values affect CSR support among consumers in Singapore and Hong Kong. They found out that religiosity had a significant impact on CSR support among consumers, meaning, that that religious people were more inclined to support CSR activities of companies and were more likely to spend more money on products and services offered by socially responsible companies (Ramasamy et al., 2010). Jamali and Sdiani (2013) wrote that little attention had been given to specific types and levels of religiosity, and the potential CSR applications. In their study, they examined how intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity influenced CSR orientations among business professionals in Lebanon with Muslim or Christian religious beliefs. The authors found no significant differences between business managers of both religions and their CSR attitudes. Their study also showed that both social extrinsic religiosity and intrinsic religiosity were related to a broader perspective of CSR. As they concluded, it was the level and type of religiosity that influenced business professionals' orientations and attitudes towards CSR, not religion or religious affiliations (Jamali & Sdiani, 2013). Similarly, Mawereeuw et al. (2014) were interested in how Christian religiosity influenced attitudes toward CSR and CSR behavior. Their study showed a positive relationship between intrinsic religiosity and ethical CSR attitude, and a negative relationship between intrinsic religiosity and financial CSR attitude. Likewise, Chatjuthamard-Kitsabunnarat et al. (2014) did an empirical study based on more than 17,000 observations across 16 years to test the link between religious piety and CSR. They suggested that religion could motivate managers to treat other people more favorably, which may lead to stronger CSR. Their findings revealed that religious piety positively affects CSR – however, only beyond a certain degree of religious piety. Other studies also addressed the link between religion and CSR. Dincer & Dincer's study (2013) showed that religion influenced how SME executives in Turkey made decisions that concern CSR practices. Vives (2006) discussed that ethics and religion were among the most common driving factors for CSR of Latin American SMEs.

#### 4.3 The role of spirituality in individuals' attitudes toward CSR

In addition to religion-related research on CSR, some studies explored the link between *spirituality* and perceptions of and attitudes toward CSR. Research showed different results in terms of significance of the relationship between spirituality and CSR attitudes. For example, Kolodinsky et al. (2010) used Forsyth's (1992) "personal moral philosophy model" to study business students in the United States and their attitudes toward CSR. Ethical idealism,

ethical relativism, materialism, and personal spirituality were examined. Their findings showed that spirituality did not significantly influence students' attitudes towards CSR, whereas ethical idealism had a positive relationship with CSR attitudes. Both ethical relativism and materialism were negatively related to CSR attitudes. Rosnan et al. (2013) were also interested in whether there was a positive relationship between these four dimensions and future business leaders' CSR attitudes. Their sample represented business students in Malaysia. The findings indicated that ethical idealism and materialistic value had significant influence toward CSR, while ethical relativism and personal spirituality had no significant influence on CSR. A similar study done by Poulton and Barnes (2012) among business students in Australia also revealed that students with strong spiritual beliefs did not have strong beliefs about the nature of CSR in business. Using different spirituality measurement, Fitzpatrick and Cheng (2014) investigated the perceptions of CSR among undergraduate students in the United States and Hong Kong. Respondents who agreed that they believe God were considered "spiritual". The authors found a significant difference in spirituality between students from both places. Whereas the majority (56%) of American students agreed with being spiritual in this sense of a term, only 31% of students from Hong Kong agreed that they have faith in God. In addition, the authors found out that spirituality was more strongly related to CSR and ethics perceptions than culture, gender, and other factors.

The above examples illustrate that so far scholars have taken different approaches and perspectives and have used different measurements and methodology to study link between spirituality/religion and CSR across various cultures and countries. In the next section, we discuss some of the key ideas presented here and aim to uncover some gaps in the literature in order to make suggestions for future research on spirituality (religion) and CSR.

## 5. Discussion

This brief overview of the existing body of knowledge on spirituality, religion and CSR confirms that spirituality and religion are, indeed, emerging and compelling topics in CSR research and related areas that are worth further exploration. Studies (e.g., Brammer et al., 2007; Jamali & Sdiani, 2013) have shown that both spirituality and religion can be related to CSR and may play vital roles in individuals' attitudes toward CSR. Moreover, research on how spiritual orientation and internalized religious beliefs may comply with 'universal' CSR values and standards, such as those defined by the UN Global Compact (e.g., Gupta & Gupta, 2008; Williams & Zinkin, 2010), suggests that spiritual and religious dimensions of CSR should not be ignored nor neglected in CSR research and practice.

As socioeconomic environment in which organizations operate, including global workplace, are becoming more multicultural (Brammer et al., 2007; Varner & Beamer, 2008), a better understanding of values, attitudes, and behaviors among individuals from different cultures and diverse spiritual and religions backgrounds is also becoming more important (Ramasamy et al., 2010). While one could agree that the current literature is quite diverse in terms of addressing

how different religions relate to CSR, not all religions have received (equal) attention among scholars. To our own knowledge, most of the existing research has been focused on Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. However, it seems that many other religions, as well as specific religious denominations, have not been explored so far, at least not extensively. Considering Brammer et al.'s (2007) argument that religious individuals have a broader view of CSR than people who are not religious, it would be interesting to find out how CSR is perceived by people with religious beliefs that have not yet been studied. Moreover, taking into account potential influence of one culture on another, scholars might need to look beyond religion and rather focus on the level of religiosity and its link to CSR, as suggested by Jamali and Sdiani (2013). One way to analyze this relationship among people coming from diverse spiritual and religious backgrounds might be to take a closer look at the so-called "Golden Rule" and its emphasis on "others" (rather than on individuals only) (Fry, 2003).

Drawing on Ramasamy et al. (2010), both religion and spirituality may impact individuals' values, attitudes, and behavior, for they can provide "the background for ethical evaluation" either by emphasizing or downsizing certain values (p. 62). A more comprehensive understanding of values that are grounded in individuals' spiritual and religious orientation is therefore critical, as values may affect how people perceive, practice, manage, and evaluate CSR behavior (Kim & Kim, 2010; Williams & Zinkin, 2010; Tobey & Perera, 2012; Srisuphaolarn, 2013). Our literature review revealed that values of organized religions and religious doctrines may all comply with CSR values. In regard to the question of how religion and religiosity may relate to CSR at an *individual* level, several other studies (e.g., Brammer et al., 2007; Jamali & Sdiani, 2013) have shown that people who are (more) religious tend to have a broader understanding of CSR. More religious individuals also tend to be more ethically- and CSR-oriented when it comes to decision-making (Brammer et al., 2007). This suggests that in some cultures, or for some people, religion might, indeed, be an important *driver* of CSR (Dhanesh, 2014).

Literature presented in this paper that addressed the link between *spirituality* and CSR, however, revealed slightly different results. Studies done by Kolodinsky et al. (2010), Poulton and Barnes (2012), and Rosnan et al. (2013) showed no positive significance concerning the relationship between students' spirituality and their attitudes toward CSR. The importance of these studies should not be undermined. Rather, we see that expanding this program of research to other cultures and countries would be interesting. We agree with Kolodinsky et al. (2010) that students' perceptions and attitudes toward CSR is highly important, as these students might as well be our future (business) leaders. Moreover, an interesting aspect to take into consideration would be to study people of various age groups to see whether people of older ages would perceive CSR differently. We believe that in some cultures generational differences may play an important role when it comes to examining individual spirituality and its relation to CSR. The expansion of such studies to explore spirituality-CSR link among individuals from different age groups would be valuable in this regard.

Our review also suggests that more attention should be given to conceptualization of spirituality vis-à-vis religion. Since spirituality is experience-based (Bubna-Litic, 2009) and can

mean different things to different people, some individuals may perceive spirituality as part of religion, whereas others may not, including scholars (Pruzan & Pruzan Mikkelsen, 2007). Moreover, defining spirituality as a belief in God (e.g., Fitzpatrick & Cheng, 2014) might eliminate those people who consider themselves spiritual, but do not believe in God. Considering closely how to define spirituality might be an important factor in conducting and drawing conclusions from our research, as our findings might be determined by the very conceptualization of the observed phenomenon. We see that one way to overcome this problem in empirical research is to ask our participants to provide their own definitions and views of spirituality (such as in Pruzan & Pruzan Mikkelsen, 2007).

The above discussion raises important questions concerning the underpinning philosophies and worldviews that might have both positive and negative consequences and implications for individuals, organizations, or even society (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2011). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's social theory, Kamoche and Pinnington (2012) took a critical approach to study discourses on organizational spirituality, questioning *why* spirituality and studies in this area are "being pursued, by *whom*, and *for what* ideological ends" (p. 498; italics added). They highlighted concerns such as the danger of imposing and prescribing religious and spiritual values on organizational members (e.g., in a form of ideological control by managers). Moreover, they saw that ignorance of such potentially problematic ideological angles on scholars' sides might be another concern. In addition to imposing spiritual and religious beliefs on and taking control over others, Bubna-Litic (2009) wrote that the perception of spirituality being a form of delusions that avoids or denies reality might be problematic as well. Questioning how theoretical and practical discourses on spirituality are framed is therefore important and should be critically examined further to avoid such biases (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2011; Kamoche & Pinnington, 2012).

## 6. Conclusion and future research

It seems that only in more recent years scholars have begun to explore spiritual and religious views of CSR, despite the fact that culture, core values, and religion are all considered important traditional drivers for CSR (Habisch & Jonker, 2005; see also Vives, 2006; Aribi & Gao, 2011; Dhanesh, 2014). Taking into account that CSR is a relatively new area of research that has predominately been studied from economic and instrumental, rather than humane and cultural, angles (Crane et al., 2008; Smith & Singer, 2012), this is not surprising. Both scholarship and practice have oftentimes been criticized for ignoring or undermining more culturally based approaches to CSR (Dhanesh, 2014).

Reflecting upon the literature, several questions concerning spirituality and CSR still remain open for further exploration. Several studies have looked into the perceptions of and attitudes towards CSR influenced by individuals' spiritual orientations or religious beliefs. Yet, there is still little empirical evidence that would explore spirituality and religion as the potential *drivers* of CSR. Looking into spirituality in particular, many scholars have, indeed, taken a rather

conceptual approach to discuss the importance of spirituality in driving and affecting CSR. While the contribution of the current scholarly work should not be undermined, one could argue that the scholarship on spirituality and CSR is still in its early stages. More empirical evidence is needed to see whether and how spirituality may influence the actual CSR behavior and practices at both *individual* (i.e., employees, managers, other stakeholders) and *organizational* (i.e., collective) levels. As suggested above, a more cultural approach to study CSR may offer a deeper and more holistic view of interwoven cultural, social, and personal values that may affect and reflect CSR across and within different cultures (Fry, 2003).

Given the limited nature of this paper, it is important to mention that several questions have not been discussed throughout this paper. Above all, more work should be done in exploring and comparing the existing theories of and approaches to spirituality in organizational contexts, such as spiritual leadership, work spirituality, religiosity at work, applied spirituality, mindfulness, etc., as these areas could help us better understand the various dimensions and aspects that could be taken into account in further exploration of the social phenomenon in question. Scholars should also look more closely into historical, political, economic, and cultural contexts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of spiritual and religious values in various cultures. It would be interesting to see whether and how major trends, such as globalization, the rise of multinational corporations, climate change, global health problems, etc., might have affected individuals and organizations (their values) within and across different cultures. In addition, more attention should be given to defining what is CSR and what do individuals, including scholars, mean by socially responsible behavior and socially responsible practices. It is important to mention that even in the literature on spirituality and its relation to CSR, the definition and understanding of CSR may vary. Last but not least, given that this paper is limited in the way that it does not provide a more systematic and detailed analysis of the existing literature on spirituality (religion) and CSR, a more thorough analysis of this emerging area of research is required, looking beyond the concept of CSR.

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## European Public Relations in the Networked Society. 'One of many' model- Online PR in EU study

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### Introduction

For the past 15 to 20 years, most of the mass communication processes have been, to a larger or smaller extent, influenced by the emergence of the Internet. This new medium, in fact an aggregation of several other media, which is used by approximately one third of the globe's population, couldn't have passed unnoticed by the communication industries.

Public relations are no exception and they too turned to these channels to convey their messages to their target audiences. Making use of this medium has brought along new challenges and raised new questions in any research on PR. Has this medium changed the public relations activity? Has it remained the same? Are the objectives or the way they are pursued the same? If so, how and how much? Has the framework of reference undergone changes too? Have new processes appeared in the PR activity? That is to say, "Did significant changes occur in the public relations activities brought along by the emergence of the Internet? If so, what are these changes?" The lack of answers to these numerous questions obliges, building on the demands of an ever-developing market and the related need for skilled staff, the academic environment and the public relations researchers to find the necessary answers and systematize these answers into a coherent theoretical framework. Such systematization comes to the aid of both those who prepare themselves to work in this industry, and those who embrace an on-going training as a way of keeping up with the changes or the developments in the industry they serve.

In a nutshell, the academic environment and researchers have the duty to identify the potential changes occurred, and, by adequate theorization, to provide on-going support for the best possible training of the future public relations specialists.

In this context, a research looking into the potential changes occurred in the field is not only desirable, but imperative to avoid the risk of the current theoretical framework becoming obsolete. The hypotheses we aimed to research were:

- Public relations activity has been significantly affected further by the emergence of the Internet and its development.
- Online communication channels have become decisive communication channels for public relations activities.
- Online communication makes use of a social and communication pattern in which organizations communicate informally, interactively, and horizontally.

### Methodology

In the context of a networked society and the online social systems which resulted from the availability of a global communication network, the social actors have adapted to the requirements of a new functional setting. Organizations started to employ virtual projections in their online social systems, that is the so-called 'caterva' (in Latin, 'caterva' stands for a group, an association of individuals) social actors which carried both their messages, and their interests to the virtual environment. As corporate communication rests with the public relations department, adaptability to such changes has been naturally entrusted to this function.

As Ye and Ki (2012, 409) noticed, there are an increasing number of studies on how public relations have evolved in this relatively new and definitely special social context, but, as Vercic D., Vercic A., and Siriamesh K. emphasized in their work on the new communication opportunities and the impact thereof on public relations, „we need to stop and think about these tools [...]. It is far from clear what this domain is all about" (2015, 142). This field still needs coherent theoretical constructions in order to allow professionals easier adaptation, and provide future PR specialists with an adequate introduction in the current specifics of corporate communication.

In order to support the effort of assembling an applied and coherent theoretical construction, the analysis I will conduct aims to look into the way public relations have adapted to the social, economic and communication models imposed by today's networked society. I hypothesize that a first useful step would be to "X-ray" the way organizations are currently communicating, to learn whether they use the virtual environment, and, if so, to what extent, what are the communication tools of their choice and what communication and interaction typologies are employed. In the given context, an empirical research undertaken by the very public relations specialists could prove revealing and, consequently, useful for a review of the aforementioned aspects.

**Research area.** To research the hypotheses listed above, I decided to turn to PR practitioners with a questionnaire about how PR activity has evolved in the context of the interconnected society. For the best possible coverage of the industry, the questionnaire was applied to the specialists working in the 27 countries which were, at the time of the research

planning, EU Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Great Britain, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Hungary.

To limit the costs incurred with covering such a large space, as well as to render answering the question easier for the subjects, we decided to apply an online questionnaire. This approach offers important benefits against the written or verbal questionnaire: speed, low costs, geographical coverage, flexibility in terms of the place and time of filling it out, easy reach of the target audiences, mitigation of the risk of interviewer being influenced, the risk of the errors which could occur when entering the data is considerably reduced, it allows for an easy and efficient collection of the data (answers are stored automatically in a database, easy to analyze and interpret at a future time), accurate setting of the period of time during which the questionnaire is available for filling-out, attractive design.

**Research implementation.** The objective set for the research was to determine the way public relations have adapted to the networked society by checking their status with the professionals working in the EU Member States. The research was titled “Online PR in EU”, and a website with the same name was launched: [www.onlinePRinEU.org](http://www.onlinePRinEU.org).

The indicated website included the questionnaire which aimed to research the hypotheses listed before, using the technical infrastructure of SurveyMonkey.com.

The research undertaken on [www.onlinePRinEU.org](http://www.onlinePRinEU.org) enjoyed the support of many professional organizations in the countries that were covered, and I take this opportunity to extend our acknowledgments for their involvement to: Belgian Public Relations Consultants Association (BPRCA), Federation SYNTEC - France, Estonian Public Relations Association (EPRA), Public Relations Verband Austria (PRVA), Komora – Czech Republic, Asociación de Directivos de Comunicación (Dircom) – Spain, Deutschen Public Relations Gesellschaft (DPRG) – Germany, Vereniging voor Public Relations Adviesbureaus (VPRA) – the Netherlands, as well as the Romanian Association of Public Relations Professionals (ARRP).

In addition to the indicated professional associations, the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management showed their interest in this research, thus certifying the need and usefulness of a study on this specific topic for the PR industry.

For best representativity and consistent coverage of the countries, I pursued a minimum number of answers by reference to the number of inhabitants, as follows: in countries with more than 5.5 million inhabitants, we wanted at least 50 questionnaires answered; in countries with less than 5,5 million, but with more than one million inhabitants - minimum 30 answers, and in countries with less than one million, more than 10 answers - in this last case, we no longer pursued representativity, but first idea about the specifics of those countries and their participation in the desired sample at European level.

Thanks to the support received from the professional associations by promoting the study in technical publications, discussions groups on corporate communication on Facebook, LinkedIn or Xing, and many direct contacts (as many as 5,000 messages were sent to PR

specialists in EU Member States on LinkedIn alone), I collected 1,411 answers. These 1,411 filled in questionnaires secure a representative sample, with a sampling error of maximum +/- 2.6%, calculated for a confidence level of 95%.

An essential part in managing to collect this number of answered was also played by the targeted social or viral effect (using, for the purpose of this study, the benefits of the interconnected society), considering stimulation of the participants in the research to recommend the study to other acquaintances in the industry, and social promotion of the questionnaire that has a decisive contribution to obtaining this result.

I include below the number of answers obtained for each of the 27 studied countries, by reference to population and ranked according to the number of inhabitants.

Item no.	Country	Population	Questionnaires answered	Persons/questionnaire
1	Germany	82,369,548	57	1,445,080
2	France	64,057,790	64	1,000,903
3	Great Britain	60,943,912	58	1,050,757
4	Italy	58,145,321	58	1,002,506
5	Spain	40,491,051	63	642,715
6	Poland	38,500,696	56	687,512
7	Romania	22,246,862	144	154,492
8	the Netherlands	16,645,313	61	272,874
9	Greece	10,722,816	61	175,784
10	Portugal	10,676,910	58	184,085
11	Belgium	10,584,534	53	199,708
12	Czech Republic	10,220,911	57	179,314
13	Hungary	9,930,915	64	155,171
14	Sweden	9,045,389	55	164,462
15	Austria	8,205,533	52	157,799
16	Bulgaria	7,262,675	96	75,653
17	Denmark	5,484,723	52	105,475
18	Slovakia	5,455,407	34	160,453
19	Finland	5,244,749	38	138,020
20	Ireland	4,156,119	45	92,358
21	Lithuania	3,565,205	39	91,416



22	Latvia		2,245,423		32		70,169
23	Slovenia		2,007,711		42		47,803
24	Estonia		1,307,605		31		42,181
25	Cyprus		792,604		13		60,970
26	Luxembourg		486,006		13		37,385
27	Malta		403,532		15		26,902
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>491,199,260</b>		<b>1411</b>		<b>348,121</b>

What is relevant in this effort is the number of PR specialists. In his research “How Big Is Public Relations?”, after having reviewed the data made available by the authorities in the United States, Italy and United Kingdom, Toni Muzi Falconi concluded that the number of PR professionals differed based on economic development and industry (public or private): from one specialist at 700/1.000 inhabitants - to one at 2,000/5,000 inhabitants (Falconi, 2006, 7-8). Linking these estimates with the data of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations which, following the survey “PR Today” undertaken by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (PR Today, 2005, 18), estimated that there were 48,000 specialists in the United Kingdom (that is, one specialist at approximately 1,350 inhabitants), we approximated an average of one PR professional at 2,000 inhabitants in the countries under review.

For a total population of 491 million in the 27 countries covered, as per the average value proposed above, we have around 245,000 PR specialists.

When compiling the questionnaires, we preferred questions with predefined answer alternatives to the detriment of open questions which, although allowing for more complete answer alternatives, are more difficult to evaluate and interpret, in particular against a database with approximately 1,500 answers. This approach supported measurement of certain aspects, such as, for instance, the use of the online environment in public relations activities. Considering the limitations in terms of time and human resources (this research being conducted by one person), I looked for solutions, which allowed me to carry out and complete the research in the circumstances described above. It is worth underlining that the volume of the data collected further in the research “Online PR in EU” – approximately 45,000 entries - allows for multiple interpretations and analyses, and what I report on here is what I found to be the most relevant findings.

## Results

### Online communication as a prevailing component of corporate communication

Further to the review of the database with answers obtained from the 27 countries, possibly the main answer I got from PR practitioners is: today, online communication is the key communication component of PR.

Region	Percentage of using online communication in PR
Austria	57.10%
Belgium	50.40%
Bulgaria	61.05%
Cyprus	68.54%
Czech Republic	54.97%
Denmark	58.30%
Estonia	51.61%
Finland	53.95%
France	63.59%
Germany	55.65%
Greece	56.50%
Hungary	61.28%
Ireland	57.01%
Italy	61.97%
Latvia	56.67%
Lithuania	56.12%
Luxembourg	59.08%
Malta	64.47%
Netherlands	52.66%
Poland	59.74%
Portugal	61.28%
Romania	62.56%
Slovakia	57.35%
Slovenia	55.71%
Spain	63.01%
Sweden	59.44%
United Kingdom	57.46%
EU	58.61%

Use of online communication in PR in the European Union

According to “Online PR in EU” survey, approximately 59% of the PR activity across Europe takes place on Internet.

Before dwelling deeper into the results, I want to make a few clarifications in relation to this research. I am aware of the fact that this research is subject to some limitations. For instance, more could have been done in what representativity is concerned: the country reviews have a significant error margin (for instance, unlike the overall European one, where the error margin is smaller, namely +/- 2.6%), but, in order to take into account the cultural specifications, I will interpret the results obtained and a deeper analysis would be covered in subsequent surveys. However, I find it important that I present the findings, despite their limitations, as they provide insights into the practicalities of the industry, and thus into the changes that the PR industry is undergoing..

**Profile of online communication in Public Relations activity**

The networked society has brought along major changes in most of the activities specific to the 21st century. The social, economic fields, as well the means of communication or interaction of the social actors have been affected by changes. These changes were expected to reflect also in the way organizations communicate. According to “Online PR in EU”, 87% of the PR specialists questions consider that PR have changed much or very much as a result of Internet development, this perception being relatively consistent across all EU countries.

Region	The activity has changed Very much or much	The activity has changed little or not at all
Austria	81%	15%
Belgium	77%	17%
Bulgaria	94%	4%
Cyprus	92%	8%
Czech Republic	79%	18%
Denmark	81%	13%
Estonia	74%	23%
Finland	84%	16%
France	91%	6%
Germany	84%	14%
Greece	92%	7%
Hungary	89%	8%
Ireland	80%	20%
Italy	93%	5%
Latvia	94%	6%
Lithuania	95%	5%

Luxembourg	85%	15%
Malta	100%	0%
Netherlands	82%	15%
Poland	93%	7%
Portugal	95%	3%
Romania	86%	10%
Slovakia	82%	18%
Slovenia	88%	12%
Spain	92%	6%
Sweden	91%	9%
United Kingdom	88%	10%
EU	87%	10%

Perception of PR specialists in the EU countries of the changes in the specific activities further to mass online communication

Across the studied part of the Europe, approximately 59% of the PR activity happens online. This may appear as an unexpectedly high percentage. It is obvious that online communication accounts for more than half of the PR activity in all studied countries, this situation being the outcome of the pressure put by the communication expectations of the public, with almost 72% of the respondents stating that Internet development has led to higher expectations of the public for the organizations to exchange messages with them. Besides this phenomenon, other factors identified as influencing and driving this state of facts are, in order: speed of communication - 25.5%, possibility of direct communication - 24.2%, interactivity - 14.7%, and effectiveness of this media - 14%. If not much needs to be said about the speed of communication, as this is manifest, the developments in direct communication, however, require some detailing. Before the retail boom, the PR specialists used to communicate with their target audiences mainly via third parties. Either magazines, radio or TV stations, or opinion leaders they tried to reach, the messages of the organization were filtered by other entities, other social actors, and ended up, to a very high extent, at their mercy as they eventually decided whether to forward these messages to the audiences targeted by the PR specialists or not. Maybe the biggest change Internet caused to PR was to offer organizations the possibility of to carry out direct mass communication. Such opportunity to convey messages pose a lower risk of message alteration. Or the risk of not being conveyed at all (not even with major alterations). These were probably the reasons why close to 25% of the European PR specialists surveyed in “Online PR in EU” stated that direct communication was a decisive factor for the changes occurred in their work. As shown above, only speed of communication slightly outranked the possibility of conveying the desired messages to the target audiences directly. Interactivity brought along by this new media is also featured as playing an important part in the decision to use online communication. In this context, we are convinced that

the possibilities extended by Internet of to mass communicate directly also another bidirectional or multidirectional aspect of novelty have been adopted and massively embedded into the corporate communication flow.

