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Panels

“Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the PR Classroom: Sharing Resources and Strategies”

Moderator:

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Panelists:

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Panel Description

Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the classroom continues to be an important commitment for scholars. The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee of the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) is gathering information for public relations educators on DEI issues in the public relations classroom. This CPRE-sponsored panel presentation will describe the DEI Committee’s resources to date, including readings, sample syllabi, and potential DEI guest speakers as well as approaches to teaching DEI in the classroom and DEI Committee research that is being conducted for the next report of the Commission on Public Relations Education. The panel presentation will be followed by questions and answers and handouts will be available for attendees.

Teaching and Mentoring in Time of Crisis

Moderator:

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Panelists:

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Panel Description

All educators have experienced teaching through trauma during the past few years, but when students are hit by multiple trauma events at once, whether individually or as a group, faculty become not just teachers but also mentors, counselors, and coaches. Connecting with students becomes even more critical. This panel will provide examples in which faculty mentored students through multiple crises and maintained the personal connection so critical for student success. The faculty will share techniques and tools that made a difference in students' lives. In addition, they will provide insight on the importance of connecting personally with every student and suggestions for accomplishing that, no matter what circumstances might arise.

Sparking student engagement in public relations through service learning in the classroom

Moderator:

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Panelists:

- Audrey W. Allison, Kennesaw State University, aalliso4@kennesaw.edu
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- Chuck Kaufman, Texas State University, kaufman@txstate.edu
- Debra Price, Texas State University, debraprice@txstate.edu
- Jennifer Scharlach, Texas State University, jscharlach@txstate.edu

Panel Description

How can educators re-energize students and equip them with lifelong job skills? This panel of university faculty in public relations and organizational communication will explore how service learning can ignite student interest. Service learning involves students in projects with community partners that allow them to develop skills and connect with diverse communities. This panel will explore real-world classroom projects that have been successful in increasing student engagement and an understanding of diversity. Projects include a campaign designed to address hesitancy of Hispanics to getting the COVID-19 vaccine and an initiative developed to increase access to free hygiene products for a diverse campus community including nonbinary and transgender students. Other initiatives have addressed disparities in black maternal health, employment assistance to formerly incarcerated populations, and awareness of congenital heart defects in children. Panelists will provide actionable, how-to strategies for working with students and service-learning clients.

How to Teach PR Writing Online: A Practical Approach to Creating Engaging and Meaningful Curriculum Regardless of Modality

Panel Chair:

Rebecca L. Cooney, Washington State University, rebecca.cooney@wsu.edu

Panelists

- Nandini Bhalla, Assistant Professor of Public Relations, Texas State University, nandinib@txstate.edu
- Joseph Stabb, Assistant Professor of Practice, University of Tennessee-Knoxville, jstabb@utk.edu

Panel Description

A famous quote by George Evans, “every student can learn, just not on the same day or in the same way” encompasses the spirit of this panel of communication professors representing four universities. Whether teaching in-person, online or live/synchronous via video, instructors must find ways to connect, engage and meet students where they are that day. This session will address how teaching public relations writing is impacted by three contemporary public relations challenges including rebuilding face-to-face relationships, managing noise from multiple channels, and overcoming corporate credibility problems. In this session, we will address how teaching public relations writing was impacted by the pandemic with geographically disconnected students, clients, and community organizations. Further, we will share our insights about how we adapted then, and continue to evolve now, given the shift to a more hybrid approach to teaching.

Beyond “thoughts and prayers”: Incorporating memorialization and grief leadership into the crisis communication plan

Moderator:

Jensen Moore, University of Oklahoma, jensenmoore@ou.edu

Panelists:

- Shari R. Veil, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, veil@unl.edu
- Michael Palenchar, University of Tennessee, mpalench@utk.edu
- Rebecca A. Hayes, Illinois State University, rahayes@ilstu.edu
- Shelley Wigley, University of Texas at Arlington, shelley.wigley@uta.edu

Panel Description

Incorporating memorialization and grief leadership into crisis communication plans are increasingly important, as social media have changed mourning processes and the public’s desire for organizations to publicly express empathy for victims. Recent events (COVID, Buffalo grocery store shooting) show most organizations – even those not directly involved in the crisis – have difficulty communicating about grief and expressing condolences. Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (2003) stated even in instances where an organization is not experiencing its own crisis (such as man-made or natural disasters) they “have a major stake in the nation’s ability to rebound from the crisis” (p. 362). Frost (2014) suggested organizations develop strategic plans which include monitoring “death pages” (i.e., memorial pages) on social media, as legacy media will also be tracking these sources. Overall, this panel explores various ways organizations engage in public mourning and how crisis communication practitioners can suitably express compassion, commiseration and sensitivity during crises.

Key Words:

Social media mourning, crisis communication, public tragedy, organization mourning, corporate social responsibility

Teaching to the Top: Helping Students Navigate the Path to the C-Suite

Moderator:

Maria Russell, Syracuse University, mprussel@syr.edu

Panelists:

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- Kathy R. Fitzpatrick, University of South Florida, fitzpatrick10@usf.edu
- Karla Gower, University of Alabama, gower@apr.ua.edu
- Kristena Lucky, BCW, Kristena.lucky@bcw-global.com

Panel Description

Public relations graduates are entering a world in which they will be called upon to lead communication teams, departments and firms transformed by new technologies and new models of communication and engagement. Yet, the leadership training and development they need to thrive in a dynamic communication environment has not become a curricular priority. This panel of chief communication officers (CCOs) and public relations educators will identify key capabilities and skills needed for graduates to "make it" in public relations today. In this interactive session, panelists will share – and invite participants to share – ideas for courses and extracurricular initiatives focused on career-preparedness and long-term professional success. The session, which will highlight innovative efforts designed to enhance the leadership capabilities and adaptive capacities of future public relations leaders, responds to the Commission on Public Relations Education's call for dialogue among industry practitioners and educators that contributes to "course development that is relevant to contemporary client and organizational needs, interests, challenges and opportunities."

PR Technology in Practice and in the Classroom

Moderator:

Lisa Peyton, University of Oregon, lpeyton@uoregon.edu

Panelists:

- Juan-