The importance of these factors is subject to a certain cultural influence at regional level, but the differences are not spectacular. Thus, importance of the speed of communication ranges between 32.1% of total factors in Austria and 19.3% of total in Spain. The possibility of communicating directly with the audiences was rated as more important in Spain - 28.7%, and less important in Slovenia, where it accounted for only 19.6% of the answers. For Germany, interactivity appears less important, this factor being indicated by 8.6% of total respondents. The upper limit is found in Latvia, where 23.7% listed interactivity as a relevant reason in turning to online communication. Although the differences may sometimes appear significant, the general orientation towards the same factors has led to the conclusion that these differences are not significant, but rather stand for an explication of the relatively flat economic development or locally flavored expectations. Still, although these cultural specificities do exist, in the end of the day, all the countries identified (in different rankings) the same three factors as catalysts of using the Internet in PR: speed of communication, possibility of direct communication, and the specific interactivity of this media. To conclude, we believe that countries display a consistent behavior in this respect, and basically embraces the same general values and orientations.

Region	direct communication with audiences	speed of communication	message interactivity	message multimediaity	enhancing the role of corporate communication	cost reduction	efficiency	other
EU	24.18%	25.52%	14.71%	7.66%	3.74%	9.86%	13.99%	0.33%
Austria	23.66%	32.06%	9.92%	9.92%	3.05%	8.40%	12.21%	0.76%
Belgium	21.09%	28.91%	14.06%	9.38%	0.78%	7.81%	17.97%	0.00%
Bulgaria	25.35%	27.19%	11.06%	5.99%	4.61%	8.76%	16.13%	0.92%
Cyprus	16.67%	29.17%	20.83%	8.33%	8.33%	4.17%	12.50%	0.00%
Czech Republic	27.86%	25.71%	12.86%	11.43%	2.86%	9.29%	10.00%	0.00%
Denmark	31.15%	20.49%	15.57%	4.92%	4.92%	8.20%	14.75%	0.00%
Estonia	22.39%	31.34%	17.91%	2.99%	2.99%	5.97%	14.93%	1.49%
Finland	23.81%	25.00%	17.86%	4.76%	1.19%	9.52%	17.86%	0.00%
France	27.74%	24.52%	12.26%	9.68%	4.52%	9.03%	11.61%	0.65%
Germany	25.31%	30.25%	8.64%	12.35%	3.70%	4.32%	15.43%	0.00%
Greece	22.30%	21.62%	14.19%	8.11%	7.43%	14.86%	11.49%	0.00%
Hungary	21.05%	23.39%	21.05%	4.68%	2.92%	12.28%	14.62%	0.00%
Ireland	20.56%	30.84%	9.35%	7.48%	2.80%	13.08%	14.95%	0.93%
Italy	24.62%	22.31%	15.38%	7.69%	5.38%	11.54%	13.08%	0.00%

Latvia	21.05%	27.63%	23.68%	9.21%	1.32%	9.21%	7.89%	0.00%
Lithuania	25.26%	28.42%	17.89%	4.21%	1.05%	9.47%	13.68%	0.00%
Luxembourg	18.75%	21.88%	18.75%	9.38%	3.13%	12.50%	15.63%	0.00%
Malta	28.57%	22.86%	8.57%	2.86%	5.71%	11.43%	20.00%	0.00%
Netherlands	27.21%	25.74%	19.85%	7.35%	1.47%	4.41%	13.24%	0.74%
Poland	25.52%	26.21%	12.41%	8.97%	4.14%	8.97%	13.79%	0.00%
Portugal	26.24%	21.28%	15.60%	4.26%	5.67%	12.06%	14.89%	0.00%
Romania	20.85%	24.47%	12.99%	9.67%	4.23%	13.29%	14.50%	0.00%
Slovakia	22.89%	26.51%	18.07%	3.61%	1.20%	10.84%	16.87%	0.00%
Slovenia	19.61%	28.43%	15.69%	6.86%	2.94%	13.73%	12.75%	0.00%
Spain	28.67%	19.33%	15.33%	10.00%	4.00%	11.33%	11.33%	0.00%
Sweden	25.42%	27.12%	16.10%	5.08%	3.39%	4.24%	17.80%	0.85%
United Kingdom	22.06%	22.79%	17.65%	7.35%	5.88%	10.29%	11.76%	2.21%

Variation of the decisive factors for using online on corporate communication in the European Union

Although an important part in today's communication mix, accounting for little under 60% of the total, online does not enjoy the same attention when it comes to financing. Thus, the average budget for online accounts of only 32% of total PR budgets, with a manifest gap between usage and financing. This gap can also come from the lower costs of online communication and the pressure to cut down costs and make more use of the Internet for its attractive cost/benefit ratio. Another explanation for this difference could, however, come also from the lack of awareness of the importance of this channel on the part of the management who have the overall role on deciding on the budgets.

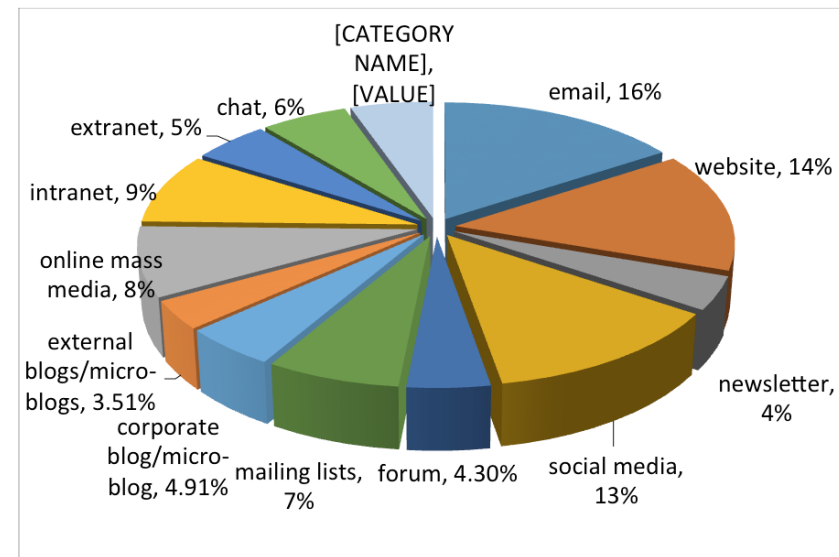
Region	usage average online communication in PR	average budget allocated to online communication in PR
Austria	57%	27%
Belgium	50%	28%
Bulgaria	61%	33%
Cyprus	69%	28%
Czech Republic	55%	29%
Denmark	58%	34%
Estonia	52%	26%
Finland	54%	37%
France	64%	34%
Germany	56%	36%
Greece	56%	31%
Hungary	61%	31%
Ireland	57%	35%
Italy	62%	30%
Latvia	57%	27%
Lithuania	56%	34%
Luxembourg	59%	32%
Malta	64%	36%
Netherlands	53%	31%
Poland	60%	35%
Portugal	61%	35%
Romania	62%	27%
Slovakia	57%	28%
Slovenia	56%	33%
Spain	63%	37%
Sweden	59%	29%
United Kingdom	57%	36%
EU	59%	32%

Usage vs. budget allocated to online communication in PR in the European Union

Internet emergence and development has not led only to one more communication channel available in the communication mix employed in PR. According to “Online PR in EU”, 87% of the respondents indicated that PR have changed very much or much as a result of Internet

emergence. This overwhelming percentage says a lot about how much Internet has changed the corporate communication. Therefore, a detailed look into the changes occurred is necessary in order to have the PR handbooks adapted and updated.

Another question this survey intended to answer is “what tools do PR specialists employ in their PR work?” and which are more important. The chart below shows the structure of online corporate communication.



The structure of the online communication mix

As it can be seen in the chart above, in most of the cases, with but insignificant differences, the three main online communication channels are, in this order: email - 15.8%, website - 14.4%, and social media - 12.9% of the time spent working online. These are followed, again in order, by Intranet, online media, direct mailing, chat, audio/video “over IP” communication, and Extranet (the latter with usage rate ranging between 8.5% and 5%).

In this context, we see that European countries seem to favor direct communication (conveying messages directly to the target audiences, and not via channels managed by third parties). Direct communication accounts for 88% of total online communication, significantly overtaking the 12% collected by indirect communication, the latter being implemented by sending messages via online media and third blogs or micro-blogs. In this respect too, the behavior of various organizations in the Member States is almost similar, with but very few percentages separating them when it comes to these two types of communication.

Region	Direct communication	Indirect communication
Austria	90.02%	9.98%
Belgium	91.72%	8.28%
Bulgaria	86.46%	13.54%
Cyprus	88.19%	11.81%
Czech Republic	88.09%	11.91%
Denmark	92.14%	7.86%
Estonia	88.64%	11.36%
Finland	89.71%	10.29%
France	86.09%	13.91%
Germany	88.37%	11.63%
Greece	88.10%	11.90%
Hungary	88.10%	11.90%
Ireland	84.27%	15.73%
Italy	87.44%	12.56%
Latvia	86.44%	13.56%
Lithuania	87.53%	12.47%
Luxembourg	91.89%	8.11%
Malta	90.11%	9.89%
Netherlands	91.60%	8.40%
Poland	87.50%	12.50%
Portugal	88.21%	11.79%
Romania	86.97%	13.03%
Slovakia	88.37%	11.63%
Slovenia	90.14%	9.86%
Spain	86.23%	13.77%
Sweden	87.46%	12.54%
United Kingdom	87.71%	12.29%
<b>EU</b>	<b>88.03%</b>	<b>11.97%</b>

Use of direct communication vs. indirect communication in PR online communication in the European Union

This study also analyzed the usage of three communication models (in respect of sending the messages and the content/attitude thereof): one-way communication, interactive-informal communication, and interactive-formal communication. One-way communication, is still the prevailing model, claiming 35.7% of total communication. Despite the model above remaining the main form of communication, interactive-informal communication with 32.3% and interactive-formal communication with 32% follow it closely, with but insignificant differences between them.

### One-way communication

Denmark takes the lead in applying this model with 41.7% of total communication, being rather orientated towards a formal and institutional tone of the messages of concern. Slovakia ends the ranking, as the one-way model is least used in this country with only 31.1% of total corporate communication.

### Interactive-informal communication

The friendly exchange of messages with the target audiences is ranked, as per the accounts of the European PR specialists, second as means of corporate communication. With an European average of 32.3% usage of this pattern, listing the countries which depart most from this average could prove interesting. The champion of using this communication model is Sweden with 38.8% of total communication. Slovakia, United Kingdom and Latvia stay above 35%. At the other end we find Belgium with 28.1%, and Malta, Denmark, Cyprus and Germany remain below 30% of the time dedicated to this typology out of total communication.

This type of communication originates in online chatting and, later on, the social networks. To this end, the statistical analysis confirmed the nexus between the rates of using of social media and applying the interactive-informal model. As an example, we can note how British and Slovakian organizations make significantly more use of the social media than other countries. If 48% of the organizations in the European Union use social media to communicate on a daily basis, more than 67% of the British organizations make use of this channel every day. Besides Slovakia, with approx. 59%, Hungarian organizations also stand out when it comes to daily use of social media, as reportedly 62.5% of these use communication via social networks every day. It's worth noticing that the organizations in Hungary, unlike those in the United Kingdom or Slovakia, despite using extensively communication via social media, have not oriented also to the interactive-informal as type of communication, although it is characteristic for this channel.

We include below a screenshot of the use of social media in PR in the EU:

Region	daily	a couple of times a week	a couple of times a month	once a month	never	I don't know/no answer
Austria	48.08	26.92	0.00	7.69	11.54	5.77
Belgium	37.74	24.53	9.43	7.55	7.55	13.21
Bulgaria	50.00	19.79	6.25	2.08	6.25	15.63
Cyprus	46.15	30.77	0.00	0.00	15.38	7.69
Czech Republic	40.35	22.81	12.28	3.51	5.26	15.79
Denmark	36.54	25.00	11.54	9.62	7.69	9.62
Estonia	45.16	16.13	9.68	3.23	3.23	22.58
Finland	34.21	31.58	13.16	2.63	2.63	15.79
France	42.19	34.38	7.81	3.13	1.56	10.94
Germany	47.37	31.58	14.04	1.75	3.51	1.75
Greece	54.10	16.39	9.84	6.56	1.64	11.48
Hungary	62.50	18.75	14.06	1.56	0.00	3.13
Ireland	55.56	13.33	4.44	2.22	8.89	15.56
Italy	46.55	20.69	8.62	1.72	6.90	15.52
Latvia	53.13	21.88	9.38	3.13	0.00	12.50
Lithuania	41.03	25.64	5.13	10.26	2.56	15.38
Luxembourg	23.08	30.77	15.38	15.38	0.00	15.38
Malta	60.00	13.33	20.00	0.00	6.67	0.00
Netherlands	50.82	31.15	4.92	0.00	1.64	11.48
Poland	55.36	19.64	7.14	0.00	5.36	12.50
Portugal	41.38	22.41	8.62	3.45	6.90	17.24
Romania	48.61	16.67	7.64	6.25	2.78	18.06
Slovakia	58.82	17.65	2.94	0.00	5.88	14.71
Slovenia	30.95	19.05	14.29	2.38	21.43	11.90
Spain	50.79	20.63	9.52	0.00	4.76	14.29
Sweden	50.91	23.64	7.27	0.00	1.82	16.36
United Kingdom	67.24	13.79	5.17	3.45	0.00	10.34
EU	48.19	22.04	8.50	3.54	4.82	12.90

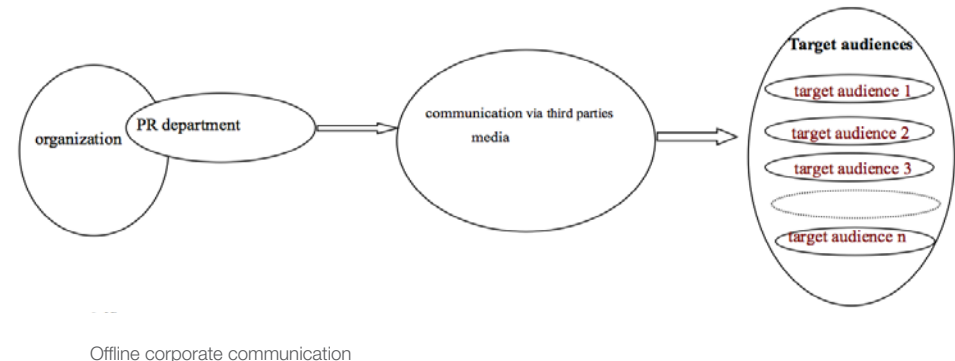
**Interactive-formal communication**

A mix between the aforementioned two types of communication, that is one-way and interactive-informal, results into interactive-formal communication. The speech remains institutional and distant, but, unlike the one-way model, it is open to feedback from the target audiences. This model too is popular in the European PR. In average, this type is used 32% across the EU, and, as usual, there is a range under which the EU countries fall, but neither this time it departs too much from the average. Portugal, with 34.9%, is the country which appears to embrace the most this mode, while France, with 34%, comes second as share of this model out of PR communication. At the opposite pole with find Austria, with 27.5%, Sweden with 27.8%, and Luxembourg with 27.9%.

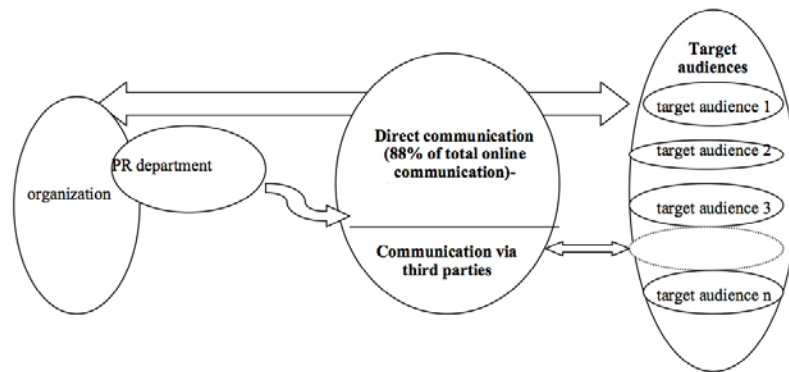
A review of these models shows that, although a certain variation is visible, this is not significant at maximum 10% between the upper and lower limit at European level, for each of the three models surveyed. Thus, in this respect too we further see a maybe unexpected constant behavior in the Online PR in EUropean Union's countries.

We need to underline some aspects which appear from this survey as relevant. One of them regards the importance of direct communication and what does occurrence, in a relative short period of time for this level, of this type of communication in PR mean.

We shall come back to an outline of the way organizations used to convey their messages in PR "classical" communication, that is before Internet emergence and development.



Communication via third parties indirect communication. Message is designed to be conveyed via media. This (potentially) takes over the message and adapts it as it finds necessary, many times altering the relevant information, or, sometimes, leaving aside the segment we wanted to convey. This survey shows points to a material shift in the PR paradigm. Today, a major segment of PR activity takes place via Internet. Of this segment, an overwhelming share (close to 90%) is accounted for by direct communication. In fact, more than half of the current PR communication is direct communication. A major shift in the way PR operate. This is one of the key advantages for Internet being so strongly embraced by the PR industry.



*Corporate communication on Internet*

Corporate communication on Internet

Another conclusion which can be drawn from this research is the incidence of the model sensed in the assumptions, namely the model the author calls “One of Many”.

### **Incidence and use of “One of Many” model in PR**

An aspect revealed by this survey and which we want to emphasize is the interactive-informal communication. This type of communication was extensively introduced in PR further to Internet emergence and development. Organizations stepped down from pedestal where they used to place themselves, deserted the role public speaker in main squares, and mingled with the crowd. They went beyond the formal speech which had become superannuated and no longer found its place in the main square. Why do we say that this speech used to be formal? The press-releases, the former bread and butter of corporate communication, had to be built on the news structure, which demanded for balance, neutrality, etc. For this reason, even if PR specialists might have wished for a more informal approach of communication, they couldn't afford it due to the limitations imposed by communication mediators. Meanwhile, organizations have managed to communicate directly and place themselves in the middle of their audiences. Thus, they become just an actor in an ocean of social actors. Just one of the many. But to stay there, they need to adapt their behavior and speech. Otherwise, they risk marginalization. This adaptation and repositioning of the organizations as a simple actor of many other equal actors allowed for occurrence of a new model in PR communication. This model is called “One of Many”.

In the networked society, seen as a global network built from subnetworks of different sizes, we can identify an important number of social systems (for instance, Facebook). In online social systems, actors (individuals, organizations) have equal communication capacity. In the end of the day, both the individuals actors (persona), and the organizational actors (caterva), are just a simple website (one of the many valid websites in the online social systems), and apply the same

programmed rules and communication systems in order to interact with the other actors in the online social systems.

The acting parties are represented by their websites, messages and (online) connections. Having available the same means of expressing themselves and interacting (we can place such on equal footing), we can perceive this shift in corporate communication as a major repositioning of the speech and interactions with audiences in PR.

Communication is not longer one-way, but interactive. Communication relies on an horizontal spreading of information. Messages are adapted in informal speeches - they are all friends among themselves. Consequently, it comes natural for the speed to be adapted and adequate to what it is. Organizations have done the same. The corporate speech has evolved rapidly from the formal, traditional, institutional (formal) one to the common language used in any friendly (informal) approach.

In the online society, the traditional (informal) speech is atypical and has genuine chances of being seen by other aspects an inappropriate and unadapted means of interaction. They could, eventually, make use of their power (Castells, 2009) to exclude (reject) the unadapted actor from their network.

## **Conclusions**

The research “Online PR in EU” aimed to review online communication in PR activity across the European space of relevance, and ascertain the way PR behave in this space.

This research has shown us that in today's PR, at least in the reviewed space, the main communication channel is Internet, as, in average, 59% of the specific activity happens online. We thus see that PR have adapted their techniques to the new requirements of the networked society.

Finally, we wish to point out two important conclusions which can be drawn further to this research: the first regards the availability of a cultural unity of the European space, as the results of the research have been surprisingly consistent across the European areal, whereas the second concerns confirmation of “One of Many” model which, in the context of the interconnected society, places the caterva social actor (organization) on equal footing with the other social actors involved in respect of both the communication power, and the speech and informal interactivity specific to this society.

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## Scapegoating in Media Coverage Analyzing Blame-giving Rituals in the Public Sphere

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### Abstract

This paper explores scapegoating in media coverage, by analyzing news reports on three former CEOs of large German corporations (Deutsche Börse, Deutsche Bank, and Deutsche Bahn) during crisis situations. Scapegoating is defined as a social mechanism, including its linguistic construction as an archetypal narrative. The scapegoat role for each CEO was analyzed by using content analysis of business news reports (n=864) from eight print newspapers and one online paper. A new methodology was developed based on a combination of the Linguistic Category System by Semin and Fiedler (1988) and the rhetorical approach of Fantasy Theme Analysis formulated by Bormann (1996, 1972). Additionally, eight semi-structured expert interviews were conducted with two communication directors and six business journalists. The results reveal differences in attribution of the so-called “sacrificial marks” or “stigmata” related to a CEO’s group affiliation and personality. A *scapegoat value S* is presented as measurand to capture the scapegoat role of a person in media texts. The limitations of the study are linked to the small number (three) of case studies and the new methodology that needs further testing.

Keywords: scapegoating, CEO communication, business journalism

### Introduction

There are ancient rituals that influence our perception of public figures. The scapegoat ritual is based on a biblical one in which a goat laden with the sins of the community was chased away into the wilderness (Girard, 1989; Perera, 1986; Pillari, 1991). The symbolic projection of evil from one individual or group to another still exists in various contexts in the form of magical thinking (Lévi-Strauss, 1983; Allport, 1958, 1979). However, scapegoating is a rather unconscious dynamic process that we mostly believe to be happening somewhere else, in the shadows of the past or in dark predictions of the future. The scapegoat is hard to recognize in our communities or in ourselves, but we will most likely see the personification of evil in others (Girard 1979, 1989; Arendt, 2010; Ricœur, 1986).

Today, we figure that scapegoating is diminished by pluralistic democracy, which assures that every voice is worth to be heard. The ideal that no human being or minority group should be alienated is a core value of Western societies derived from ideals of enlightenment (Kant, 2008; Habermas, 1991). However, just because the projection of evil is condemned by society, it does not mean that scapegoating processes do not exist anymore. This is the underlying research thesis: Ancient rituals influence our perception of contemporary communication processes. Although we might not see real scapegoats in our own group contexts, we instinctively recognize the narrative behind discrimination.

In these times of neo-liberal economy and global conflict, powerful social actors, such as politicians and corporate leaders, symbolize societal hopes and fears. In particular, chief executive officers (CEOs) are often viewed as something that goes beyond their functional roles. They become the projections of people’s expectations from the business or political system. In other words, their actual tasks as CEOs become less important than their status as the substitute for a greater problem or issue. In this perspective, CEOs are protagonists of public narratives that shape our perception of how industries work and what they stand for in the public sphere. This paper aims to provide insights into media coverage on CEOs. The analysis of the scapegoat-mechanism was applied to the media coverage of three former German CEOs and their corporations. The research question “*How does the scapegoat narrative manifest itself in media coverage on CEOs of German corporations?*” implies a narrative approach (Fisher, 1989; Heath, 2004; Heath & Millar, 2004) from a structuralist perspective (Levi-Strauss, 1955, 1983; Turner et al., 1995) referring to the central elements of the scapegoat ritual in the context of business journalism.

### Theory

Allport refers to the belief of symbolic transfer of guilt as a universal phenomenon (1979, p. 5). Approaches from philosophical linguistics (Burke, 1969; Carter, 1996) and cultural anthropology (Girard, 1989; Lévy-Bruhl, 2012; Frazer, 2009) confirm the presence of the scapegoat as a social mechanism (Hedström & Swedberg, 1996; Mayntz, 2004) in almost every group context throughout time. The scapegoat basically encompasses the struggle for survival in social groups (Colman, 1995; Douglas, 1995; Gemmill, 1989). The process of the attribution of

symbolic responsibility is still relevant today (Daniel 1998, pp. 7–8; Weick, 1988).

Scapegoat will be defined here as a social mechanism including its linguistic construction as an archetypal narrative. It is a communicative problem-solving process in which an actor A (consciously or unconsciously) projects his or her own ambivalent conditions Z onto a passive actor B. The actual responsibility of actor B for Z is less relevant than his or her specific characteristics of victim selection, the so-called *sacrificial marks*. This definition not only includes the basics of the process of scapegoating, but its representation as an archetypal narrative as well. The motive of repulsion and the process of projection are subsumed under the term “problem-solving.”

Sacrificial marks or *stigmata* (Goffman, 1986; Katz, 1979; Devine, 1989) can be described as important indicators for scapegoat analysis. Recapitulating the scapegoat selection process, one can differentiate between four major groups of sacrificial marks: (1) culturally independent archaic or *archetypal figures* (e.g. the devil, evil, etc.); (2) time- and culture-dependent *stereotypes*, prejudices, and characteristics of the collective memory (e.g. the foreigner, the stranger, etc.); (3) norms of *social behavior* (e.g. the greedy, the envious, etc.); and (4) individual character traits or *personality* (e.g. the angry guy, the narcissist, etc.).

The motivation behind the scapegoat mechanism can be a consciously executed hostility or an unconscious psychological conflict. The process of symbolic projection has short-term stabilizing effects, which could be seen as the main functional aspect of scapegoating in any context. At first, the self-confidence of groups or individuals can be enhanced through symbolic punishment of a culprit. However, the results from studies in social psychology and organizational sociology show that these short-term effects of appeasement do not solve the structural problems in the group context (Pillari, 1991; Daniel, 1998; Gollwitzer, 2004; Scheidlinger, 1982; Bonazzi, 1983). Hence, the consequence of the scapegoat phenomenon is a series of effects of relief that hinder acknowledgment of the actual problems. Scapegoating is a form of avoidance behavior led by the “fundamental attribution error,” which means people’s tendency to attribute negative outcomes to personal or internal factors rather than to external circumstances (Ross, 1977; Kelley, 1973; Weiner & Magnusson, 1988).

Referring to the scapegoat phenomenon in the context of the public sphere, we instantly think of the public as a collective consciousness and as a tribunal for critical issues and incidents (Lamp 2009, p. 77). According to Bentele and Nothhaft (2010), the notion of *public sphere* can be defined as a complex “network of points of interest” (p. 112). The concept of public opinion can be compared to a “corridor” of unspoken norms in which the narratives compete for attention (Bentele, 2008). The attention of various audiences shaping the abstract *public* reminds the individual of being watched and judged. There are unspoken norms, which manifest themselves through the isolation of perceived minorities for breaking “the rules” (Noelle-Neumann, 1993; Lamp, 2009, pp. 79–81).

According to Noelle-Neumann (1993) and other researchers following her approach (Lamp 2009; Halleemann, 1990; Justl, 2009), social sciences have traditionally avoided a discussion on what she called “our social skin,” the fact that we fear being isolated by perceived public opinion. In accordance with the pioneer of analytical psychology, C. G. Jung, the scapegoat is a

visible metaphor of the archetype of the shadow that is the fear of acknowledging the evil side of human nature and the dependence of the individual from group contexts (Jung, 1981). Famously published studies and experiments on bullying and other forms of discrimination have verified the fact that in certain group contexts, punishment is something that people not only engage in frequently, but they even enjoy (watching) it, especially in anonymous situations (Quervain et al., 2004; Milgram, 2009; Zimbardo, 2008). This corresponds to the results derived from studies analyzing group cohesion processes (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003; Asch, 1963; Tajfel & Billig, 1974).

By viewing the public sphere as a rather anonymous network of group cohesion, we can distinguish three different clusters of news factors (Staab, 1990) that influence blame-giving dynamics. According to Schulz (1982), three dimensions of news factors are closely linked to scapegoating: (1) *status* (élite person, power and sensation); (2) *identification* (personalization); and (3) *valence* (conflict and damage). In the public sphere, scapegoats tend to be personalized in media coverage that somehow fosters negativity. Thus, scapegoating in media coverage is a very promising narrative because three different aspects of news factors help to tell the story of the black sheep by incorporating sacrificial marks. Since the structure of the scapegoat narrative corresponds to an ancient ritual and therefore to an archetypal story, it has also become a central reference point in our collective memory. In times of social acceleration (Rosa, 2013) and flexible structures (Sennett, 2000), ancient ritual stories are reliable anchors that everybody can relate to. According to the rhetorical approach proposed by Heath (2004, p. 183), the transformation of sense is always bound to the attribution of responsibility. To sum up, the scapegoat narrative in the public sphere can be viewed as an *archetypal narrative* about change and crisis situations due to minority groups or individuals by the incorporation of sacrificial marks.

## Methods

The research question of “*How does the scapegoat narrative manifest itself in media coverage on CEOs of German corporations?*” was addressed by conducting a content analysis (Frueh, 2011) and semi-structured expert interviews. The content analysis followed in the lines of the structural study of mythology by Lévi-Strauss (1955, 1983). He viewed rituals as early forms of myths that turned into societal narratives. Media coverage, in this case the texts written by business journalists, might still show structural elements of the scapegoat ritual that can be analyzed by using case study research (Yin, 2009).

Three CEOs were selected as possible scapegoat case studies: Werner Seifert (CEO of Deutsche Börse AG from 1993 to 2005), Josef Ackermann (CEO of Deutsche Bank AG from 2002 to 2012) and Hartmut Mehdorn (CEO of the German railway company Deutsche Bahn from 1999 to 2009). All three corporations are associated with special expectations concerning citizenship because they all have the adjective “German” within their respective company names. In fact, these three large and traditionally renowned corporations in Germany have become objects of collective memory (Assmann, 2011). In each case, the selected sample covered a central crisis in

the corporation linked to the CEO.

The three plots of the respective crises are as follows: (1) In 2005, Deutsche Börse CEO Seifert had to resign because of public pressure by a hedge fund named TCI and its CEO Christopher Hohn. The hedge fund requested the management not to engage in an acquisition of the London Stock Exchange (LSE). The public debate on the power of minority shareholders and the role of hedge funds in the German stock market were the key issues in this CEO crisis. The period of investigation encompasses the media coverage before and after Seifert's resignation (January 1, 2005 to June 30, 2005).

(2) From 2004 to 2006, Ackermann, the CEO of Deutsche Bank, went through a court trial. In his function as a member of the supervisory board of Mannesmann, a former large German corporation in the telecom sector, he had supervised the acquisition of the corporation by Vodafone. He allegedly approved high bonus payments to the former managers. During one of the biggest trials in German economic history, Ackermann became infamous for the "V-for-victory" sign he made in front of the cameras at the beginning of the trial in January 2004. The court dismissed the case after an agreement on payments. The period of investigation covers the whole legal proceedings from January 1, 2004 till December 31, 2006.

(3) The third case study is about Hartmut Mehdorn, the former CEO of Deutsche Bahn. In 2009, news reports hinted at an abuse of personal data at the German railway company. Mehdorn denied having any knowledge of spying on more than 1,000 employees. However, he had to resign ultimately because of public pressure. The period of investigation includes the timeframe from the days of the first reports about the scandal till Mehdorn's resignation and the post-reporting phase (January 1, 2009 till May 15, 2009).

On the whole, 864 press articles were analyzed. The sample comprised two daily newspapers (Süddeutsche Zeitung and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung), one daily tabloid newspaper (BILD), two weekly newspapers (Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung and Die ZEIT), three news magazines (Der Spiegel, Stern and Focus), and an online news portal (Spiegel Online). According to the three different periods of investigation, the number of articles varied between the case studies ( $n_{\text{VWS}}=179$ ;  $n_{\text{JA}}=527$ ;  $n_{\text{HM}}=158$ ).

Each article was analyzed on the basis of 33 variables in seven categories: (1) formalities, (2) topics, (3) personalization, (4) crisis framing, (5) narrative analysis, (6) visual-narrative analysis, and (7) evaluation of the tonality. The narrative analysis comprises the major part of the study by visualizing the structural elements of the scapegoat narrative.

The Linguistic Category System (LCS) proposed by Semin and Fiedler (1988) and adapted by Schoenmakers (2007) is a method for tracking personal attributions and characterizations. In news reports written by business journalists, CEOs usually stand for their functional roles as decision makers. However, according to the theory of personal sacrificial marks or stigmata (Goffman, 1986; Katz, 1979), they mostly refer to perceived aspects of personality or group affiliations rather than to the actual functional roles. Thus, for identifying *the scapegoat potential* of the three CEOs under consideration, all the adjectives and nouns were coded and categorized into three different categories: (1) the perceived *functional role* of the CEO acting on behalf of the

organization, (2) the CEO's perceived *group affiliation* in any social context, and (3) the CEO's perceived *personality*.

For further analysis, the words were clustered into five groups in combination with the evaluation of their tonality in the text (negative, ambivalent, neutral or positive): (1) place/matter, (2) action, (3) functional position, (4) personality or interaction type, and (5) long-term conditions or circumstances. Adjectives and nouns that described a negative or ambivalent evaluation of group membership or personality trait that referred to *typical interactions or basic character traits* as well as *long-term conditions* were considered as direct indicators for scapegoat coverage about the CEOs. By analyzing the relative frequency of the adjectives and nouns fitting into these specific categories of negative evaluation, a *scapegoat value S* was measured.

The second method used for the narrative analysis of the journalistic texts was the concept of Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA) formulated by Bormann (1996, 1972). Fantasy themes (FT) are symbolic long-term frames or figurative language referring to larger rhetorical metaphors in the texts. This semantic analysis allowed the researcher to conceptualize major narrative images behind the media coverage of public figures (Ball, 2001). These metaphors or frames were again categorized into the four groups of sacrificial marks: Archetypal figures, stereotypes, social behavior and personality.

In addition to the content analysis, eight semi-structured expert interviews were conducted. The former CEO of Deutsche Bahn, Hartmut Mehdorn, gave a personal face-to-face interview. Moreover, two communication directors who had worked with one of the three CEOs and five business journalists who had published reports during the crises were also interviewed. Three journalists were selected for the Ackermann case study. For the Seifert and the Mehdorn cases, the researcher interviewed one communication director and one journalist each.

## Results and Discussion

### Description of the material, personalization and crisis communication

The results revealed that the media coverage on Ackermann comprised not only the highest number of articles, but the average size of the articles in the Ackermann case study was larger in comparison to those in the two other case studies. However, articles concerning the Mehdorn crisis were published more frequently on the first two pages of print newspapers, which indicated the importance of this particular CEO crisis as a topic in the overall news agenda. In all three cases, the number of articles that directly addressed the person of the CEO as the main topic of the report was rather high (Seifert: 36.3%, Ackermann: 34.2%, Mehdorn: 58.2%). The frequency of references to the CEO's name in headlines and/or figure captions in an article was measured as the indicator for personalization. In 52.5 per cent of the articles, Mehdorn's name was mentioned in the headlines or figure captions. Ackermann's percentage of explicitly personalized articles comprised more than one third (35.9 %) of the material. The least personalized coverage was found for the Seifert case (21.8%). After this short analysis of formalities such as the size of the articles and tendency for personalization, a difference between the Seifert case and the

two other CEO crisis cases became apparent. Ackermann and Mehdorn were more frequently mentioned and more prominently reported about than Seifert.

Furthermore, the crisis contexts of the three cases were analyzed. Accordingly, the perceived crisis history and the perceived crisis type of the respective corporations and CEOs were coded in detail. Especially, the crisis history of the German railway company, Deutsche Bahn, was mentioned rather often (27.8% of articles). However, all three CEOs were presented as active protagonists of crises rather than victims of their corporation's crisis history. 33.5 per cent of articles mentioned Mehdorn's personal involvement in past crisis situations. Ackermann and Mehdorn were both described as active actors in permanent public conflicts in the past. 32.6 per cent of articles referred to a personal crisis history of Ackermann, whereas only 8.2 per cent mentioned a crisis history of the Deutsche Bank. Seifert's crisis history was mentioned in 12.3 per cent of the articles. His corporation, Deutsche Börse, was only mentioned in 3.9 per cent of the descriptions of past crises. The results indicated that especially Ackermann and Mehdorn took the blame for past crisis situations in their corporations, which consequently implied a long-term attribution of responsibility and therefore a possible scapegoat role.

Another important difference between the three case studies was offered by the analysis of the perceived crisis types (Coombs 1995, 2006). While Ackermann and Mehdorn were mostly framed as active protagonists in a preventable crisis type, the Seifert case was perceived as an accidental or even victim crisis. These results once more suggest an important difference between the Seifert case and the others: Seifert faced a rather low attribution of crisis responsibility in media coverage. Therefore, a symbolic blame-giving process or scapegoat role may not be applicable to him as a person. Ackermann and Mehdorn, however, were viewed as being responsible for their respective corporation's disadvantageous situations in the past as well as in the present, and thus fit into the possible attribution of the scapegoat role through sacrificial marks.

**Lexical analysis: Linguistic category system (LCS) and scapegoat value**

The relative frequency of scapegoat attributions was measured by the LCS methodology described above. The percentage of the scapegoat potential for the three CEOs varies. Figure 1 shows the results for all the adjectives and nouns coded by the LCS—regardless to their evaluation or tonality.

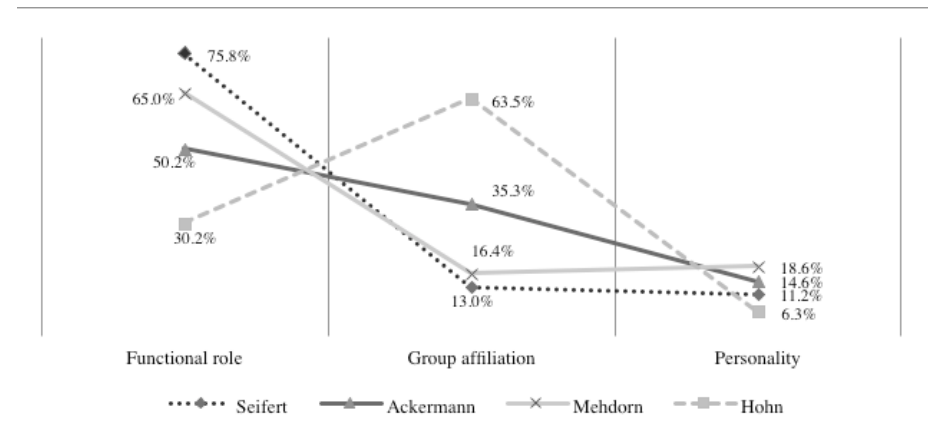


Figure 1: Categories of the LCS (total number of words coded: nWS=481, nJA=2260, nHM=451, nCH=463)

Figure 1 shows the differences in the media coverage about the three (or four, with the CEO of TCI, Hohn) analyzed CEOs. All three were reported foremost for their actual functional roles. However, in more than one third of the coverage, Ackermann represented societal groups. Mehdorn's personality was seen to be more important in comparison to the other case studies. Since Seifert was mostly characterized in his functional role as the CEO, he was not likely to be seen as a scapegoat in media coverage. However, since the story behind the crisis situation was a power struggle with another CEO, the researcher also coded all the adjectives and nouns of Seifert's "opponent," Christopher Hohn. 63.5 per cent of all the adjectives and nouns written about Hohn framed him as a group member (i.e. hedge funds, the locusts, the foreigners, etc.). In fact, the coverage focus on Hohn fulfilling his functional role as CEO only encompassed 30.2 per cent of all the words coded by using the LCS methodology. This could be a typical structure of the scapegoat story: In leadership disputes between two important public figures, it is more likely to have an overall framing of only one culprit. Assuming that the number of possible sacrificial marks coded is a crucial factor for scapegoat potential, there are clear implications that Seifert's scapegoat potential is only marginal. On the contrary, Ackermann and Hohn have the highest scapegoat-potential because of their perceived group affiliations. In almost 20 per cent of the words coded, Mehdorn is characterized for his personality traits. His scapegoat potential is moderate but it needs to be considered in the context of his perceived character traits.

The scapegoat potential does not correspond to the actual negative or ambivalent tonality in the analyzed articles. By considering the additional categories of evaluation and selected word groups (*typical interactions or character traits* and *long-term conditions*), the actual scapegoat value can be measured. The scapegoat value  $S$  of Seifert is rather low ( $S_{WS}=.129$ ). In contrast, more than 40 per cent of all the coded adjectives and nouns show Hohn as a possible scapegoat ( $S_{CH}=.406$ ). In every third article, Ackermann is characterized with negative or ambivalent attributions, indicating a scapegoat role ( $S_{JA}=.315$ ). The scapegoat value of Mehdorn is higher than that of Seifert but lower than that of Ackermann ( $S_{HM}=.213$ ). Figure 2 shows all the results with the corresponding number of adjectives and nouns coded for the scapegoat categories in relation to the total number of all the words coded using the LCS methodology.

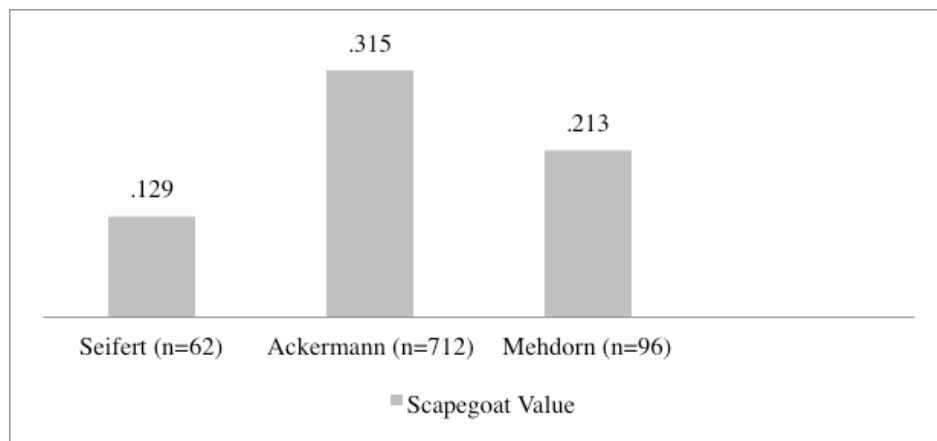


Figure 2: Scapegoat value  $S$  (total number of words coded:  $n_{WS}=481$ ,  $n_{JA}=2260$ ,  $n_{HM}=451$ ,  $n_{CH}=463$ )

In the following section, the coded adjectives and nouns (in quotation marks) help to reconstruct the scapegoat narrative or framing behind the published articles. The most frequent adjectives and nouns coded in the scapegoat categories for Hohn mostly implied negative group memberships: “the Anglo-Saxons,” “the locusts,” “the leader of the guerrilla rebellion” of the dreaded “hedge fund managers.” Seifert, on the other hand, was viewed as a “captain” defending his sinking “empire.” He was described as someone belonging to the group of “bankers from Frankfurt” who, notwithstanding their “arrogant” character traits, stand for stability compared to the “short-term-oriented” hedge funds.

Ackermann, CEO of Deutsche Bank, seems to belong to a number of groups that are disliked in published opinion: “the Suisse bankers,” “the bosses,” and “the top brass.” He was viewed as one of the most “powerful” and “rich men” in the country. However, this power became critical because his personality was brought into question, especially after the V-for-victory sign incident. Ackermann’s behavior in front of the court was described as “disrespectful,” “cynical,”

and most of all as “arrogant.” He was presented as a substitute for the growing gap between those down here and “those up there.”

The coded words in the scapegoat categories of the LCS comment differently on the polarizing personality of Mehdorn. Some journalists characterized him as a “culprit,” as someone who was incredibly “stubborn” and “intransigent.” For others, it was precisely his stubbornness that made him “authentic.” Some journalists called him “Rumpelstiltskin” and because of his “megalomania.” However, there is a group of coded words that separate this case study from the other two: Mehdorn was described as a “scapegoat,” “bogeyman,” or “buffer of the nation.” These words were coded as scapegoat categories, but they actually indicated an exposure of the scapegoat attribution and therefore a public defense of the CEO. The results of the Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA) implied similar interpretations.

### Semantic analysis: Fantasy theme analysis (FTA) for scapegoat narratives

For every article, one dominant fantasy theme encompassing an interpretation of the whole story presented in the article was coded. Fantasy themes were not found in every article. The researcher had to evaluate the overall figurative language or metaphors that referred to the crisis narrative. All three case studies contain structural elements of the scapegoat narrative in form of *archetypal figures*. Other dimensions of sacrificial marks are *stereotypes* and *personality*. Whereas the most important metaphors in reference to Ackermann are stereotypes, Mehdorn seems to incorporate the story of a personality.

For the Seifert case, fantasy themes for the crisis were coded in 143 of the 179 articles (79.9%). The most important fantasy theme (FT) for the Seifert case study can be summarized as “battle for power” ( $n=22$ ) between him and the CEO of the hedge fund TCI, Hohn. Thus, in 22 out of the 179 articles in total, the rhetorical image of the “power struggle” was predominant. The second largest group of FTs was called “the locust plague,” referring to the pejorative term for “hedge funds” ( $n=14$ ), followed by “the shareholders from Britain” ( $n=11$ ) and “the mutiny/the revolt” ( $n=10$ ). The five most important FTs all referred to Hohn. Seifert was described as the counterpart, and not as the evil opponent.

FTs were coded in 68.9 per cent ( $n=363$ ) of the analyzed reports about Ackermann. By interpreting the FTs for the Ackermann case study, the symbolic blame-giving became obvious: Ackermann was described as a substitute for “the typical manager” ( $n=58$ ) and as an “allegoric figure” ( $n=48$ ) for his “ruthless reforms” ( $n=34$ ) and the whole downfall of the economic system. He was viewed as a “successful” ( $n=34$ ) and very “powerful man” ( $n=27$ ). Ackermann seemed to function as a projection surface for “conspiracy theories” ( $n=19$ ). He was seen to have a large influence on the industry and politics. His arrogant behavior was not only perceived as a personal character trait, but as an inherent attribute of the “arrogance of the mighty ones” ( $n=25$ ) as well.

For Mehdorn, 132 FTs were coded (83.5%). The most important FT was the “permanent crisis of the Deutsche Bahn” ( $n=17$ ). This relativized the crisis responsibility of the CEO because the corporation as a system was criticized as well. The main metaphoric image coded for 11

articles was his “stubbornness,” but at the same time he was also described as a very “successful manager” (n=9). His resignation was even framed as the “end of an era” (n=8). Thus another aspect of the Mehdorn case study was that the corporation behind the CEO was also a blame-taker. Combining the results of the FTA with the LCS data, we see a clear correspondence between the exposure of Mehdorn as the “buffer of the nation” and the corporation as the supposed culprit behind the “scapegoat” CEO.

### Expert interviews: The context of the case studies

The first section of the semi-structured interviews was dedicated to the overall description of scapegoating in media coverage. Combining the personal definitions of scapegoating by the experts, three commonalities could be identified: Scapegoating is described as a combination of *negative evaluation*, *personalization* and *scandalization* transported via texts and images. Every expert was able to name at least two famous public figures in media coverage who seemed to have been blamed for circumstances that they could not be responsible for as a person.

The interviewees indicated that some CEOs were more likely to become victims of public scapegoating than others. Important variables such as *industry affiliation*, *corporate history*, and *size of the corporation* influenced the probability of a symbolic blame-giving. With regard to the Mehdorn case study, a *permanent crisis* or a *change in the industry* seems to have enforced the attribution of crisis responsibility to the CEO. The experts mostly named branches or industries with a high potential of scapegoating that faced major external or internal changes. Moreover, the interviewees saw *narcissistic* and *advice-resistant* CEOs as more likely to be exposed in public than others. Referring to the three case studies of Deutsche Börse, Deutsche Bank and Deutsche Bahn, three of the interviewees implied that the public perceived those corporations differently because the national collective memory associated with the names of the companies was bound to very high expectations by the stakeholders. Furthermore, three experts described a special German culture of resignation. In fact, there are studies that prove a very high fluctuation rate among German CEOs (Strategy&, 2012).

Taking into account all the mentioned variables that influence the process of CEO scapegoating, the communication directors as well as the journalists saw strong limitations in strategic CEO positioning. Although one has to be aware of the scapegoat potential of the CEO, it is difficult to manage scapegoating processes. CEOs who incorporate many of the above mentioned variables that predestinate them to become public targets should better avoid being actively personalized by their corporations.

Another section of the interviews dealt with the case studies. The two experts selected for the Seifert case described the power struggle between Seifert and Hohn as an unequal fight. According to the experts, if anyone had to be characterized as the scapegoat, it had to be the CEO of the hedge fund, Hohn. Interestingly, some experts described this crisis situation by using words such as “opponent” or “locust swarm.” Seifert as a person was characterized as an “advice-resistant” traditional leader who was chanceless against the “clever young guerrilla warrior” Hohn.

All experts instantly referred to Ackermann as a scapegoat. Most experts viewed his “V-sign” as a symbol of “arrogance.” According to three business journalists, the image of the V-gesture has become part of the collective pictorial memory in Germany. Ackermann was described as a large surface for projection of collective fears in times of economic downturn and high rates of unemployment. According to the interviewees, there were no metaphors for Ackermann as a public figure because he was functioning as a metaphor himself. Interestingly, no expert criticized Ackermann for his actual work as CEO, but rather blamed him for his lack of sensibility for public opinion.

Mehdorn was presented as a very polarizing person not only in media coverage but also by the interviewees. Three experts described him as a model for a scapegoat. Others indicated that there were two frames in media coverage about his public image: The role of a scapegoat and the role of a hero. This assessment corresponds with the results of the LCS and the FTA. The experts perceived Mehdorn both as a culprit and victim as well. Mehdorn protected his corporation by offering the press an authentic angry face instead of disappearing or letting someone else take the blame. Mehdorn and two other experts even viewed the scapegoat role as a basic CEO competency: “[The CEO] has to be someone who takes the bullet, so the others can get back to work. If you do not want that, you must not become the CEO” (Mehdorn, August 21, 2012). Being asked if and how the communication department could manage CEO communications, Mehdorn replied: “Communication cannot lead a corporation. [...] Communication is a service provided by the communication department” (Mehdorn, August 21, 2012). For him, the communication department’s task was to formulate and adjust strategy, and not to make strategic decisions. A majority of the experts felt it was rather unrealistic to assume that a communication director would be able to fully control the positioning of the corporation’s CEO. However, communication professionals and CEOs can develop a new sensitivity and consciousness for scapegoating in the public sphere.

### Conclusion

Scapegoating is an inevitable communicative problem-solving process. As long as people communicate through narrative structures, symbolic blame-giving will offer short-term appeasement effects that help groups to develop a sense of unity. In times of information overload and social acceleration (Rosa, 2013), narratives about archetypal figures are very effective strategies to be heard since they correspond to basic dimensions of the psyche (Jung, 1981) and to a set of news factors that include status, identification and valence (Schulz, 1982).

A new definition of the term scapegoat was proposed and a new methodology based on the LCS was developed to analyze the central structural elements of the ancient scapegoat ritual: The so-called “sacrificial marks,” negative or ambivalent adjectives or nouns referring to a person concerning his or her group affiliations and personality. Furthermore, the narrative frames behind these sacrificial marks were evaluated using FTA, a content analysis of metaphors and figurative language.

According to this combination of lexical and semantic analysis, the research question of “How does the scapegoat narrative manifest itself in media coverage on CEOs of German corporations?” can be answered by referring to the results of the case studies. Seifert was not made a scapegoat in media coverage. However, since all the metaphors of symbolic blame-giving refer to his opponent Hohn, he could be seen as a potential scapegoat in the crisis narrative. The Ackermann case mostly referred to a scapegoat role bound to stereotypes or group affiliations, while the Mehdorn case referred to a figurative language describing a scapegoat personality.

The limitations of the study are linked to the three case studies and the new methodology. The methods were combined and tested for the first time and thus cannot be generalized. The calculation of the scapegoat potential and scapegoat value are only initial attempts to capture the scapegoat role of a person in media texts and need further testing for statistical significance. Moreover, the methodology presented only allows the researcher to analyze published opinion. For measuring scapegoat attributions of news recipients, there is need to apply other methods such as surveys or in-depth interviews.

In times of lower resources in journalism and the increasing pressure on corporations to gain attention in the public sphere, public scapegoating seems to be increasing. The expert interviews also supported this fact. In Germany, the number of resignations of CEOs and politicians has gone up during the past few years (Strategy&, 2012). This development could be rather dangerous considering the fact that scapegoats are only substitutes for real problems. As a personified false solution, the scapegoat hinders public discourse and the process of questioning one’s own self and complex structures. In the long term, this might pose a real threat to democracy.

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## Wake up call for online media - BeeShaper Software as a Service

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### Abstract

In the paper, we explore factors that affect the success and virality of communication campaigns on the Internet. The paper analyses the use of BeeShaper – a new media for online advertising that enables companies to communicate with users on the Internet, and which operates according to the principles of eWOM. BeeShaper medium is developed in the wider concept of this research. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the new alternative medium which represents the new solution for online advertising. BeeShaper is an innovative way for creating a strong bond between brands and Internet users. It is a new and high-quality relationship in online communication and advertising in which an open dialogue is built, reshaped and developed between the users and the creators of the campaign. The efficiency of BeeShaper is tested through the campaigns of companies from different business areas: telecommunications, financial sector, restaurants, and Internet companies.

Key words: online advertising, online medium, social networks, word-of-mouth, BeeShaper.

### Introduction of the problem

By studying the attitudes and actions of individuals and groups on the Internet, a question arises whether it is possible for companies to exploit, develop and implement a communication model on the Internet which would target ideal representatives of their brand, and which would be based on directional generation of content by users who are profiled as ambassadors of the brand.

In the last few decades, focus of research have been the potential and limitations of different online media and platforms in public relations, marketing and advertising as well as the actual use in the profession (Duhé, 2015; Ye & Ki, 2012).

The companies have recognised the opportunities and the potential of new media, especially in terms of online advertising. Therefore, it is not surprising that investment in online advertising has recorded a significant growth, much higher than investment in any other form of advertising. In 2008 Hallerman predicted that the costs of investment in online advertising would increase from 23.4 billion dollars (which was in 2008) to 34 billion dollars in 2014 (Evans, 2009). At the global level, it is anticipated that advertisers in 2015 will spend 592.43 billion dollars (eMarketer, 2014), which represents an increase of 6.0 percent compared to 2014.

Pechuán et al. (2013, p. 148) stated: „Despite the great success of social media and online marketing, marketers must realise that 65% of consumers consider themselves overwhelmed by too many advertising messages, and nearly 60% believe advertising is not relevant to them”. Such information overload can cause consumers to defer their purchase altogether (Iyengar and Lepper 2000), and strong evidence indicates consumers actively avoid traditional PR and marketing instruments (Hann et al. 2008).

On the other hand, social media represent a space where users can share their views, preferences and experiences with others, but also allows companies to take an advantage of eWOM (electronic word of mouth) promotion. Instead of spending millions of dollars on television ads, small and medium - sized enterprises are trying to attract the attention through a lot more affordable marketing strategies such as blogging and eWOM campaign. Even when companies “grow up” and begin to consume a lot of resources on traditional marketing, it is important to understand whether eWOM is really effective, and how its impact can be compared to traditional marketing activities.

Some researchers question the importance of social networks (Valentini, 2014), as well as the efficiency of “traditional” ways of online advertising like Google Ads (Wener-Fligner, 2014). For example, Google admitted that 56.1 percent of advertising on the Internet never reaches “in view” - which means to be on the screen for one second or longer. It is a large number of “impressions” that cost advertisers a lot of money, and their efficiency can be comparable to television advertising, which is broadcast when there is no one in the room. In such an environment of the advertising industry, the question is whether the market is mature enough for a new, alternative form of online advertising where people are in the center of marketing campaigns?

## Literature review

**The importance of online media** The digital media world has significantly changed in the last two decades, and it continues on to change to unprecedented levels. Makner stated that the Internet enabled communication between people in the most radical way by bridging the boundaries of time and space (Makner, 2005).

In the past twenty years information and communication technologies have appeared, which have greatly changed and influenced the development of society (Castells, 2004). New technologies represent a real refreshment with respect to their interactive nature and the possibility of developing a dialogue between people (Benkler, 2006; Lessig, 2004). A large number of publications are dedicated to research in this area, and literature in the field of PR and communication disciplines supports the positive effects of digital technologies (van Osch and Coursaris, 2014). Social media are considered to be fast, cheap and interactive channels to reach target audiences. In public relations, social media is a conversation platform that allows users to connect and exchange user-generated materials (Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2015), and it have been very positively welcomed, because social media allow companies to communicate directly with their target audience, bypassing journalists and other intermediaries (Kent, 2013). Among the various digital technologies, social media have gained particular relevance in the field of public relations as “new” channels, not only to communicate with target audiences and stakeholders, but also to cultivate relations with them (Verhoeven et al., 2012).

Two billion people are currently active on social networks, and it is anticipated that by the end of 2015, 27 percent of people around the world will regularly use social networks. Eighty percent of people who use social networks will use a mobile phone to access these platforms (eMarketer, 2015). People are turning to the Internet and social networks to entertain themselves, search for information, to learn and make contact with other people (Avidara et al., 2013; Lee & Ma, 2012).

Currently, three key trends are visible in the company's use of social media (Wright & Hinson, 2014; Yang & Kent, 2014). The first trend is the proliferation of customised messages to potential or current customers, consumers and other interested parties. Another trend is to provide entertainment and online experiences to users (Kent, 2013); and the third trend is to collect valuable information about what online community think and comment about the organisation and its products or services.

Digital technologies and applications allow social network users to receive daily messages from the brands based on their past search activity. Also, the well-prepared message content can increase the value of word-of-mouth promotion on social networks. WOM is considered as an important strategy for increasing the visibility of the brand and its presence on the market (Ferguson, 2008). This strategy is used by professionals in the field of public relations, in order to spread the message of the company in social media and social networks, and to encourage supporters of the brand to share ideas and content with each other.

## Factors of success and virality of the online campaigns

Numerous studies have examined the success of online campaigns carried out in social media, i.e. how managers and practitioners perceive social media and their value for the companies (Briones et al., 2011; Eyrich et al., 2008; Porter et al., 2009; Reber & Kim, 2006; Sommerfeldt et al., 2012).

Companies often create online campaigns to encourage user involvement and creation of content generated by users, however, these companies' efforts sometimes fail to reach their goal. What is the reason for this? Are there factors that influence whether some campaigns become viral? Is virality random (e.g., Cashmore 2009) or can be determined by certain factors affecting that some content of the campaign is shareable? A number of studies are attempting to answer these questions.

According to research described in Calder, Malthouse & Schaedel (2009), the online campaigns will be more effective and company messaging will expand on the Internet if the message is spread in the media on which are users normally the most engaged. Therefore, it is assumed that users who are involved in specific social media (e.g. YouTube), would rather be exposed to online campaign that is carried out in the social network; and the message of the company i.e. a specific campaign, will achieve better effects and campaign objectives.

Berger and Milkman (2012) in their study point out that the positive content is more viral than negative content. However, they conclude that emotions like sadness, anger and other negative emotions, are triggers that cause virality. It can be concluded that the content sold through the company's online campaigns should provoke strong emotions among users. Content that is moderate, which relaxes the user usually will not cause a reaction and user involvement. Companies usually shy away from campaigns and messages that provoke negative emotions. However, the results of this study suggest that negative emotions can cause viral content and activation of users.

The researchers point out the following factors as important for creating viral campaigns:

- content, sufficiently attractive that makes the message memorable (Berger and Milkman 2010; Porter and Golan 2006);
- the structure of the social network (Bampo et al. 2008);
- behavioral characteristics of the recipients and their incentives for sharing the message (Arndt, 1967); and
- seeding strategy, which establishes the initial narrowly targeted users who are elected by the company (Bampo et al. 2008; Libai, Muller, and Peres 2005). Targeting the audience (users) is very important for the success of the campaign, because only if the message reaches those who are genuinely interested to hear it, it can become viral.

## Measuring the success and virality of online campaigns

Companies tend to measure the effects of advertising on their own web pages, and according to the results in social media. In the past, it was believed that number of hits on websites was a relevant indicator for the success of online campaigns. However, today there are a number of

relevant parameters that are measured (Jurković, & Katolik, 2013).

In practice, the following metrics are mostly used for measuring the success of the campaign:

- website company traffic (Sessions, Unique visitors, Page views, Time on a site, Traffic Sources by Segment, Bounce Rate, Conversions by Source)
- message Reach or Reach metrics
- campaign shareability
- social interaction (the number of comments, likes, share's, etc.).

“Reach” is one of the most commonly used metrics for measuring the effectiveness of the campaign (Cruz and Fill, 2008). “Reach” refers to the number of people to whom the campaign message has arrived i.e. those who have seen the contents of the campaign (Bazadona, 2000). The limiting factor in relying only on the measurement of reach is missing out to keep the track of some other significant forms of participation in the campaign. Although reach shows the number of users who access the contents of the campaign, this number does not display the number of participants who were engaged and who shared campaigns’ content, specifically spread the message of the company, thus contributing to the virality of the campaign. Metrics that provides this deficiency of reach is the measurement of campaign sharing. Campaigns that record a high degree of user engagement in the interaction with the campaign message (liking, sharing, tweeting, etc.) - have a greater reach. Seeding of the campaign is a valuable parameter because it indicates that the users “start” to engage and actively participate in the campaign.

After studying the above-mentioned research, it can be concluded that the researchers have identified several factors significant for virality and performance of online campaigns: levels of engagement with social media platforms; emotions; content and user targeting. The most important metrics that indicate campaign virality metrics are number of hits, unique visitors, campaign reach and user engagement (sharing - social interaction).

### BeeShaper algorithm

People are a necessary factor to promote the activities of companies and brands on the Internet. BeeShaper was created in order to connect companies with people. It allows companies to connect with their ideal representatives on the Internet, as well as enables them to have an opportunity to lead a campaign on the Internet through a voice of the people. On one side are the companies, their brands and campaigns, and on other - users of these products and services. BeeShaper is a medium for online advertising, which establishes a relationship between the company and the user, it unites them and allows users to communicate about brands.

People trust people. Specifically, people trust people they know and talk about things they know. BeeShaper scans the affinities of individual users who have signed up to BeeShaper medium (users of BeeShaper are called Shapers), thus it connects the companies with the ideal promoters of their brand. Shapers, according to their interests, gets the opportunity to participate in the campaign. Participation in the campaign means sharing a link to the company’s campaign and launch a dialogue based on the theme of the campaign. Users of BeeShaper medium - Shapers,

with the help of BeeProfiling tools, are selected as users who can deliver the message of the company on the Internet in the best possible way. These users, Shapers, share their opinions about the campaign or brand through their accounts in social media (on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, but also via email Viber and similar services), and for such activities, they have been rewarded. Shapers are profiled within 9 categories and 215 subcategories. Based on the results (touches, actions), Shaper is awarded and paid. For the payment of Shaper’s earnings, BeeShaper uses Payoneer service. Thanks to Shapers, companies and brands receive an honest, warm, human voice while the budget is focused on a precisely targeted target audience, which leads to maximising the desired effects of the campaign.

BeeShaper consists of three custom tools: a BeeProfiling, BeeAnalytics and BeeStorm “laboratory”. By using a three-layered algorithm for profiling, BeeShaper works by finding an adequate brand ambassador (user of social media) that corresponds to a particular brand, campaign, organisation, public figure or politician. Also, BeeShaper works in order to provide “massive” and highly relevant effect of promotion principle “word of mouth”. On the other hand, BeeShaper is a medium for online advertising that enables companies and brands to optimally place the budget for online communication activities by connecting the brand with adequate promoters of the brand. Further on, through social media, those promoters pass on the brand message to their friends.

BeeShaper algorithm

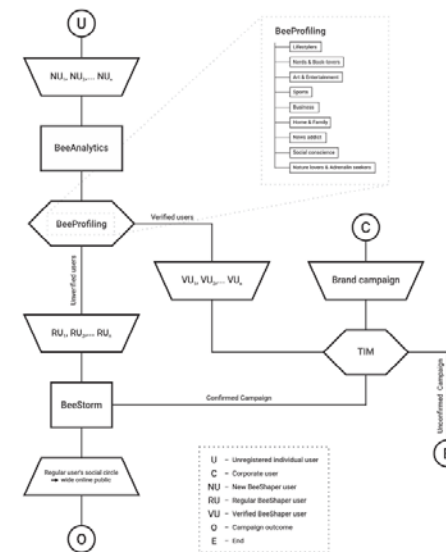


Figure 1 shows the BeeShaper algorithm that explains how the media works.

BeeShaper is a multi-sided platform for online advertising. Registered individual and corporate users use it. Individual Internet user (U), by the registration with the service, becomes the user of BeeShaper.

Each new BeeShaper user passes through a three-layered analytical process (BeeAnalytics) of determining the categories (9) and subcategories (215) to which she or he belongs to (BeeProfiling). BeeShaper's customer database consists of Verified BeeShaper users (VU) and Regular BeeShaper users (RU). The most successful users are verified and are part of the database which, in addition to participating in communication and advertising activities of the company, is previously testing the interestingness of marketing campaign (TIM) with which the corporate users (C) applied to the service.

Corporate users with their current campaign or communication task, use the service by defining the expected campaign outcomes (O) with respect to the pre-set communication and advertising objectives, budget and desired duration of the campaign. If the campaign was confirmed as worthy of sharing by verified individual users, after processing (BeeStorm) it is forwarded to the other (regular) users of BeeShaper for sharing and promotion within their individual Internet connections (friends and followers). In such way, by spreading through the small groups and individual social circles, the campaign becomes viral and reaching a wider audience on the Internet.

### Terms and metrics used by Beeshaper

Below are listed the terms, which need to be clarified in order to understand the results of testing the success factors and virality of campaign, launched by BeeShaper as a new medium for online advertising:

- BeeShaper – a new medium for online advertising, a multi-sided platform consisting of a registered individual and corporate users.
- Shapers regular users – BeeShaper's individual users who share the campaign of corporate users on the Internet through their accounts.
- Shapers verified users – the most successful verified users who are part of the database which, in addition to participating in communication and advertising activities of the company, is previously testing interestingness of marketing campaign (TIM) with which the corporate user (C) applied to the service.
- Corporate users - agencies, companies, organisations that report and launch a campaign via BeeShaper.
- Touch - most similar to “click” on the Internet. Since people are talking to people, the campaigning voice of Shaper “touches” people. Click is one of the Touch results. The results are also: visibility, recognisability, etc.
- Individual Touch Scope –maximum reach to friends/followers accounts (same or different) that one Shaper has.
- Campaign Touch Scope - maximum reach to friends/followers accounts (same or different) of all Shapers who are participating in a single campaign.

- Total Touch Scope - maximum reach to friends/followers accounts (same or different) of all registered Shapers at a given moment.
- Investment Per Touch (IPT) – an allocated investment, by a corporate user, for individual Touch in the campaign (i.e. the value of the Touch). BeeShaper works as the postpaid model, one only pay for the results after the end of the campaign.
- Action - the execution of the desired activity by Internet visitors that are accessing Shaper page of Corporate User.
- Investment Per Action – an allocated investment by a corporate user, for each individual executed action.
- Unique Social Engagement – USE - the number of unique tweets, statuses, posts, comments, and interactions with BeeLink in a campaign.
- TIM – BeeShaper's Council for Testing Interestingness of Marketing campaigns. The most successful Shapers from the previous month are the part of this Council. TIM members receive details of the reported campaign and based on carefully created questionnaire – they assess its value. Only if TIM verifies the campaign, it becomes available on BeeShaper. TIM members also send the recommendation to the company to adapt and improve the campaign, because not every campaign is worth sharing on BeeShaper.
- BeeLink - a unique link for each Shaper in each individual campaign based on following the results and the individual performance of each Shaper.

### Findings and Discussion

In this section, factors that affect the success of the campaigns managed on BeeShaper are tested and analysed. Below are the results of the campaign in the case of companies from different business areas: telecommunications, financial sector, restaurants and Internet companies.

The aim of the research is to point out the factors that influence success and virality of campaigns managed on BeeShaper. The results presented in the remainder of this paper, indicate that if the user has “passed” through BeeShaper algorithm (BeeAnalytics, BeeProfiling, BeeStorm), then the communication objectives are met in BeeShaper outcomes.

Table 1 presents the BeeShaper outcomes. When signing up the campaign to BeeShaper, a corporate user is opting for one of the business outcomes depending on the desired results and the available budget.

Table 1. BeeShaper outcomes

BeeShaper outcomes				
Characteristics	Bee	Honey	Hive	Bee Power
CTS <sup>1</sup>	250.000+	450.000+	600.000+	2.000.000+
USE <sup>2</sup>	100+	200+	300+	600+
Touches <sup>3</sup>	1.800+	2.800+	3.500+	12.000+
Duration	Up to 10 days	From 10 to 14 days	From 14 to 28 days	From 4 to 6 weeks
Budget	€1.500	€2.500	€3.500	€9.500

It is necessary to compare the achieved results in each campaign tested on BeeShaper, specifying communication objectives, in order to check whether the objectives have been met and whether the campaign has become viral.

Table 2. Results of the company's campaign that operates in the field of telecommunications

Basic information about the campaign	
Area of business	Mobile operator / Telecommunications
Goal	Touches
Number of touches	3.479
Touch Scope	291.134
Budget	\$2.000
Results of the campaign (source of visits)	
Facebook	2.300
Direct	892
Other	170
Twitter	115
LinkedIn	2

<sup>1</sup> Campaign Touch Scope - maximum reach to friends/followers account (same or different) of all Shapers who are participating in a single campaign.

<sup>2</sup> Unique Social Engagement - the number of unique tweets, statuses, posts, comments, and interactions with BeeLink in the campaign.

<sup>3</sup> Touch - most similar to "click" on the Internet. Since people are talking to people, the campaign voice of Shaper "touches" people. Click is one of the Touch results. The results are also: visibility, recognisability, etc.

Table 3. Results of the company's campaign that operates in the field of finance

Basic information about the campaign	
Area of business	Financial sector
Goal	Touches
Number of touches	1818
Touch Scope	332.492
Budget	\$1.000
Results of the campaign (source of visits)	
Facebook	1.254
Direct	338
Other	127
Twitter	89
LinkedIn	6

Table 4. Results of the company's campaign that operates in the field of restaurants

Basic information about the campaign	
Area of business	Restaurants
Goal	Touches
Number of touches	1.800
Touch Scope	494.593
Budget	\$1500
Results of the campaign (source of visits)	
Facebook	1.257
Direct	363
Other	157
Twitter	22
LinkedIn	1

Table 5. Results of the company's campaign that operates in the IT area

Basic information about the campaign	
Area of business	Internet company
Goal	Touches
Number of touches	4.527
Touch Scope	598.242
Budget	\$2.500
Results of the campaign (source of visits)	
Facebook	2.874
Direct	873
Other	498
Twitter	152
Blogs	70

Given the fact that each campaign on BeeShaper runs through BeeShaper algorithm described in Figure 1, the results of the campaigns from different areas are pretty even and show that all the communication objectives stated in the BeeShaper outcomes - are accomplished.

### Influence characteristics

As noted above in the theoretical part of the paper, many researchers have tried to identify what factors influence the success of the campaign and what is it that makes a viral campaign. The factors that are most frequently mentioned as important for creating virality of online campaigns are: quality of content, emotions carried by the message of the brand, frequency of use of certain social network and the precise targeting of the target audience.

Certainly, quality content is a very important factor in the virality of the campaign on BeeShaper. The slogan of BeeShaper is "Campaigns worthy sharing", and each campaign before launching on BeeShaper passes TIM check. TIM represents an acronym for Testing the Interestingness of Marketing campaigns. Namely, Shapers who achieved the best results in the past month (profiled as ideal representatives of the brand or company that wants to launch a campaign), before the start of the campaign, they gain an insight into the campaign and give their candid feedback. This way the company gets the feedback from users who are ideal representatives of its brand - focus groups, as well as possible recommendations for improving the campaign. In this way, the quality of content is provided.

The emotion that campaign, i.e. brand message causes on BeeShaper did not show as significant for virality of the campaign. All tested campaigns have achieved a balanced result, i.e., they achieved the objectives set in BeeShaper outcomes.

According to research by Berger & Milkman (2012), the online campaigns will be more effective, and the message of the company will expand the Internet if the message is spread in the media where users are most engaged. This claim in the case of BeeShaper has proved to be correct, as Shapers mostly use Facebook (63.38 percent), and the greatest number of visits has come from this social network. Also, Twitter, right after Facebook, proved to be the most used channel. Results of testing the efficiency of BeeShaper, as new medium for online advertising, which allows the expansion of the company's message via voice of people, showed that each campaign can be viral and that the factors affecting the virality of the campaign on social media in the case of campaigns on BeeShaper - are partially relevant.

What turned out to be relevant for the success of the campaign on BeeShaper? The factor that had the most influence on the results of online campaigns is very precise targeting and profiling of users. This factor is the most important for achieving virality because if the message reaches the users who are truly interested in a company's message, they will be eager to convey it to their friends on the Internet.

Therefore, regardless of the content of the campaign, the emotion, the previous company's reputation or social network where users share campaign, each of the tested companies were able to achieve its communication goals through BeeShaper. BeeShaper outcomes that a corporate user chooses when launching the campaign, are not by themselves a success factor, but rather the result of something much more important and relevant to the success of online campaigns and virality. And that is a precise targeting and profiling of the messenger brand. As noted in the paper, individual users of BeeShaper (Shapers) are categorised in 9 categories and 215 subcategories. On the other hand, the database of close to 10,000 registered users allows for any company or brand on BeeShaper, to launch a massive, highly relevant word-of-mouth campaign shared by ideal users and ambassador of the brand. In this way, their reputation and credibility are protected because they share something that they would normally share on the Internet and social networks, only in this case they are paid for it. Consequently, the goals of the campaign are achieved; their friends trust them because they are considered competent in a particular area, and they want to hear their opinion and click on the link to find out more.

### Analysis and conclusion

This paper begins with an overview at the current state of advertising and communication of the companies in the new media landscape, as well as the focus on the challenges that companies are facing when interacting through online media.

Advertising and communication through online media are implemented through a number of different models, services and platforms, depending on the objective of the campaign, the estimated budget and the expected results. Companies consider the advantages and drawbacks of the use of specific types of online advertising, and they make a decision on the model that best suits them.

Research shows that users are increasingly interested in products that are discussed on blogs or forums than for those that are on the market, in a traditional environment. Therefore, what people are talking to each other on the Internet (eWOM) is becoming relevant and can contribute to increasing the credibility of the product or service (Bickart & Schindler, 2001).

It was noted that investment in online advertising is growing (Evans, 2009; eMarketer, 2015; Statista, 2015), and the companies are not fully satisfied with the current possibilities of new media (Pechuán et al., 2013). From the professional point of view, the study provides the first comprehensive insight into an important public relations and online marketing platform – BeeShaper.

Factors listed in previous research as relevant for the performance and virality of online campaigns are in the case of advertising through BeeShaper shown as partially relevant. High-quality content is very important for the virality of the campaign, and BeeShaper created a special algorithm to ensure that the content of the campaign is really worth sharing. Another factor that proved to be relevant is spreading the message of the campaign, i.e. organising campaigns in the media where users are most engaged. Namely, Shapers mostly use Facebook (63.38 percent) and the highest number of visits came from this social network, in the case of all four campaigns. The emotion, which carries the message of the campaign, has not proved as important for campaign virality on BeeShaper.

The most relevant factor, which had the greatest impact on the virality and success of campaigns conducted on BeeShaper is the three-layered profiling process of individual users. An accurate targeting provides that campaigns get the ideal brand or company representatives that is launching a campaign, because it is important that users share something that they would otherwise share, but to be paid for it. Only if users share the content that is consistent with their usual online performance and behavior on the Internet, their friends will trust them and click on the link – i.e. there will be a message of the brand. Therefore, BeeShaper legalises an already widespread “craft” of secret advocacy on the Internet.

Testing the efficiency of BeeShaper has shown that, if the company decides to use this new media for online advertising, the industry in which the company operates, or the previous reputation of the company, offline and online performance, or previous strategy of online communication, all these factors are not relevant. This result is somewhat controversial, but it is important to understand that the greatest factor of success and virality of online campaign on BeeShaper is carefully profiling and targeting of users, and three-layered algorithm that gives an added value, and position BeeShaper as a new medium of online advertising.

### Limiting factors and implications for management

Given the fact that this is a specific new medium for online advertising, it is necessary to examine whether the communication objectives would be achieved in the company campaigns from other areas. Also, it is necessary to compare the results achieved by companies in similar areas in other media of online advertising. Considering that the largest value of BeeShaper presents an accurate targeting, it would be useful to compare the possibility of targeting the target audience in other media for online advertising.

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## Co-Designing Public Relations: Working with Professionals in Information Industries and End-User Publics

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### Abstract

Design practice has contributed to public relations mainly through the influence of four-stage planning and action models. This paper presents a design/communication approach to guide public relations practice in this era of digital media and user-generated communications. The approach provides for collaborations between public relations professionals and fellow practitioners from other media-based industries and also supports novel working relationships between professionals and wider publics of stakeholders. A shift underway in public relations, from a functional to a cocreative approach is part of a general reorientation of communication, as publics demand increased access, personal choice, and self-directed action, while new media expand the available means to realize participatory norms. A cocreative, design/communication approach facilitates participation by stakeholders; empowers participants to form their own self-motivated relationships with the organization; and expands publics' ability to play a part in shaping projects that have impacts on their lives. A practical-critical methodology supports design/communication as a working protocol for practice and also as a basis for ongoing, reflexive critique of public relations practices, aimed at addressing an ineliminable tension between an end-directedness that is inherent to public relations practice and an emergent participatory understanding of design/communication as mutual-personal action.

Jurisdictional boundaries formerly differentiated the accredited modes of communication management and reporting done by public practitioners and journalists, from comparable vernacular activities of non-professionals as they routinely conduct communicative interactions and exchange accounts of daily news and opinions. The certified teaching and scholarship of university professors was similarly set apart from how people learn from each other in diverse social contexts and life circumstances. Shared interests and interrelations among these information-based professions are part of what has categorically distinguished their professional forms of production from counterpart activities in everyday society, but practitioners also viewed themselves as playing distinctively different organizational, institutional and social roles from each other, resulting in mutual tensions, conflicts, and sometimes outright enmity.

Is the occurrent de-establishment of these professions sufficient to turn reputedly sworn enemies within these cadres into willing bedmates as our symposium theme inquires? Will the prevaricating lion of public relations lie down with the truth-telling -- or at least fact-stating -- lamb of journalism? (Or is investigative reporting a stalking wolf that preys on benign shepherds of public relations as they go about tending their flocks of stakeholders?) And what about the wisdom-dispensing scholar? Can the professor remain on the sidelines, contentedly theorizing, historicizing, and interpreting with counterfactual freedom of thought how all things significant came about and where they may be headed? If we are to imagine a rapprochement, even a collaboration, among these parties, how can the peacemaking be expected to unfold and what imaginable themes could successfully inform a newly found unity? Or if these groups should fall short of becoming soulmates, will they need to emerge instead as comrades in arms defending different but interconnected positions on some common institutional turf? What lines of rhetorical defense, along with what allied politics, would they then construct?

These indicated transformations are part of a general reorientation of communications now taking place in the digital age. Changing public attitudes are reflected in increased demands throughout network societies (Castells, 2000) for access, personal choice, and self-directed action, while new media expand the available means to realize participatory norms by shifting communicative agency to stakeholders, publics, clients, constituencies, and audiences, who are now considered as end-users.

Amidst dramatic transformations, the ongoing provision of professional services that practitioners in these information fields make to the complex societies of this globalizing era remains critically important to the quality of people's lives. Consider that contemporary organizations in every area of interest, concern, and initiative are called upon to provide social and technical expertise required to address collective problems and to capitalize on common opportunities. These range from managing the systematic provision of basic economic necessities of daily life, to cultivation of enduring cultural ideals associated with the pursuit of truth, beauty, and goodness through science and philosophy, the arts, and spiritual and ethical strivings. Meeting this organizational responsibility to society entails fostering understanding about many complex and often controversial areas of interest and concern, such as developments in technoscience; health; global economics, finance, and business; political ideologies and public affairs; law and

justice; urbanization; the environment; media, journalism, entertainment and the arts; education and advances in knowledge, including teaching, learning, and scholarship; religion, spirituality, and ethics. An obvious imperative is the coordinated development, advancement and dispersion of scientific and technical knowledge that must be transformed from specialized theory into a critically needed public good, useful for guiding collective action in an age of risk when the accumulating impacts of public 'bads' is an increasingly dire threat (Beck, 1992, p. 3).

Reporting well and probingly, educating with vision and depth of understanding, and creating and managing communication programs that assist stakeholders and publics in comprehending and evaluating the substance and quality of organizational work in all areas of enterprise and concern, should be seen as outcomes-oriented forms of information work that succeed or fail on the basis of how well the responsible professionals perform their duties. The way forward specific to public relations might best begin by moving with renewed resolve in the direction of solidarity with stakeholders and publics, as suggested by a cocreational approach that now commands the present and future vision of the field. Is there a newly distinguishable 'cocreational function' for public relations professionals to perform that is attuned to the democratizing opportunities and accompanying challenges of the network society? Should the cocreational mandate apply to innovative ways of working with peer professionals, specifically with journalists and possibly with professors, as well as with newly configured networks of organizational stakeholders and publics?

The terms function and cocreation are juxtaposed purposefully here to enter into immediate discussion of an important contemporary development within public relations theory. The field is said to be moving progressively beyond the limitations associated with an earlier, superseded, functional approach that considered "publics and communication as tools or means to achieve organizational ends" (Botan and Taylor, 2004, 651), to arrive now, in perfect timing with the availability of requisite technologies and media, at a more philosophically congenial, as well as what is supposed to be a more effectively manageable, cocreational perspective that "sees publics as cocreators of meaning and communication" (p. 652).

Replacing functional concentration on achieving outcomes instrumentally by means of "techniques and production of strategic organizational messages" allows for advance in the direction of dialogue and enhances the ability to manage in the interests of achieving mutual benefits for client and stakeholders through construction of "shared meanings, interpretations, and goals." Thus, the cocreational posture promises to bring communication, culture, and community building to the forefront of public relations theory and practice, while consigning strategic message sending and technical instrumentalism to the field's historical background.

However, the cocreational alternative "manifests itself more as a stance, orientation, or bearing in communication rather than as a specific method, technique, or format" (Botan, 1997, p. 192), while actual ways of doing public relations appear to remain mainly functional. "Indeed, it is the attitudes toward publics that is the defining factor differentiating the functional and cocreational perspectives" (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 653). Even as one acknowledges changes in the theoretical "assumptions guiding public relations research and theory over time" (p. 651),

skepticism must remain about whether the actual state of public relations practice "has changed from being a functional communication activity to a cocreational communication activity."

Commitments to relation and dialogue are well considered to define responsive public relations professionalism in the emergent network society, and making a successful transition towards cocreational ideals is an important, progressive goal for the field to pursue. At the same time, achieving instrumental success in public relations remains central to the profession's functional responsibility to provide effective, efficient management for projects, programs, and campaigns in support of client's mission, interests, and purposes. Bridging the gap between cocreational aspiration and functional realities of public relations requires acknowledging and developing the inherent end-directedness of public relations work, that practitioners proceed 'by design' in fulfilling their professional obligation to advance the mission, purposes, aims, and goals of client organizations and institutions.

Pragmatic instrumentalism shapes public relations, as "planned communication to motivate publics to support a cause, service, organization, or product" (Mickey, 2003, p. 40), and is also an informing principle of design, as "courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred situations" (see also, Simon, 1996, p. 111). The instrumentalism of design process combines with, and develops in some degree of tension with, aesthetic or expressive values that are also definitional aspects of design, as well as important contributing elements to public relations. These values involve recognizing, appreciating, and actively drawing out patterns – formal patterns, semantic patterns in language use and features such as iconicity in image making, along with performative and behavioral patterns in human activities -- that embody qualities of balance, proportion, and harmony.

How can design logic contribute most effectively to public relations? The guiding standards for judgment and realization with respect to both instrumental and expressive or formal aspects of design are established by "the idea that every design problem begins with an effort to achieve fitness between two entities: the form in question and its context. The form is the solution to the problem; the context defines the problem" (Alexander, 1964, p. 15). Instrumental projects in public relations derive from a context that presents organizational challenges and opportunities, which can be translated into the formalized terms of problem-posing and problem-solving methodologies. Aesthetic, expressive qualities emerge as solutions take on actualized form and are "realized" (Radder, 1996, p. 147) as physical-artifactual entities (including objects, the built environment, equipment, technologies and other knowledge-mediating artifacts, spatial organization and space utilization); discourses and symbolic representations (meanings, ideologies, world views, expressed values, schemas for thought and action, pragmatic orientations, planning processes, culturally-shared definitions and attributions, stated and implicit norms, and written rules); and relational dynamics (functional and primary identities, roles and performances, accompanying emotions, feelings, hopes and dreams, fears and apprehensions). These "triadic" (Woodward, 1996; 2000a; 2000b; 2001a; 2003) domains of physical, social, and relational (mutual-personal) reality are encompassed in the movements of design from experienced context, to imagined form, to embodied form, ultimately to the transformed context that presents and expresses the

realized design. The intended physical, artifactual, and performative outcomes of public relations may range from a simple printed announcement with an eye-catching layout meant to attract audiences to an event, to a program of actionable initiatives designed to mobilize global efforts to achieve world peace.

Despite obvious comparability, it is not customary to consider public relations specifically as a design field or discipline. Designers and design theorists do not typically regard public relations as a suitable 'drawing board' on which to experiment with new and innovative design concepts; and the design logic that circulates in public relations takes the form of practitioners' rules of thumb and working axioms instead of articulated theory, principles, and methods that contribute systematically to the advance of design knowledge as a field of inquiry and a resource for practice. The alternative perspective taken here is that public relations should be approached as a design field, one that presents valuable opportunities to retain aesthetic values and related qualities of 'tacit knowledge' that are integral to design practice and can enable public relations practitioners to combine and integrate strategic rationality with creative thought and expression in planning and carrying out projects, programs, and campaigns.

The relevant affinities provide the basis for envisioning a "design/communication" (Woodward, 2000a) approach to public relations. This hybrid concept highlights that public relations communication is necessarily informed by and incorporates elements, qualities, and values of design, and, reciprocally, that design of public relations is based in communicative purposes. To design communication and to communicate through design are activities that require effectively utilizing signifying means – linguistic, visual, other symbolic forms -- to produce intended outcomes, for example, presenting a convincing 'call to action' that elicits supportive participation. Design/communication, as a substantive approach, designates an instrumental skill-set for public relations practitioners, but one that requires spontaneity and openness as values associated with cocreation and dialogue. As a sensitizing concept, design/communication points towards a focal management responsibility for public relations professionals, who mobilize stakeholders and publics to participate in active support of activities and initiatives of client organizations.

Recognition that design and communication are integrally connected has deep origins that received first explicit statement in Aristotle's rhetoric, which "provided the basis for systematic forethought in all of the distinct forms of making in words: history, drama, poetry, political and legal speeches, prayers, and religious sermons" (Buchanan, 1995, p. 31). Presented as "the faculty of finding the available means of persuasion with regard to any subject about which we deliberate" (p. 57), rhetoric served as a "design art of literature" (p. 31). A methodology of prior planning in service to diverse directed actions through words, and later through other material and behavioral performances, could be regarded as a kind of universal art ... independent of any particular art of making and, therefore, able to range over all potential considerations and subjects that may enter into the making of this or that kind of product.... The element of forethought in making is what subsequently came to be known as design. (p. 31)

All organizations today, including media industries such as the press, must carry out strategic designs in order to deliver the outputs associated with their established mission and purposes, and also as part of ongoing, coordinated efforts to achieve and maintain economic viability, either through market success or other ways of financing operations. The distinctive role of public relations expertise is to provide strategic management for this requirement that organizations must achieve public support for their substantive activities and financial needs. Design/communication is a central skill in the 'toolkit' that public relations professionals provide for organizations from across the range of contemporary missions and social roles.

The timing of the project is appropriate, since the field of design studies (Buchanan & Margolin, 1995) has now progressed to a point where the interdisciplinary sophistication applied to the study of design makes this knowledge applicable to adjacent areas such as public relations practice. This progress places public relations theorists and practitioners in a position to draw on a body of valuable contemporary knowledge about design, while it also provides public relations contributors to the discussion with an interdisciplinary mix of audiences who should be reciprocally interested to learn how design principles can be directly applied to public relations as a globally significant discipline and industry. Public relations should be an active partner in the ongoing, expanding conversation of design studies, especially as it concerns the topic of design culture as an ambient environment in which today's publics live and work.

The activities and methodologies that design studies investigate include "inventing, judging, deciding, and evaluating" (Buchanan, 1995, p. 45), which are basic skills for public relations practice. These instrumentalities are carried out by means of a practical and critical tool-kit comprising "communication, construction, strategic planning, and systematic integration." This "matrix of abilities and disciplines" is applied to management of "signs and images, physical objects, actions and services, ideas and systems," which are the major production areas of design and also the workaday resources and products of public relations professionalism.

The contemporary influence of public relations as a global, organizational, and societal force makes clear how public relations practitioners are now required to exercise responsible authority over this entire array of design abilities, disciplines, and products by applying them specifically to the art and science of reputation management. A design focus can heighten responsible attention to the diverse requirements for communication, culture and community building, as well as mediation of information, knowledge, and related activities associated with enacting organizational missions, goals, and commitments.

Design logic brings a heightened reflexivity about how a practice such as public relations occurs and the impacts it produces. Design is iterative, which means that it proceeds through levels of elaboration and development governed by reflexivity and recursion. Reflexivity refers to the informational, virtual aspects, and recursion to the material, embodied aspects of a process or "movement whereby that which has been used to generate a system is made, through a changed perspective, to become part of the system it generates" (Hayles, 1999, p. 8).

The designer is obliged to interrupt the sense of spontaneity communication can convey – i.e., that flows of communication just continue on naturally from moment to moment as

customary roles of sender and receiver provide accustomed ways of conducting communicative exchange. Design, as a manner of thinking and acting, intervenes to consider reflexively the purposeful character that underlies this apparent spontaneity. Reciprocally, communicative considerations can break the spell of controlled instrumentality that can beset the designer, by widening the design perspective to encompass the broader social activities of which any design initiative is a part, especially when consideration is given to the dialogic foundations of design in its ultimate communicative address to an interlocutor or partner in action. Each practice – design and communication -- allows, in fact requires, the other to question “technique’s acknowledged and celebrated forms” (Fry, 1995, p. 190).

The lens of informational reflexivity and instrument of material recursion can be sharpened through adoption of a practical-critical methodology (Woodward, 2003). Design provides for critically examining how practical techniques are planned and put into action and what their impacts may be on the persons who are involved in and affected by the use of techniques. A cocreational paradigm requires particular attention to forms and processes of inclusion and exclusion that apply to determining the functional roles played by diverse contributors to public relations projects, programs, and campaigns. These range from principal decision makers operating under established organizational and institutional authority, to stakeholder groups that may comprise ‘incumbents, insurgents, and virtual participants’ (Mansell, 2000, p. 1), who bring into consideration various levels of interest and involvement in, and experienced consequences from, the activities decision makers undertake.

Practical-critical methodology incorporates critical analysis as an integral, ongoing, routine part of design/communication practice. This methodology assists the practical use of design/communication to achieve organizational outcomes and consequences for stakeholders and publics; while it also provides for critical-theoretical attention to how design/communication practice is shaped by the manner in which authority and control are exercised over (a) distributions and deployments of material resources, (b) language use and symbolic expression generally, especially the ability to define key terms and determine the quality of discourse, and (c) the norms for establishing and acting on relations -- cooperative, competitive, and conflictual -- in the management and performance of practical projects.

Expanding from a basis in ‘immanent critique’ the practical-critical approach entails “an epistemological learning process, in which inconsistencies are progressively remedied by resort to greater depth and/or (more generally) totality” (Bhaskar, 1998, p. xxi). This occurs according to two basic modes, “(1) by bringing out what is implicit, but not expressly articulated, in some notion; or (2) by repairing some want, lack or inadequacy in it (p. xxi).” Expanding levels of contextually-based analysis and action (reflexivity and recursion) enable accounting for how material circumstances, symbolic resources, and relational factors affect individuals’ and social groups’ ability to exercise active, situated participation. Critical attention is directed toward what is omitted from expressed perspectives, that is, what is taken for granted or left unconsidered; the corollary, required design/communication practice is based on inclusive norms of dialogue, participation, and equity.

An initial level of practical-critical consideration acknowledges and facilitates the goal-

orientation of instrumental activities that are undertaken to achieve specifiable design outcomes in organizational and social contexts. Empirical accuracy is the standard for knowledge and action. Interpretive variability is a factor to be strategically controlled. Communicators are described in categorical terms, and activities and communicative appeals are correlated with general sets of interests attributed to segments of these aggregated audiences. Applicable design techniques are deployed instrumentally as generic building blocks of technical action. This sort of instrumentalism defines the characteristic functional approach as criticized by its detractors and challenged by the cocreational perspective.

Practical-critical methodology reveals from the outset, however, that working techniques are distilled from complex, situated histories of discursive, material, and relational practices, rather than serving as atomic units of action. Accordingly, attention turns to the different interpretive and practical perspectives from which these instrumental operations can be considered. The immediate use context of instrumental design action is ‘reconstructed’ according to competing discourses or language usages that make techniques intelligible to different groups of actual and potential users of the design outcomes. The reconstructive mode directs attention to the situated ways in which communicators become involved, develop interpretive meanings, and establish interpersonal relations as communicative activities unfold in time. Discursive formations and language uses are analyzed in specific relation to how meaning making invokes material circumstances and elicits interpersonal interactions or performances as substantive parts of communicative activities. Expressed perceptions and experiences, and inflections based on such differences as gender, class, race, and ethnicity, matter significantly. Value is accorded to the discovery of interpretive variability rather than attempting to control it. Communicators are considered not as generic indicators of categorical aggregates, but as situated, social actors expressing and acting on self-constructed meanings in specific material circumstances and amidst particular relational dynamics.

A full practical-critical analysis relates interpretations to material conditions and the social circumstances of communicators in order to increase actionable knowledge about, as well as to provide for shared control of, the conditions and consequences of design/communication as it proceeds in organizational contexts as well as in broader social circumstances.

To engage these broader dimensions of context, design/communication should be considered as an instance, or expression, of a “triadic” (Woodward, 1996) theory of communication, which contends that communicative practice requires, in all instances, (1) embodiment in material form, (2) construction and exchange of information and ideologies, and (3) enactment of relations, through role performances conferring personal and functional identities. The materiality of communication concerns how it is manifested or enacted, directly in physiological capabilities, such as speech and hearing; in physical-artifactual forms, including technological media; and in physical performances, which may impress significance on any or all of all the sensorium, as communication is heard, seen, touched, even smelled or tasted, since these senses all contribute to the organizing of experience and meaning making. The informational, discursive, ideological dimension of communication concerns how it is constructed according to available ensembles of

symbolic or signifying tokens, which are incorporated into communicative activities as resources for meaning making. The relational character of communication has to do with the constitutive basis it provides for identity formation and social role-playing. Triadic elements of communication may be ‘assembled’ in diverse ways; but the material (physical-artifactual), symbolic-discursive, and relational dimensions are always present and observable and require comprehensive analysis.

A correlative proposition is that triadic communication is a ‘transactional’ (Woodward, 1996; 2001b) activity that involves movement, exchange, and transformation across these three dimensions. In communicative transactions, matter, meanings, and performative role playing and identity building enter into the complex patterns of interaction and interdependence, with each dimension shaping and conditioning the others: Matter becomes meaningful and performative; communicative meaning is materially embodied and performatively enacted; and communicative role performances are materially presented while the meanings that are enacted are continually transformed through interpretation, translation, and reinterpretation across diverse social and cultural contexts.

This triadic, transactional approach has its basis in John Dewey’s transactionalism (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, pp. 121-129 and *passim*), which is an established philosophical source for communication theory (see Carey, 1989; Woodward, 2001b). Inquiring beyond the significance of interactions between individualized entities, dyadic processes of cause and effect, or linear flows of information, the triadic, transactional view focuses on the encompassing medium or milieu (Dewey & Bentley, 1949) as a ‘third’ element in all communication. Dyadic models emphasize transmissions, including empirical examination of how particular transmissions may be motivated (senders’ interests) and what their social effects may be (receivers’ responses). The triadic, transactional view draws attention instead to how common worlds for experience and knowledge are created and especially how they provide for modes of participation, which may range from full, creative collaborations at the upper range, to mere acquiescence at the lower end, including critical awareness of cooptative forms of action that have the effect of negating participation.

A familiar emphasis on “social transaction” (Bruner, 1986, p. 57) revolves around language use as the basis for “those dealings which are premised on a mutual sharing of assumptions and beliefs about how the world is, how mind works, what we are up to, and how communication should proceed.” A “fully transactional view” (Becker, 1964, pp. 38 ff.) extends beyond these language-based elements, significant as they are, to recognize how commonly available, communicative worlds are constructed or constituted in triadic dimensions. That is, all communication is (1) symbolic – based on available ensembles of symbolic or signifying tokens and activities, which are resources for meaning making; (2) material, because communications are embodied in physical-artifactual forms, including media, and (3) relational, based on performative role-playing, which is coupled with an experienced sense among communicators of personal and social or group identity.

Moreover, communicative activity reveals its distinctively transactional-participatory (Woodward, 1996) character, based on the interrelatedness of (a) human action as situated

creativity embodied in transactions with a material substratum, (b) systems of mediating techniques and languages through which individual and collective creativity are expressed and enacted, and (c) a sociocultural order that provides meaningful context for personal and collective action. The primacy of communicative action, the material and symbolic resources on which it depends, and the settings for role playing through which communicative action unfolds constitute the basis for considering “participation as the most fundamental relation to reality” (Feenberg, 1999, p. 196).

Schön’s transactional design approach provides an initial framework on which to construct a design/communication model for public relations based in triadic communication theory. Beginning with the practitioner’s stance as “reflection-in-action,” Schön (1983, p. 76 ff.) demonstrated how reflective conversation with the situation allows for integrative management of the domains of representation and use – i.e., the symbolic and material dimensions of the “triadic field” (Woodward, 2000a, p. 346). The design process begins with creation of a “virtual world” (Schön, 1983, p. 159) -- for example, a strategy for action -- that serves as a “context for experiment.” In the case of the public relations manager, this experimental, virtual world is likely to take initial form as a “verbal order” (p. 90) made up of descriptions of strategic and creative initiatives. A working design, based on the objectives toward which the strategy is ultimately directed, specifies how this verbal order -- the words of the plan -- are to be translated over time into specific changes in the material order. In public relations practice, this planning and action would typically take the form of a four-step process extending from definitions of problems and opportunities through planning and programming, communicative action, and finally evaluation (Woodward, 2003, pp. 415 ff.). At this point, the design procedure begins its next iteration. Experimentation, based on newly relevant definitions, produces a revised verbal order, a new virtual world. This recurrent process enables the public relations practitioner to establish linkages between information, or meaning, and material realization.

The transactional approach concentrates on how informational and material orders come together in an integrative way. A virtual world is an informational prevision of the shared experience that the manager intends to create materially through concrete acts of communication. Design/communication succeeds or fails, according to this vision, on the basis of how well the “results ... can be transferred to the built world” (Schön, 1983, p. 159); that is, whether a particular design of communication is successfully realized as concrete acts of communication by situated participants.

A fully triadic, “transactional-participatory” (see Woodward, 1996) approach conceives design/communication as situated, creative action based on mutual-personal relation (see Kirkpatrick, 1986, esp. chp. 5, pp. 137-185) and dialogue. Such action unfolds within a “triadic field ...the time/space in which (i) personhood and identities, (ii) environments, and (iii) social-cultural orders are made and remade through integrative acts of design/communication” (Woodward, 2000a, p. 320).

Emphasis is on how resource environments enable participants or users to access information, to conduct exchange, and to communicate in ways that foster participatory relations. The dialogic character of cocreational relations between and among participants supports a

normative claim that communication should derive from the “basic ... word pair I-You” (Buber, 1970, p. 53) which establishes a dialogic “mode of existence.” The communicator becomes an active agent in relation with others by speaking the “‘I-You’ of persons, dialogue, and mutuality” (Woodward, 1996, p. 161). This relation encompasses and supersedes the other “basic ... word pair” -- the “‘I-It’ of things, persuasion, and causality.” This ‘I-It’ form of involvement describes communicators’ engagement with the resource environment, or physical-artifactual infrastructure that is essential to all communication. A triadic picture of communication comes into view by adding attention to the socio-cultural or discursive orders that provide symbolic resources for communication. The “triadic field” (p. 169) thus includes (1) agents who act in cocreational relation with others, (2) utilizing “mediating activities of languages and techniques” as well as “transactions with the physical/artifactual infrastructure” to produce (3) “social relations and personal and collective cultures” (pp. 169-170) that are geared towards accomplishing organizational work aligned with institutional mission and purposes.

A design/communication perspective, when considered in its full, triadic and transactional-participatory context, can help to inform a next step for media and information-based professions in the emergent network society. This proposed theoretical and practical stance acknowledges and affirms the functional, end-directedness of the public relations role, while also pointing the field’s inherent pragmatism in the direction of cocreational values. A model for collaborative partnerships comes into view that entails sharing of authority and resources among partners across three dimensions of cocreation: material, discursive, and relational.

In areas of concern where publics depend on reliable provisions of expertise for their well-being, the need for interpreters of expert knowledge who can also provide direction for applying the knowledge according to appropriate options is primary. Such a vocational calling can ennoble its practitioners by uplifting its beneficiaries. In the face of numerous pathologies that beset the world today, it is the duty of public relations theorists to help envision how public relations profession can work in collaboration with peer professionals as well as stakeholders and publics in an effort to attain the highest possibilities of the field.

One way of engaging with the social transformations in progress that characterize the emergent network society is to imagine public relations expertise transforming into leadership in dialogue and community building. Public relations management could evolve into professional mobilization of communities of concern, with the individual practitioner to be judged by mastery of the arts and sciences of cocreation, contributing to various communities of stakeholders and publics as an expertly knowledgeable ‘first among equals,’ which is the stance that standards of dialogue and community would require.

The historical division between cocreational and functional approaches to public relations provides a necessary framework for comprehending the possibilities of the field. The approach advocated here is to integrate rather than polarize functional and cocreational perspectives. The claim is that functionalism in public relations can provide (a) a descriptive account of how professionalism in the field actually operates, and (b) a requisite foundation for meeting the normative, cocreational demand to collaborate with publics and stakeholders in creating meanings

and pursuing actions.

The argument is not that theory-building should resort to “a truly functional analysis of communication” (McQuail, 1987, p. 328), considering that conventional functionalism is considered by many, especially critical theorists, to be “too discredited to be of further use as a theory.” Rather, the paper takes the pragmatic position that deploying the field’s functional capabilities in a reflexive-recursive manner is key to shaping cocreational practices that accord with the field’s existing institutional logic, and that promise to develop this institutional logic in the direction of greater social equity and participation in the future. The relevant meaning of function is “a purposeful communication activity as it might seem to the acting unit, or agent, such as a person, group, or organization” (McQuail, 1987, p. 329). This usage employs “the concept of function for ‘provisional orientation and practical illustration’” (p. 328). Incorporating this provisional functionalism into theory (see Woodward, 2001b, pp. 81-83) and pragmatically developing functional capabilities as a resource are key elements in developing cocreational approaches that better serve stakeholders and publics according to their own estimations of what constitutes mutual benefit. In this way, the social benefits of public relations as a contemporary institution can be effectively delivered, while also increasing the ability of people to shape these benefits towards their own interests.

Perfecting techniques for systematically managing the functional outputs of public relations practice in cocreational ways that are comprehensible and transparent to publics has the potential to open the field, with its ensemble of historically developed techniques and skills, to more potential beneficiaries. These include “organized groups with limited funds” (Curran, 2002, p. 34), along with those involved in forms of collective activity that might not conventionally be thought of as organizational or institutional in nature. An example would be emergent social movements that are currently described by labels such as “transnational activist networks” (Ponniah & Fisher, 2003, p. 3) or “epistemic communities.” The concern to make public relations expertise a more widely accessible resource redirects the emphasis of the field away from a contemporary movement towards relationship management (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000) as a central strategy for addressing “‘publics that constrain or enhance the ability of the organization to meet its mission’” (p. xiii, citing Grunig, Grunig, & Ehling, 1992, p. 20). Instead, theory development is directed towards specifying functional capabilities of the field so that publics can actively utilize these capabilities as resources for their own self-directed projects. These projects may, in fact, include relationship-building between organizations and publics, but the impetus can come from other sources than conventionally-recognized organizations and institutions acting foundationally out of their self-interest.

Public relations, as a field of study and an ensemble of practices would then be better positioned to play a prominent role in challenging existing coalitions of power rather than serving mainly to consolidate the power of elites, which now can occur even in the guise of relationship management. The field’s functional capabilities become less like a “brick” (see Massumi, 1992, p. 8; Deleuze & Foucault, 1977, p. 208) to be used by professionals to produce a type of relational architecture deemed desirable by established organizations, and more like a “toolbox” that diverse

people can employ, individually and collectively, to pry open institutional mechanisms whose inner workings are now often closed to public comprehension and to directive participation by stakeholders and publics. Developing a functional perspective on the institutional logic of the field thus supports an effort to move beyond the field's established institutional logic towards a more participatory mode of deploying the field's resources and expertise. The vision is to transform public relations by means of its own accomplished history.

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## 21

## How Can Companies Succeed in Forming CSR Reputation?

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### Abstract

This study examined companies' use of various channels to communicate their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities and the effects of those channels—specifically, press releases, corporate websites, CSR reports, corporate Facebook pages, and TV advertising—on forming the CSR reputations of 100 global companies. Results showed that, as in previous studies, corporate websites and CSR reports were the most common channels for CSR communications, but press releases—through their impact on news articles—and general corporate Facebook pages were the only effective channels in forming CSR reputation. The theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: advertising, corporate communication, CSR communication, CSR report, CSR reputation, media relations, social media, websites

As attention to the ethical and social responsibilities of companies has increased, companies have invested more resources in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. According to a 2013 survey by the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy (CECP), companies' philanthropic contributions in cash and in-kind giving totaled more than \$25 billion in 2013, an increase of 64% over 2010 levels. Among companies making international contributions, the median international contribution increased from \$3.11 million in 2010 to \$4.88 million in 2013 (CECP, 2014). LBG Associates' 2014 study entitled *Global Employee Engagement* also showed that workplace giving increased from 53% in 2007 to 72% in 2014. LBG Associates (2014) attributed this trend to a global recognition of the value of CSR, as well as to the globalizing of businesses themselves.

A primary goal of CSR initiatives is to gain a favorable CSR reputation; companies desire the public to see them as ethical and socially responsible (Lii & Lee, 2012). Consumer surveys suggest the positive effects of maintaining a good CSR reputation. For example, in Nielsen's 2014 *Global Survey on Corporate Social Responsibility*, 55% of consumers across 60 countries said they were willing to pay more for products and services of companies that were committed to having a positive social and environmental impact. Academic research has also shown that a positive CSR reputation can affect consumer behavior, donations to corporate-supported nonprofit organizations, and citizenship behavior (Lichtenstein, Drumright, & Braig, 2004; Lii & Lee, 2012). Despite increasing awareness that CSR communication is essential to forming positive CSR reputation (e.g., Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010; Kim, 2011), previous studies have not fully revealed which CSR communication strategies are effective in creating a positive CSR reputation. Most studies of CSR communication have either been merely descriptive or have focused on only a few channels (e.g., Chaudhri & Wang, 2007; Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011; Smith & Alexander, 2013); in the real world, however, CSR messages are often conveyed through multiple channels. Studies have also usually been limited to one or two countries, even as technological advancements and companies' globalizing communication efforts impel practitioners to think about transnational strategies. Furthermore, most research on message strategies has been experimental (Eberle, Berens, & Li, 2013; Skard & Thorbjørnsen, 2014); though helpful in examining the causal effects, experimental studies are inadequate for testing the effects of communication strategies on reputation, as reputation rarely changes by a one-time exposure to a stimulus.

To fill these gaps, the present study seeks to explore how companies communicate their CSR messages and to test the effectiveness of the CSR communication strategies. Associative network theory (ANT) and the network agenda setting (NAS) model form the theoretical framework. Associative network theory explains the network-like cognitive structure of memory and offers a basis for understanding how humans store and retrieve information. The NAS model, also called third-level agenda-setting theory, posits that semantic networked information can be transferred between different agendas through communication (Anderson, 1983; Anderson & Bower, 1973; Collins & Loftus, 1975; Vu, Guo, & McCombs, 2014).



## Literature Review

### Corporate Reputation and CSR Reputation

Definitions of corporate reputation are varied; after reviewing 49 journal articles and books, Barnett, Jermier, and Lafferty (2006) defined it as “observers’ collective judgments of a corporation based on assessments of the financial, social, and environmental impacts attributed to the corporation over time” (p. 34). Corporate reputation is contextual—it represents the standing of a company compared to others in a specific category (e.g., within the industry, in the U.S., worldwide), and evaluates a company on a specific attribute or attributes (e.g., financial, leadership, social responsibility) (van Riel, 2013).

Scholars have endeavored to identify which attributes the public uses to evaluate a company—those that collectively determine overall corporate reputation (Berens & van Riel, 2004; Walsh & Beatty, 2007). Perhaps the most well-known of these attributes are the seven dimensions of corporate performance of the Reputation Institute’s RepTrak®; these relate to a company’s *product/services* (high quality products and services), *innovation* (innovative products or business), *workplace* (appealing place to work and treats employees well), *governance* (responsibly-run, behaving ethically, and open and transparent in its business), *citizenship* (good corporate citizen, supporting good causes, and protecting the environment), *leadership* (strong leadership), and *financial performance* (good financial results) (Reputation Institute, 2015).

CSR reputation is one aspect of corporate reputation that focuses on the public’s evaluation of a company on its social performance over time. Conceptually, three of the seven dimensions of corporate performance uniquely define CSR—*citizenship*, *workplace*, and *governance*. Stakeholder theory views corporations as systems of stakeholders operating within the system of the society that provides the necessary resources—such as the legal and market infrastructure—for corporate activities; thus, corporations have responsibilities to a wide range of stakeholders, including consumers, employees, the community, and the general public (Clarkson, 1995; Freeman, 1984). On this basis, some may argue that all of the seven dimensions are related to CSR reputation, but previous studies indicate that the public distinguishes between corporate ability—a company’s expertise in its products and services—and CSR—activities related to its social performance or social obligations (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2007). Accordingly, the present study considered only the three dimensions distinctly related to CSR as the dimensions comprising CSR reputation.

### Corporate Communication and Reputation

Corporate communication is “the set of activities involved in managing and orchestrating all internal and external communications aimed at creating favorable starting points with stakeholders on which the company depends” (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 51); it involves various channels, including media relations (e.g., press releases, media kits, etc.), advertising, social media, and organizational media such as websites, newsletters, flyers, and e-mail.

Essentially, corporate communication 1) increases the public’s awareness of a company and

2) creates or strengthens associations between the company and certain attributes (Einwiller, 2013). Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) focused on the role of communication in forming corporate reputation, emphasizing its cognitive effects on the public, as reputation “forms from networks of cognitive associations that develop over time from a group’s cumulative exposure to sensory stimuli. The mosaic of associations comes together to create an overall impression” (p. 78).

In the present study, the role of corporate communications in creating associations between a company and CSR attributes and transferring them to the public’s memory is of particular interest. First, it is important to understand how human semantic networks function in cognitive information processing, as the networks or associations of existing information play a critical role in interpreting a new message. ANT posits that a person’s knowledge, or semantic memory, comprises a set of nodes and links among the nodes (Anderson, 1983, Anderson & Bower, 1973; Collins & Loftus, 1975). A node refers to any type of information—for example, a company, a product, an issue, a characteristic, or an attribute. An association indicates a link between two pieces of information, or two nodes, which varies in strength. A collection of nodes associated with each other can form a category. When exposed to new information, a person recognizes the information as linked to at least one of the categories in his or her memory and understands the new information based on the characteristics of the category, which, in turn, affects that person’s evaluation or perception of the new information. The strength of the associations among the nodes affects when a person retrieves information, which is referred to as the “spreading activation” process. When two nodes are more strongly associated, a person is more likely to retrieve the two pieces of information simultaneously.

The NAS model, which is based on the network-like structure of the human cognitive map in ANT, hypothesizes that associations between objects/issues and attributes can be simultaneously transferred in bundles from one agenda to another through communication (Guo, Vu, & McCombs, 2012; Vu, Guo, & McCombs, 2014), whereas traditional agenda-setting and agenda-building theory posits that an issue or an attribute is transferred between the two agendas in a discrete manner. The NAS model only focuses on the transfer of the salience of an association or associations from the media agenda to the public agenda, so as to examine the influences of the news media on the public agenda. The present study, however, adopts the basic notion of the NAS model and expands the scope from the corporate agenda to the public agenda.

Therefore, before formulating messages, companies need to determine in advance what attribute(s) they want to be associated with in the public’s mind. When a company and CSR issues co-occur more frequently in the news media or when a company positions itself as related to CSR issues more often in its corporate communication materials, the public may have a stronger association between the company and CSR issues. This association will affect the public’s judgment of the company in regard to the CSR dimension. Previous studies have demonstrated the positive effects of the public’s CSR associations with a company on the public’s evaluation of the company in general and in relation to the CSR dimension (Keller & Aaker, 1998; Kim, 2011).

### Corporate CSR Communication

Companies can convey their CSR messages through two types of communication channels, controlled and uncontrolled (Du et al., 2010). Company-controlled channels include annual CSR reports, press releases, corporate websites, TV advertisements, magazines or billboard advertisements, and product packaging. The converse of such company-controlled channels is third-party endorsement—by the news media, customers, or monitoring groups—which has more credibility than controlled media. Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, and blogs are in between; companies can decide whether they will set up an account or not but will not have full control over the messages. Controllability and credibility thus involve a trade-off: The more controllable channels are, the more likely the public are to think they are self-serving and biased toward the corporation.

Despite the growing importance and popularity of CSR communication, however, there is no clear map of companies' existing CSR communication efforts, which prompts the following research question:

*RQ1: To what degree do global companies communicate their CSR messages using different channels?*

**Press releases and the news media.** Historically, media relations have been a major part of public relations practices. In regard to CSR, companies can put out press releases or media kits about their CSR activities, and the news media may pick up the CSR issues as part of their news agenda, which may influence the public's perception of the companies in relation to CSR issues. The underlying assumption of information sources having an effect on the news media is that the media agenda is not built in a vacuum, but rather that, due to the media's limited resources and time, information sources—including companies, individuals who write opinion pieces and letters to the editor, the government, and monitoring groups—can influence the news media agenda (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Previous research has found empirical support for the success of companies' media relations efforts (e.g., Kioussis, Popescu, & Mitrook, 2007; Ohl, Pincus, Rimmer, & Harrison, 1995). For example, when examining the 25 largest U.S. proxy contests, Ragas (2013) found that news releases from candidate companies had agenda-building effects on the financial news coverage in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and the *Financial Times*.

Media relations strategies are particularly important in reputation formation due to the media's capacity to reach a large audience and their credibility as a third-party endorser. Scholars have posited that the news media shape corporate reputation (Carroll & McCombs, 2003); empirical studies have generally supported the idea, despite some mixed results (Deephouse, 2000; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Kioussis et al., 2007; Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006; Skard & Thorbjørnsen, 2014). As Fombrun and Shanley (1990) observed, "The media themselves act not only as vehicles for advertising and mirrors of reality reflecting firms' actions, but also as active agents shaping information through editorials and feature articles" (p. 240). This prompts the following hypothesis:

*H1: A company's CSR communication through its press releases will be positively related to the company's CSR reputation, mediated by the news articles covering the company and CSR issues.*

**CSR reports and corporate websites.** CSR reports and websites are two channels commonly used in CSR communications (KPMG, 2013; Smith & Alexander, 2013). For example, the 2013 KPMG survey of corporate responsibility showed that more than 93% of the world's largest 250 companies published corporate responsibility reports, up 64% in 2005 (KPMG, 2013). Research has shown that consumers consider websites and CSR reports more effective than advertising (Golob & Bartlett, 2007; Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009). Scholars have also viewed CSR reports and corporate websites as important communication channels that can enable greater corporate transparency and better engagement with multiple stakeholders (Chaudhri & Wang, 2007; Golob & Barlett, 2007; Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011).

**Social Media.** Several studies have highlighted the benefits and significance of social media for corporate image and reputation in general, or to corporate reputation online (Floreddu, Cabiddu, & Evaristo, 2014; Gilpin, 2010; Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011; Li, Berens, & de Maertelaere, 2013), as social media's interactive features allow companies to build relationships via ongoing dialogue with the public. Eberle et al. (2013) found that interactivity in CSR communication channels generated higher message credibility and stronger feelings of identification with a company among consumers, which eventually increased corporate reputation and word-of-mouth intention.

Companies have become aware of the value of social media and have begun to incorporate them in their communication strategies, and research has shown that CSR can be a topic that elicits engagement on social networking sites (Jeong, Paek, & Lee, 2013). Some companies even set up CSR-dedicated social media pages, such as those by Coca-Cola (the Coca Cola CSR Initiative on Facebook), Danone (Danone down to Earth on Twitter), and PepsiCo (PepsiCo Environmental Sustainability on Pinterest).

**Advertising.** Although companies have traditionally avoided advertising their CSR activities, a few studies have indicated that advertising can be effective in forming corporate reputation (Hsu, 2012; Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2007), and several companies have recently used advertising focused either on a specific cause they support or on CSR in general. For instance, Unilever created TV advertising about their fight against hunger among children (part of Unilever's Project Sunlight sustainability program), and a Chevy Super Bowl commercial in 2014 featured the American Cancer Society.

Despite these diverse communication strategies, however, few studies have tested the effectiveness of channels simultaneously, prompting the following research question:

*RQ2. How effective are corporate websites, CSR reports, social media, and advertising in building a positive CSR reputation?*

### Method

The two primary methods used in this study were secondary analysis of the existing data and content analysis. The study sample was the 101 companies in the Reputation Institute's 2014 CSR ranking of the 100 most highly regarded companies (two companies were tied), across 15 countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia,

South Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. To qualify, companies had to have above average reputations in their home markets from 2009 to 2013, be public-facing companies with mid-high international scope, and have revenues greater than \$6 billion in the U.S. or \$1 billion internationally (Reputation Institute, 2015).

### CSR Reputation

The Reputation Institute's 2014 CSR ranking of 100 global companies—the 2014 Global CSR RepTrak® 100—was used as an indicator of CSR reputation. The Global CSR RepTrak® 100 is based on the Global RepTrak® 100, which measures all seven reputation dimensions. The CSR RepTrak® generates annual scores based on the *citizenship*, *governance*, and *workplace* dimensions.

The 2014 Global CSR RepTrak® 100 data were collected in January and February 2014 through an online survey conducted by Toluna. There were 59,921 respondents from the 15 aforementioned countries. The sample from each country matched that country's demographics in terms of age and gender. To qualify to rate a company, a respondent had to rate a company 4 or higher on a 7-point scale for familiarity (Reputation Institute, 2015).

### Corporate CSR Communication

As reputation develops over longer periods of time, the present study focused on the companies' CSR communication over the period of a year, from January to December 2013, before the survey period.

**Press releases.** As the co-occurrence of a company and a CSR issue, representing the salience of the association between the company and the CSR issue, was the focus of the present study, the researcher used Lexis-Nexis keyword searches to count the number of CSR-related press releases that the 101 companies issued in the 15 countries where the reputation survey was conducted. The sources for the press releases were the two largest international press release distribution companies, with the capacity to reach more than 150 countries, *PR Newswire* and *Business Wire*, and the timeframe was from January 1, 2013, to December 31, 2013.

The CSR issues were identified using index terms relevant to the three dimensions of CSR reputation. Examples include *business ethics & corporate citizenship* (“corporate social responsibility, community involvement, resource stewardship and honesty and fairness in dealing with employees, shareholders and the public”), *corporate social responsibility* (“programs and policies of corporations designed to bring sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits to communities in which they operate”), *corporate governance* (“the rules by which business are directed and controlled. The scope includes directors' duty to ensure that businesses are properly and honestly managed to serve shareholders and other communities”), *workplace diversity* (“efforts to recruit, promote and support workers of various cultural backgrounds and physical abilities”), and *employee assistance programs* (“employee benefit packages that offer assessment, counseling and referral services in a variety of areas that affect work performance, health, and wellbeing”) (quotes from LexisNexis, 2015).

**News articles.** To identify news articles where both the companies and the CSR issues were concurrent, the researcher followed the same procedure as with the press releases. First, the researcher selected two newspapers from each of the 15 countries based on their circulation in those countries and their availability in Lexis-Nexis. Second, the number of newspaper articles covering both the 101 companies and the CSR issues were counted, using the same index terms used in searching press releases, with the timeframe of January 1, 2013, to December 31, 2013 (a list of the newspapers will be provided upon request).

**Corporate websites.** Adapting Chaudhri and Wang (2007) and Capriotti & Moreno (2007), the researcher analyzed the websites for the *visibility* of the CSR section and the *prominence* of CSR information. *Visibility* was measured by the placement of CSR information—where the link to the CSR page was. Some companies had an independent tab or direct link to the CSR page on their homepages; others embedded their CSR section under the ‘about us’ or ‘company information’ section. If the main web page had a direct link, it was coded as 1; if not, as 0.

**Prominence** was measured by the number of pages dedicated to CSR information. Coders counted the number of pages and classified websites into one of five categories: 1 for one to two pages, 2 for three to six pages, 3 for seven to ten pages, 4 for 10 to 14 pages, and 5 for 15 or more pages. Hyperlinked pages were all counted, but the contents of banners and simple video downloads that did not involve opening a new tab were disregarded.

The intercoder reliability of the variable *visibility* was 96% in simple agreement, .92 in Scott's pi, and .92 in Krippendorff's alpha. The simple agreement for *prominence* was 94.1 % with .87 in Scott's pi and .87 in Krippendorff's alpha.

**CSR Reports.** The existence of CSR reports was counted as well (0 = *absence*, 1 = *presence*). CSR reports published for 2013, 2012–2013, or 2013–2014 were manually checked, and two coders checked them separately to increase the precision of the coding. Coding of all CSR reports coding was consistent across the coders.

**Facebook.** Companies' Facebook pages were content analyzed as one indication of companies' CSR communication via social media. In 2013, Facebook was ranked as the world's most popular social media site (Pew Research Center, 2015). Companies' general Facebook pages and CSR-dedicated Facebook pages were examined. The existence of CSR messages on a general company Facebook page in 2013 was coded as *presence* (1) or *absence* (0). The existence of CSR messages on a CSR-dedicated company Facebook page in 2013 was coded as *presence* (1) or *absence* (0). The intercoder reliability was 93.1% in simple agreement, with .85 in Scott's pi, and .85 in Krippendorff's alpha.

**TV advertising.** A count was made of the number of TV advertisements with a CSR theme or CSR issues in 2013. The researcher made a comprehensive survey of the available archival databases of advertising and selected the Advertolog database (<http://www.advertolog.com>). The Advertolog database allows one to search advertisements by company name and country. CSR advertising was defined as advertising promoting the company's CSR efforts to benefit the community or society in general, or to support a cause. Two coders evaluated each advertisement returned by a search. Coding results were identical, although only a few companies aired CSR advertising.

## Results

RQ1 asked about the communication channels through which companies communicate their CSR messages in 2013. Among the 101 companies, a total of 414 CSR-related press releases were issued by 62 companies, with the number per company ranging from 0 to 29. Newspaper articles with CSR issues totaled 385, which covered 61 companies; the distribution ranged from 0 to 43 per company.

Although all 101 companies had CSR sections on their websites, the *visibility* and *prominence* of the CSR information varied. In terms of visibility, more than half of the companies ( $n = 58$ , 57.43%) had a direct link to the CSR section on their main homepage, either in the main part of the page or at the bottom, usually labeled *citizenship*, *responsibility*, or *sustainability*. The rest of the companies' websites ( $n = 43$ , 42.57%) embedded CSR information in the general corporate information, such as in the 'about us' section. The visibility of CSR information on these websites was poor; readers who did not make an effort to look for the CSR information would be unlikely to ever see it.

Regardless of visibility level, CSR information was highly prominent on most of the companies' websites: 74.26% ( $n = 75$ ) of the companies dedicated 15 or more pages to CSR information; 5.94% ( $n = 6$ ) of the companies' websites had 11–14 pages, 6.93% ( $n = 7$ ) had seven to ten pages, 8.91% ( $n = 9$ ) had three to six pages, and only 3.96% ( $n = 4$ ) of the companies had only one to two CSR-related pages. Whether the information was easily accessible or not, the companies did utilize their websites as a primary tool for communicating their CSR efforts.

Most companies in the sample published CSR reports (78.22%,  $n = 79$ ). That is slightly lower than the percentage found in 2013 KPMG's survey results but indicates that CSR reports are still one of the most used channels for presenting companies' CSR efforts. Analyzing the company Facebook pages, 53.47% ( $n = 54$ ) communicated CSR messages through their general company Facebook pages, and 31.68% ( $n = 32$ ) through CSR-dedicated Facebook pages. Most companies still deemed advertising an inappropriate channel for conveying CSR messages: Only three CSR-related TV advertisements were detected, from two companies, Google ( $n = 1$ ) and Unilever ( $n = 2$ ).

H1 posited mediating effects of the news media on relationships between press releases and CSR reputation. Before testing the mediating effects of the news media, relationships between the press releases and the news articles, and between the news articles and CSR reputation were tested. Results showed that the number of press releases where a company's name and CSR issues co-occurred was positively related to the number of news articles covering the same topics ( $\beta = 0.27$ ,  $p = .02$ ); the more companies communicated their CSR messages through press releases, the more likely the companies and the CSR issues were to appear in news articles. The number of news articles covering both a company and a CSR issue, in turn, was positively related to the CSR reputation of the companies ( $\beta = 0.12$ ,  $p = .001$ ). However, press releases had no direct effect on CSR reputation. The bias-corrected bootstrapping method (Hayes, Preacher, & Myers, 2011), which is more robust for a small sample, was used to test the significance of indirect effects of press releases on CSR reputation. The distribution of the estimates generates

asymmetric confidence intervals (CI). If a 95% bootstrap confidence interval does not contain 0, the indirect effects are significant at the .05 level (MacKinnon, 2008). With 10,000 samples from the data, the results showed the significance of the indirect effects of press releases on CSR reputation through the news media (CI = .003, .104).

RQ2 asked about the effectiveness of communication channels in forming CSR reputation. Relationships between different types of communication channels and CSR reputation were examined using path analysis, by including the direct and indirect effect of communication channels on CSR reputation. Results showed that news articles ( $\beta = 0.11$ ,  $p = .002$ ) and Facebook pages—both general Facebook pages ( $\beta = 1.09$ ,  $p = .02$ ) and CSR-dedicated Facebook pages ( $\beta = -1.20$ ,  $p = .02$ )—were the two statistically significant channels in forming CSR reputation. A higher number of newspaper articles covering both a company and CSR issues was associated with a more favorable CSR reputation. However, there were mixed results for the social media effects. The companies that communicated CSR messages on their general Facebook pages had significantly higher CSR reputations than those that did not communicate via that channel, whereas the companies that communicated CSR messages on CSR-dedicated company Facebook pages had lower CSR reputations than those that did not communicate via that channel (see Figure 1).

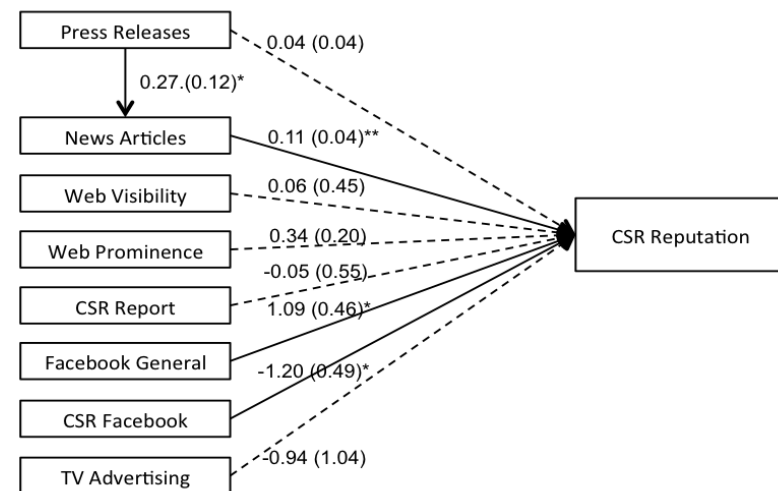


Figure 1. Path analysis of the effects of CSR communication channels on 2014 CSR reputation (N = 101). Unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses; \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## Discussion

CSR communications are an essential bridge between a company's CSR activities and the public's CSR perception of the company. Despite much recent research on CSR communication, we know little about the effectiveness of CSR communication strategies in shaping the public's perception of corporate social performance. The present study examined the channels used to communicate CSR messages and the effects of those channels on forming CSR reputation.

Across the study companies, websites and CSR reports were the prevalent channels for communicating CSR information. Although the visibility and prominence of the CSR messages on the companies' websites varied, all had CSR sections on their websites; the majority of the companies published CSR reports. Press releases and social media were less used. Most of the companies in the sample published less than 10 press releases during 2013, only half used their Facebook pages to communicate CSR messages, and about one third had CSR-dedicated Facebook pages. Advertising was rarely used.

Testing the effects showed that the most commonly used CSR communication channels are not always the most effective. Companies' media relations strategies, press releases specifically, influenced CSR reputation indirectly through the news media. As previous studies found, the news media were still a crucial source in forming the companies' CSR reputation, and the results highlighted the importance media relations strategies, even in today's digital and social media era.

The present study also provides empirical evidence of the effectiveness of social media as communication channels for CSR messages. CSR messages themselves can draw people to a company's Facebook pages (Jeong et al., 2013), where the public is more exposed to the CSR messages and forms an association between the company and the CSR issues, which, in turn, benefits its CSR reputation. The present results offer a caveat, however, about CSR communications on Facebook: setting up CSR-dedicated Facebook pages had adverse, rather than positive effects on CSR reputation. Perhaps the public perceive CSR-dedicated Facebook pages as too promotional and are skeptical of the motives for a company's CSR engagement.

This study has several limitations. First, some of the study data are secondary data. Despite the strengths of each database (i.e., the Global CSR RepTrak<sup>®</sup> 100, Lexis-Nexis), the researcher had no control over the data collection process or the indexing of the news articles. Second, caution is needed in interpreting the results. Although the study examined the relationships between the different channels of communication and CSR reputation, this does not mean there are direct causal relationships between the two. Experimental studies should follow up on this. Third, even though the RepTrak<sup>®</sup> is the most comprehensive collection of CSR reputation data, it only contained 101 corporations. Future studies can be done on a larger scale and can also explore the effects of other channels, such as TV news coverage and Twitter or other social media. The study relationships can be explored at the country level, to explain the role country factors may play. Moreover, this study can be replicated so that trends could be observed.

Nevertheless, this study makes both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it advances ANT and the NAS model by applying them to CSR communication. ANT has primarily

been applied to brand extension, but little used in the CSR context. Because CSR communication efforts start from a company's intention to associate itself with a CSR image, understanding how these associations work in people's cognitive information processing helps to further understand how these CSR strategies might affect the public. The NAS model posits the transferability of associations between issues or attributes from one agenda to another. CSR associations that companies create through their communication strategies can migrate, for example, from the corporate agenda to the media agenda and from the media agenda to the public agenda, or from the corporate agenda directly to the media agenda. The present study supports this model, and shows that a company's CSR association can be transferred to the public agenda, either directly through social media or indirectly through the media agenda.

In terms of practice, this study offers practitioners guidance on CSR communication strategies. Although scholars have advocated communicating CSR activities through third parties to counter the public's skepticism about CSR activities, currently, CSR is primarily conveyed using direct communication strategies. The present results suggest that it is still important for corporations to invest in media relations, not only with their home countries' media, but with the media in other countries where they operate also. CSR is a strategic topic about which practitioners can proactively reach out to journalists, as CSR practices are tied to issues that stakeholders care about and that benefit the local community or society as a whole.

Another practical implication of the study relates to strategies for using online communication tools. Although companies routinely use corporate websites to present CSR information, the results showed that the visibility and prominence of CSR information on the websites had no relationships with CSR reputation, implying that corporate websites may not be the best strategy for a company seeking to improve its CSR reputation. This study, however, presents the opportunities of using social media for CSR communications, which might need to be the future direction of companies' CSR communications online. Even though several limitations resides, the present study can serve as a springboard for exploring the area of CSR communication and the strategic management of channels in CSR communication.

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## 22

## Should PR Practitioners Communicate CSR Activities Directly or Through the News Media? Comparing the Effects of Communicating Through the News Media and Direct Corporate Communication Efforts on CSR Reputation

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### Abstract

This study seeks to examine the channels through which CSR messages are conveyed and test the effectiveness of news media and corporate communications—specifically, newspapers, corporate websites, CSR reports, social media, and advertising—in forming the 2014 CSR reputations of 100 global companies. The results showed that corporations utilized CSR reports and websites more than social media and advertising, and there were variations in terms of the media coverage of CSR issues across the company. Among them, the issue salience in the news media and the website prominence were two significant predictors of positive CSR reputation. The theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: CSR communication, CSR reputation, news media, websites, CSR report, social media, advertising

As attention to the ethical and social responsibilities of corporations has increased, corporations have invested more resources in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. According to a 2013 survey by the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy (CECP), corporations' total philanthropic contributions in cash and in-kind giving totaled more than \$25 billion in 2013, an

increase of 64% over 2010 levels. Among companies making international contributions, the median international contribution increased from \$3.11 million in 2010 to \$4.88 million in 2013 (CECP, 2014). LBG Associates' 2014 study entitled *Global Employee Engagement* also showed progress in employee engagement programs: the presence of workplace giving increased from 53% in 2007 to 72% in 2014. LBG Associates (2014) attributed this trend to a global recognition of the value of CSR, as well as to the globalizing of businesses themselves.

One of the primary goals of CSR initiatives is to gain a favorable CSR reputation, meaning that a corporation is seen as ethical and socially responsible in the public eye (Lii & Lee, 2012). Nielsen's 2013 report on *The Global, Socially Conscious Consumer* demonstrated the value of the public perception of CSR performance; about half of the respondents expressed their willingness to spend more on goods and services from companies that had implemented programs to give back to the community (Nielsen, 2013). Similarly, in Nielsen's 2014 *Global Survey on Corporate Social Responsibility*, 55% of global consumers across 60 countries said they were willing to pay more for products and services of companies that were committed to having a positive social and environmental impact. In addition, more than half of the respondents (52%) said that they had purchased at least one product or service in the past six months from a socially responsible company (Nielsen, 2014). Other research has also shown that a positive CSR reputation can affect consumers' attitudes or behaviors toward a corporation, including purchase behavior, donations to corporate-supported nonprofit organizations, and citizenship behavior (Lichtenstein, Drumright, & Braig, 2004; Lii & Lee, 2012).

Companies have endeavored to communicate their CSR efforts, as that is essential to forming the public perception of a company (Devin & Lane, 2014; Maignan & Ferrell, 2004; Manheim & Pratt, 1986), and the public can perceive the same CSR messages differently depending on how a company communicates them (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). The two most popular communication channels that companies have used to convey their CSR activities have been corporate websites and CSR reports (KPMG, 2013; Smith & Alexander, 2013). More recently, however, as CSR has become a core strategy for increasing corporate competitiveness, companies have begun to diversify their CSR communication strategies and to include social media and advertising.

Despite the popularity of CSR communication, however, few studies have assessed the effectiveness of different communication channels in generating favorable CSR reputation. Most studies of CSR communication have either been purely descriptive or have focused on only one type of channel, even though in the real world CSR messages are often conveyed through multiple channels (e.g., Amaladoss & Manohar, 2013; Chapple & Moon, 2005; Chaudhri & Wang, 2007; Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011; Smith & Alexander, 2013; Sweeney & Coughlan, 2008; Wanderley, Lucian, Farache, & de Sousa Filho, 2008). The scope of such research has also been limited to one or two countries, even as the increasing globalization of companies' communication efforts and the ever-advancing pace of technological developments make it clear that practitioners need to think about communication strategies to deal with a global public. Furthermore, research on message strategies has largely consisted of experimental studies (Eberle, Berens, & Li, 2013;



Skard & Thorbjørnsen, 2014). Although experimental studies are helpful in examining the causal effects of various types of message strategies, such studies cannot really measure the effects of these strategies on reputation, as reputation is formed over the long term.

The present study seeks to examine the channels through which CSR messages are conveyed and to test the effectiveness of news media and corporate communications—specifically, newspapers, corporate websites, CSR reports, social media, and advertising—in forming the CSR reputations of 100 global companies. As Marshall McLuhan's famous dictum, "The medium is the message" implies, different communication channels can affect people's perception of the same messages (McLuhan & Fiore, 2001). A corporation can influence the public's perceptions of that corporation through the news media or through direct corporate communication channels with the public (Manheim & Pratt, 1986). As CSR has become more and more popular, the CSR-related content that corporations seek to convey is increasing. It will be crucial for practitioners seeking to communicate CSR strategically to gain insight into how to select the most effective channels for communication.

## Literature Review

### Corporate Reputation

Corporate reputation has been a topic of research in many disciplines, including psychology, sociology, management, marketing, and communication, and its interdisciplinary nature has generated the multidimensionality of the concept. Scholars have defined corporate reputation from diverse perspectives; as a result, there is no single definition of corporate reputation. From a review of 49 unique journal articles or books, Barnett, Jermier, and Lafferty (2006) identified three clusters among the definitions of corporate reputation that are distinct from each other: assets (i.e., intangible, financial, or economic assets), assessment (i.e., judgment, evaluation, opinion, or estimate of a corporation), and awareness (i.e., general awareness or knowledge of a corporation without judgment). Barnett et al. (2006) therefore summarized corporate reputation as "observers' collective judgments of a corporation based on assessments of the financial, social, and environmental impacts attributed to the corporation over time" (p. 34). This definition placed more emphasis on the aspect of assessment, as it is the most popular and representative aspect among corporate reputation scholars (e.g., Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Fombrun & van Riel, 1997; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Rindova & Fombrun, 1998; Wartick, 2002), and the present study does so as well.

Corporate reputation comprises multiple dimensions, and scholars have tried to define these (Barnett et al., 2006; Berens & van Riel, 2004; Fombrun, 1996, 1998; Walsh & Beatty, 2007). One of the most comprehensive descriptions of the dimensions of corporate reputation is that of the Reputation Institute's RepTrak®, which comprises seven dimensions of corporate performance; these relate to a company's *product/services* (high quality products and services), *innovation* (innovative products or business), *workplace* (appealing place to work and treats employees well), *governance* (responsibly-run, behaving ethically, and open and transparent in its business),

*citizenship* (good corporate citizen, supporting good causes, and protecting the environment), *leadership* (strong leadership), and *financial performance* (good financial results) (Reputation Institute, 2015). The RepTrak® is an updated version of Harris Interactive's Reputation Quotient<sup>SM</sup>, and previous research has demonstrated the validity and reliability of both measures (Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever, 2000; Gardberg & Fombrun, 2002; Ponzi, Fombrun, & Gardberg, 2011; Wartick, 2002).

CSR, thus, is an aspect of corporate performance that the public evaluates and that eventually affects overall corporate reputation. From the perspective of stakeholder theory, corporations are systems of stakeholders operating within the system of the society that provides the necessary resources—such as the legal and market infrastructure—for corporate activities, and so they have responsibilities to a wide range of stakeholders, including employees, the community, and the general public (Clarkson, 1995; Freeman, 1984). Examples of CSR practices include community volunteer programs, charitable contributions, pro bono work, environmental or public health initiatives, employee welfare programs, and transparent communications about their management (Clarkson, 1995; Gardberg & Fombrun, 2006).

### Communication and Reputation

The public's knowledge of a corporation or a corporate performance is a prerequisite to forming a reputation, and corporate communication serves as a bridge between a company's desired identity and how the public perceive the corporation. As one can discern from van Riel and Fombrun's (2007) definition of corporate communication—"the set of activities involved in managing and orchestrating all internal and external communications aimed at creating favorable starting points with stakeholders on which the company depends" (p. 51)—corporate communication involves various channels, both internal and external, including media relations (e.g., press releases, media kits, etc.), advertising, social media, and organizational media such as websites, newsletters, flyers, and email (Balmer & Greyser, 2006). Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) have emphasized the role of communication in forming corporate reputation, as it "forms from networks of cognitive associations that develop over time from a group's cumulative exposure to sensory stimuli. The mosaic of associations comes together to create an overall impression" (p. 78).

Accordingly, corporate reputation is the result of the public's processing of information they receive through corporate media, news media, advertising, peers, and personal experience (van Riel, 2013; van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). Reputation scholars have been most interested in the impact of communication through the mass media because corporate reputation is the collective judgment of the general public—that is, public opinion—and the mass media influence public opinion significantly (Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Deephouse, 2000; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Einwiller, Carroll, & Korn, 2010; Kioussis, Popescu, & Mitrook, 2007; Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006a, 2006b). As Fombrun and Shanley (1990) observed, "The media themselves act not only as vehicles for advertising and mirrors of reality reflecting firms' actions, but also as active agents shaping information through editorials and feature articles" (p. 240).

Agenda setting is a useful theoretical framework for examining issues related to corporate reputation

and the media. The major premise of agenda-setting theory is that, although the news media do not tell the public what to think, they do tell the public “what to think about” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Dearing and Roger’s (1996) extensive review of 112 empirical studies showed that about 60% of the studies supported this premise. Later, McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, and Rey (1997) introduced two levels of agenda setting; the first-level agenda deals with an object or an issue, and the second-level agenda deals with the attributes of the object or issue, which comprise a substantive attribute and an affective attribute (tone). Second-level agenda setting suggests that the news media tell not only what to think about but also how to think about an object or issue. Applying this theory to the field of business communication, Carroll and McCombs (2003) postulated that the first level of agenda setting implies that more media coverage about a company will lead to a higher degree of public awareness of that company. The second-level of agenda-setting theory, they said, suggests that the media salience of a particular attribute of a firm will be positively associated with the proportion of the public who define the firm by that attribute (i.e., substantive attribute); the tone of the attribute in the news media will affect the public’s evaluation of that attribute (i.e., the affective attribute). More importantly, Carroll and McCombs (2003) suggested that the second level of agenda setting primes the public’s opinion about a company by calling attention to a particular attribute. When people make a judgment about an object they based it on the information that is salient at that time, rather than retrieving complete information about the object (Iyengar & Simon, 1997). Accordingly, what attribute the news media cover about an object and how they cover it will affect the public’s opinion about the object.

Logically, then, the salience of CSR information received through the news media may affect the public’s opinion of a corporation’s CSR performance —how socially responsible it is compared to other firms in the same industry. Furthermore, as Fombrun and van Riel (2007) have observed, direct corporate communication efforts can influence the public’s perception of a corporation’s CSR performance as well. Previous research has shown that CSR communication is critical in forming positive attitudes or supportive behavior toward a corporation (Berens, van Riel, & Bruggen, 2005; Du et al., 2010; Fombrun, 2005; Lichtenstein et al., 2004). This raises the question of what CSR communication strategies are really effective in forming a positive CSR reputation. Second-level agenda-setting theory and empirical studies suggest that news media coverage of CSR issues influence a company’s CSR reputation (Deephouse, 2000; Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006a, 2006b; Kiousis et al., 2007; Wartick, 1992), but the effects of corporate communication efforts such as websites, CSR reports, and social media have little been explored.

### CSR Communication Strategies

Brenna, Merkl-Davies, and Beelitz (2013) described the two-way nature of CSR communication as “a process of reciprocal influence between organisations and their audiences” (p. 665). Similarly, Podnar (2008) defined CSR communication as a process of anticipating stakeholders’ expectations, articulation of CSR policy, and managing of different organization communication tools designed to provide true and transparent information about a company’s or a brand’s integration of its business operation, social and environmental

concerns, and interactions with stakeholders. (p. 75)

The difficulty in creating CSR communication strategies is that the public often thinks that a subtle communication style is more appropriate for communicating CSR activities and that a highly promotional communication is less desirable (Maignan & Ralston, 2002; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Morsing, Schultz, & Nielsen, 2008). The primary goal of CSR communication is to minimize the skepticism the public may have about a company’s motives for engaging in CSR practices and to move the public from complete unawareness to meaningful involvement with a CSR program. Practitioners need to make strategic decisions about two fundamental aspects of CSR communication: message contents and message channels (Bhattacharya, Sen, & Korschun, 2011; Du et al., 2010). First, message content is what to communicate (Berens et al., 2005; Du et al., 2010; Kim, 2011); for example, a company can communicate about its commitment (what kinds of commitments it has made), effectiveness (articulating the impacts of its CSR efforts), motives (the reason for its commitments—public serving vs. self-serving), and fit (the congruence between its CSR issues and its corporate identity, mission, or values).

Second, there are a variety of CSR communication channels through which a firm can convey CSR messages. Company-controlled channels include annual CSR reports, press releases, corporate websites, TV commercials, magazines or billboard advertisements, and product packaging. Corporate-sponsored social media sites on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, and blogs are partially but not completely controllable channels. The converse of such company-controllable channels is third-party endorsement, such as by the news media, customers, and monitoring groups, which is considered more credible. Controllability and credibility, thus, involve a trade-off: The more controllable channels are, the more likely the public are to think they are self-serving and biased toward the corporation (Szykman, Bloom, & Blazing, 2004; Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, & Schwarz, 2006). Additionally, Eberle et al. (2013) found that interactivity in CSR communication channels generated higher message credibility and stronger feelings of identification with a company among consumers, which eventually increased corporate reputation and word-of-mouth intention.

In the present study, the effects of communication channels on CSR reputation are of greater concern than the specific content of the communication. CSR reports and websites seem to be most popular CSR communication channels, even though the effects of these channels on the public have not been examined. For example, the 2013 KPMG survey of corporate responsibility revealed that more than 93% of the world’s largest 250 companies publish corporate responsibility reports, which is a 29% increase from the 64% that did so in 2005 (KPMG, 2013). An analysis of CSR sections on the websites of the *Fortune* 500 companies for 2011 found that 98% of the companies made reference to CSR issues (Smith & Alexander, 2013). Previous research has shown that consumers considered websites and CSR reports to be more effective than advertising (Birth, Illia, Lurati, & Zamparini, 2008; Golob & Bartlett, 2007; Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009).

Research on other communication channels is rather sparse. Although scholars have emphasized the importance of third-party endorsement and attention from the news media (Bhattacharya et al., 2011), few studies have examined the effects of news media on CSR reputation (Skard & Thorbjørnsen, 2014). Using the agenda-setting framework, this study proposes that the salience

of the CSR issues in the news media will affect CSR evaluation. The present study also aims to explore the effectiveness of the new media in communicating about CSR, a topic which scholars have not yet examined. Recently, corporations have begun communicating CSR messages on their corporate social media pages. Some pioneering companies have created CSR-dedicated social media sites, such as Coca-Cola (the Coca Cola CSR Initiative on Facebook), Danone (Danone down to Earth on Twitter), and PepsiCo (PepsiCo Environmental Sustainability on Pinterest). Furthermore, although companies have often avoided advertising their CSR activities, several companies have recently begun using advertising, focusing either on a specific cause that they support or on CSR in general. For example, Unilever created TV advertising focusing on their fight against hunger among children, which is part of Unilever's Project Sunlight sustainability program. Chevy aired a Super Bowl commercial that featured the American Cancer Society and said, "Join Chevy and the American Cancer Society in celebrating survivors."

To shed light on this relatively unexplored field, the present study aims to examine the effects of CSR communication on CSR reputation. Specifically, the study will investigate what channels are being used to convey CSR messages and then test the effectiveness of the CSR communication strategies on forming the public perception of the corporations.

**RQ1. Where are CSR communication messages communicated?**

**RQ2. What is the effectiveness of each channel in building a positive CSR reputation?**

## Method

The two primary methods this study used were secondary analysis and content analysis. The study sample of corporations was the 101 corporations in the Reputation Institute's 2014 CSR ranking of 100 global companies. The Reputation Institute's CSR reputation scores are the most comprehensive CSR reputation measures that survey the general public, and they also cover a global audience, providing insights into global communication strategies.

The 101 companies in the sample are the 100 most highly regarded companies across 15 countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, Spain, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia. To be qualified, companies had to be above average reputation in their home market from 2009 to 2013, be public-facing companies with mid-high international scope, and have revenues greater than \$6 billion in the U.S. or \$1 billion internationally (Reputation Institute, 2014). Companies on the list cover 19 industries and include Google, Microsoft, The Walt Disney Company, BMW, Apple, LEGO, Volkswagen, Intel, Rolex, and Daimler. The companies' countries of origin, based on the locations of their headquarters, varied. The majority of the companies on the list were headquartered in the United States ( $n = 41$ ), followed by Japan ( $n = 13$ ), Germany ( $n = 9$ ), France ( $n = 7$ ), the United Kingdom ( $n = 6$ ), and Italy ( $n = 6$ ). The remaining countries—Denmark, Switzerland, Netherlands, Korea, Sweden, Singapore, Taiwan, Spain, and China—had three or fewer companies.

## CSR Reputation

The Reputation Institute's 2014 CSR ranking of 100 global companies, called the 2014 Global CSR RepTrak® 100, was used as an indicator of CSR reputation, that is, what the general public thinks about a company's CSR performance. The Global CSR RepTrak® 100 is based on the Global RepTrak® 100, which measure all seven reputation dimensions. CSR RepTrak® generates scores based on the three dimensions—citizenship, governance, and workplace—which go along with the definition of CSR from the stakeholder theory perspective (Clarkson, 1995; Freeman, 1984). Even though the Global CSR RepTrak® 100 has not been used in previous research yet due to its newness (starting 2013), the Global RepTrak® 100, formerly Reputation Quotient<sup>SM</sup>, has been widely used in the corporate reputation research.

The data were collected in January and February 2014 through an online survey conducted by Toluna, an online panel survey company. There were 59,921 respondents from the 15 aforementioned countries, consisting of general public. The sample from each country matched that country's demographics in terms of age and gender. In order to qualify to rate a company, a respondent had to rate a company as a 4 on a 7-point scale for the familiarity question. The largest age group among both female and male respondents was those aged 45–64, and 59.3% fell into the high education category among three education categories (low (10.1%), medium (30.6%), and high (59.3%)) (Reputation Institute, 2014). Although the title of the scores is the Global CSR RepTrak® 100, there were 101 companies in the list due to tied scores.

## The Salience of CSR Information

As reputation does not develop ad hoc but rather over a longer period of time (Fombrun, 1996), the salience of the CSR information of those 101 companies in various information sources for the public was measured for a year, from January to December 2013. The public can receive CSR information through traditional news media, which are known for their credibility, or through corporate communication channels such as websites, CSR reports, social media, and advertising, which are more controllable. The timeframe of 2013 were selected, considering that companies' CSR reputation would be the result of previous communication, and the reputation study was conducted in January and February in 2014. Two independent coders checked all sources independently, and the results were compared and corrected.

**News Media.** In order to measure the issue salience of the CSR information in the news media, the number of newspaper articles covering the CSR issues of the 101 companies in the 15 countries were counted (Carroll, 2010; Kioussis, et al., 2007; Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006a; Wartick, 1992). Although newspaper subscription rates have been declining, people consume news via alternative devices such as a smartphone, computer, or tablet PC, and the relative exposure of CSR in one medium across the companies still allowed the researcher to examine the degree of media exposure across the different companies. Furthermore, DeFleur, Davenport, Cronin, & DeFleur (1992) found that newspaper readers had a greater recall of information than those listening to radio or watching television.

Lexis-Nexis keyword searches were employed. First, two newspapers from each of the 15

countries were selected based on their circulation and availability in Lexis-Nexis (see Table 1). Second, the number of newspaper articles covering the 101 companies related to CSR issues in the 15 countries were counted. The CSR issues were identified using index terms similar to the three dimensions of the Global CSR RepTrak® 100 and CSR definitions, and included ‘business ethics & corporate citizenship,’ ‘corporate social responsibility,’ ‘corporate governance,’ ‘workplace diversity,’ and ‘employee assistant programs.’ The company names were added in the search syntax, and search time period was from January 1, 2013, to December 31, 2013. The Lexis-Nexis database has been widely used in academic research as source for searching news (e.g., Carroll, 2010; Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006a).

Table 1.  
Newspapers Selected from Each Country

Country	Newspaper name
Australia	The Herald Sun
	The West Australian
Brazil	O Globo
	Folha de S. Paulo
Canada	The Toronto Star
	The Globe and Mail
China	China Daily
	People’s Daily
France	Le Figaro
	Aujourd’hui en France
Germany	Die Tageszeitung
	Die Welt
India	The Times of India (TOI)
	Hindustan Times (HT)
Italy	Italia Oggi
	Milano Finanza
Japan	The Yomiuri Shimbun
	The Japan Times
Mexico	El Economista
	El Universal

Russia	The Moscow Times
	The Moscow News
South Korea	The Korea Times
	The Korea Herald
Spain	EL PAÍS
	El Mundo
U.K.	The Daily Mail
	The Sunday Times
U.S.	USA TODAY
	The New York Times

**Corporate Websites.** Company corporate websites were content analyzed. A total of 77 companies in the sample had global websites not tied to a specific country, written in English. The other 24 companies did not have global sites; in that case, the local website of the country where the firm was headquartered was examined. Most of these local websites were similar to other countries’ websites except for the language, meaning that the same contents or the same website layouts had been translated into multiple languages.

Adapting the website analysis method of Chaudhri and Wang (2007) and Capriotti & Moreno (2007), the *visibility* of the CSR section and the *prominence* of CSR information on the websites were analyzed. First, the *visibility* was measured by the placement of CSR information—where the link to the CSR page was. Some companies had an independent tab or direct link to the CSR page on their homepage, whereas other companies embedded their CSR section under the ‘about us’ or ‘company information’ section. If the direct link was presented in the main web page, it was coded as 1; if not, it was coded as 0.

Second, *prominence* was measured by the number of pages dedicated to CSR information. The number of pages were counted and coded into five categories: 1 for 1–2 pages, 2 for 3–6 pages, 3 for 7–10 pages, 4 for 10–14 pages, and 5 for more than 5 pages. When the coders counted the pages, the hyperlinked pages were all counted, but the contents on the banner and simple video downloads that did not involve opening a new tab were disregarded.

The intercoder reliability of the variable *visibility* was 96% in simple agreement, .92 in Scott’s pi, and .92 in Krippendorff’s alpha. The simple agreement for *prominence* was 94.1 % with .87 in Scott’s pi and .87 in Krippendorff’s alpha.

**CSR Reports.** The existence of CSR reports was counted as well (0 = *absence*, 1 = *presence*). CSR reports published for 2013, 2012–2013, or 2013–2014 were manually checked, and two coders checked it separately to increase the precision of the coding. All CSR reports coding were consistent across the coders.

**Social Media.** Facebook was content analyzed for the social media. In 2013, Facebook was ranked

as the world's most popular social media site (Pew Research Center, 2015). Issue prominence in social media was defined as the existence of CSR information through a corporate-sponsored social media page. Some companies posted CSR messages only on their company Facebook pages or on their CSR dedicated Facebook pages; other companies posted duplicate messages to maximize the outlets for the information. As the timeframe of the information source was 2013, the number of CSR posts on company Facebook pages in 2013 and the beginning date of the CSR-dedicated Facebook pages were recorded.

The existence of CSR messages on a general company Facebook pages in 2013 was coded as *presence* (1) or *absence* (0). The existence of a CSR-dedicated Facebook pages was coded as *presence* (1) or *absence* (0). Facebook pages that were created by someone else, such as employees or volunteers participating in a CSR program, were not counted, but Facebook pages for partnerships between the target company and a nonprofit organization or the foundation page of the target company were counted. The intercoder reliability was 93.1% in simple agreement, with .85 in Scott's pi, and .85 in Krippendorff's alpha.

**Advertising.** The number of TV commercials with a CSR theme or CSR issues in 2013 were counted. First, the researcher made a comprehensive survey of the archival databases of advertising that are available and selected the Advertolog database (<http://www.advertolog.com>) due to its comprehensiveness. The Advertolog database also allows one to search commercials by company name and country. Each commercial the search returned was evaluated by two coders as to whether it covered CSR messages or not. CSR advertising was defined as advertising whose primary focus was not selling specific products or services but promoting the company's CSR efforts to make a better community and society in general or to support a cause, typically partnering with a nonprofit organization. The intercoder reliability for evaluating the advertising was 100% in simple agreement, with 1 in Scott's Pi and 1 in Krippendorff's alpha.

## Results

RQ1 asked about the communication channels through which CSR messages were conveyed in 2013. On average, there were four news articles per company covering CSR issues relating the company, with 43 being the highest (Google) number of articles and 0 being lowest (e.g., ACER, Inc., Suzuki Motor, Hugo Boss, LVMH Group, etc.).

Although all 101 companies had CSR sections on their websites, there were variations in the *visibility* and *prominence* of the CSR information. In terms of visibility on the websites, more than half of the companies ( $n = 58$ , 57.43%) had a direct link to the CSR information section on their main homepage, either in the main part of the page or at the bottom, with names such as *citizenship*, *responsibility*, or *sustainability*. The CSR information section for the rest of the companies' websites ( $n = 43$ , 42.57%) was not explicit but rather was embedded into corporate information or the 'about us' section. The visibility of CSR information on these websites was poor; if someone did not know that the corporate introduction page was where CSR information was located, or if someone did not make the effort to locate the section, they would be unlikely to ever see it.

Surprisingly, regardless of the visibility of the location, CSR information was highly prominent on most of the companies' websites. Specifically, 74.26% ( $n = 75$ ) of the companies dedicated more than 15 pages to CSR information; 5.94% ( $n = 6$ ) of the companies' websites had 11–14 pages, 6.93% ( $n = 7$ ) had 7–10 pages, 8.91% ( $n = 9$ ) had 3–6 pages, and only 3.96% ( $n = 4$ ) of the companies had only 1–2 pages on their websites that dealt with CSR. Whether the information was easily accessible or not, corporations did utilize their websites as a primary tool for communicating their CSR efforts.

The majority of the companies in the sample published CSR reports (78.22%,  $n = 79$ ). That is slightly less than the percentage found in KPMG's survey results, but it seems that CSR reports are still one of the most popular channels for presenting corporate CSR efforts.

Analyzing the company Facebook pages, 100 companies—all but one—had company Facebook pages. Of these, 46% ( $n = 46$ ) communicated CSR messages through their general company Facebook pages. Of the 101 companies, 31.68% ( $n = 32$ ) had CSR-dedicated Facebook pages. All together, 20.79% ( $n = 21$ ) presented their CSR messages through both their general company Facebook pages and CSR-dedicated Facebook pages, 10.89% ( $n = 11$ ) only conveyed CSR information on CSR-dedicated Facebook pages, and 24.75% ( $n = 25$ ) did not have CSR-dedicated Facebook pages but communicated through their general company Facebook pages. A little less than half of the companies (43.56%,  $n = 44$ ) did not communicate CSR messages through Facebook pages at all.

Finally, the results showed that advertising is still not a popular channel for conveying CSR messages. Only three TV commercials dealing with CSR were detected from two companies, Google ( $n = 1$ ) and Unilever ( $n = 2$ ).

RQ2 asked about the effectiveness of the communication channels in forming CSR reputation. In the case of Facebook, four different types of strategies to convey CSR messages were recoded as follows: group 1, using both their general company Facebook page and a CSR-dedicated Facebook page; group 2, using only their general company Facebook page; group 3, using a CSR-dedicated Facebook page only; and group 4, communicating no CSR information at all through Facebook pages. Group 4 was used as a reference group. The average CSR reputation score was 66.1 with a 100-point scale, with lowest being 61.8 and the highest being to 72.7. Multiple regression analysis was employed, and CSR reputation was regressed on news media prominence, website visibility, website prominence, CSR report, general Facebook and CSR Facebook, general Facebook only, and CSR Facebook only, and TV commercial.

Overall, the variables explained 22.48% of the variance,  $F(8, 92) = 2.60$ ,  $p = .013$ . The results showed that the issue salience in the news media ( $\beta = 0.11$ ,  $p = .003$ ) and website prominence ( $\beta = 0.45$ ,  $p = .029$ ) had positive relationships with CSR reputation. A higher number of newspaper articles about a company's CSR issues was associated with a more favorable CSR reputation. The amount of information on the companies' websites was associated with a more positive CSR reputation, regardless of the visibility of CSR information on their websites (see Table 2).

Table 2.

**Multiple Regression Analysis of the Effects of CSR Communication on CSR Reputation**

Independent Variables	$\beta$	SE	t	p
Number of News articles	0.11	0.04	3.05	.00
Website visibility	-0.17	0.47	-0.37	.71
Website prominence	0.45	0.20	2.23	.03
CSR report	-0.06	0.56	-0.10	.92
Facebook general & CSR	-0.51	0.60	-0.85	.40
Facebook general only	0.20	0.57	0.35	.72
Facebook CSR only	-1.06	0.73	-1.45	.15
CSR TV commercials	-0.65	1.07	-0.61	.54

Note. N = 101, F (8, 92) = 2.60, R<sup>2</sup> = .18

## Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the different channels through which CSR information is communicated and the effectiveness of those CSR communication channels—specifically, news media, websites, CSR reports, social media and advertising. As CSR gains in popularity, the evaluation of a firm on its CSR performance will be even more important, and CSR communications play a critical role in forming that CSR reputation. However, we know little about the effectiveness of CSR communication strategies in shaping the public's perception of corporate social performance.

Among corporations' direct communication channels, as the literature has shown, websites and CSR reports were prevalent in communicating CSR information across the study corporations. All of the companies but one had CSR sections in their corporate websites, and 78.22% of the companies published CSR reports. Compared to these channels, social media were less popular; nevertheless, half of the study companies utilized social media as CSR communication channels. In contrast, companies still deemed advertising still inappropriate for CSR communication.

Testing the effects, however, showed that the popularity of CSR communications is not always joined with effectiveness. Although corporations have been making more efforts in CSR communications and using more sophisticated strategies, the results of the present study indicate that they still need to count on media news coverage, which implies that media relations strategies still need to be emphasized. In this study, just as in the literature, the news media were still the critical source in forming the public's opinion of the corporations. In addition, websites seemed to be another effective channel, which suggests that companies should continue their commitment

to website communication regarding CSR. However, despite the potential of social media to influence CSR reputation in the future, this study did not find that to be true of social media yet. The results suggest that the channel of advertising might be too early or inappropriate for CSR communications, and other communication channels are likely to be much more effective. This study has several limitations. First, the study as a whole relies on secondary research and existing databases or archives. For example, the study used CSR reputation data which had already been collected through the third party, so the researcher had no control over the data collection process, and the same is true of the Lexis-Nexis database. Although the researcher determined the search strategy for that database only after multiple trials of different search strategies, it still did not capture all newspapers in 15 countries; whatever newspapers the database did not archive were excluded from the analysis. Although the purpose of the present study was not to compare the effects across countries, future studies can examine data of this sort at the country level, so that the effectiveness of CSR communications can be examined in greater depth and how the country factors play into that. Second, as an exploratory study, the present study was limited to counting the sheer volume of the news articles. Future study can explore how the tone of news media coverage can influence CSR reputation. Third, one needs to be cautious in interpreting the results. Although the study examined the associations between the different channels of communication and CSR reputation and considered them as an effect, this does not mean there are direct causal relationships between the two. Experimental studies are needed to follow up on this. Fourth, even though the RepTrak<sup>®</sup> is the most comprehensive collection of CSR reputation data reflecting the public's evaluations of corporations, it only had 101 corporations. Future studies can be done on a larger scale. In addition, future research can explore the effects of other channels, such as TV news coverage and Twitter or other social media. Moreover, this study could be replicated so that a trend could be observed.

Nevertheless, the present study makes both theoretical and practical contributions. First, the study advances the agenda-setting theory by expanding its scope to the CSR context. It also advances CSR scholarship, as the relationship between communication strategies and CSR reputation have not been examined before, in particular in this natural setting, based on the survey data. Second, the results will provide public relations practitioners with insights into which communication channels might be more helpful if their goal is to improve a firm's CSR reputation. The present study can serve as a starting point in exploring the area of CSR communication and the strategic management of channels in CSR communication.

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## 5. About BledCom

### About BledCom

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The primary mission of the international symposia that have been organized over the past 22 years under the aegis of BledCom, is to provide a venue for public relations scholars and practitioners from around the world to exchange ideas and perspectives about public relations practice in all its forms such as corporate communication, public affairs, reputation management, issues and crisis management, etc. Building from this history, BledCom seeks to help establish a state-of-the-art body of knowledge of the field with each annual symposium attempting to widen the horizons of the field by attracting current and new perspectives and state-of-the-art research from public relations and related disciplines. Toward this end, every BledCom symposium seeks to offer a venue for practitioners and scholars to share their conceptual perspectives, empirical findings (adopting any/all methodologies), or case studies related to the field. As an international symposium, BledCom welcomes participation of scholars (including doctoral students) and practitioners from every region of the world so that we can help improve the public relations profession and theory-building to cope with a world that is globalizing rapidly. The symposium is known for its relaxing, pleasant and above all informal atmosphere, where all the participants can engage in debate and discussions with colleagues who have similar interests, and of course, enjoy the delights of the beautiful Lake Bled setting.

## 6. BledCom 2015

### BledCom Programme Committee:

#### Dejan Verčič

(University of Ljubljana, Slovenia)

#### Krishnamurthy Sriramesh

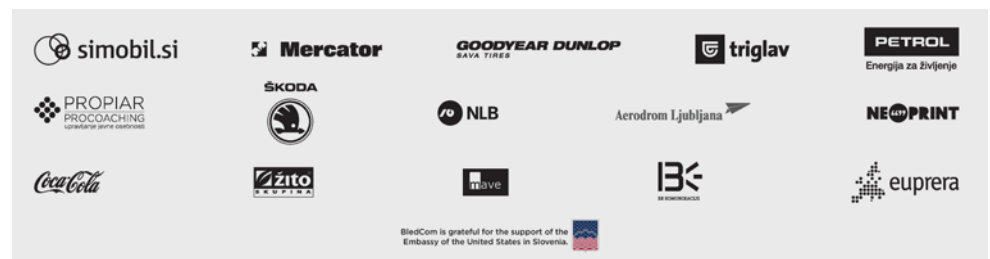
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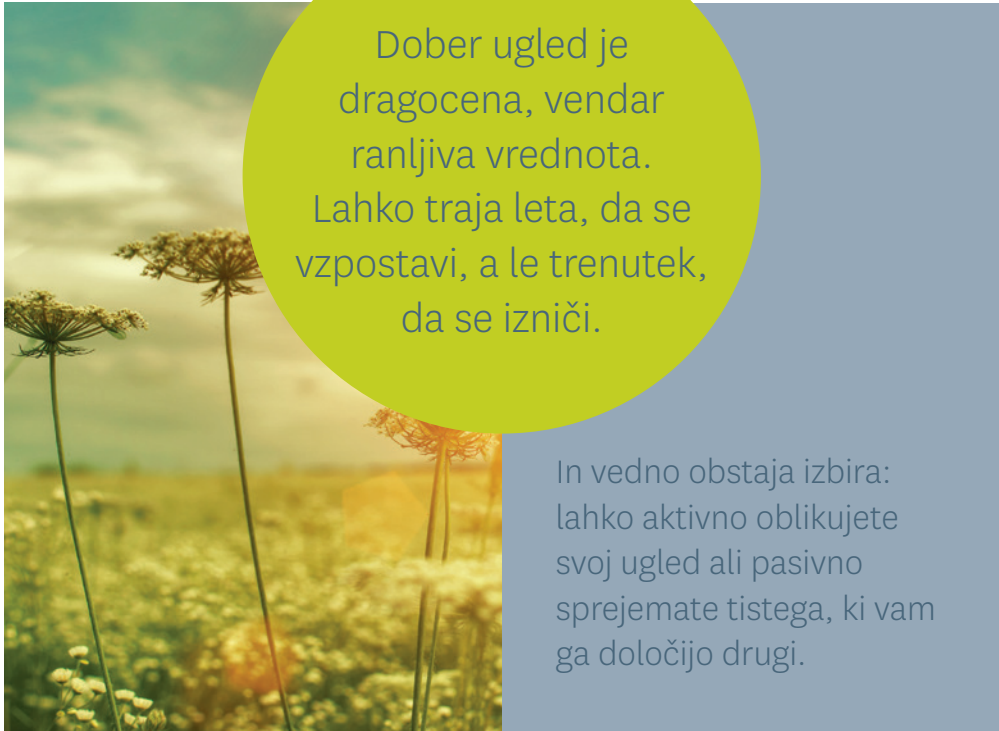


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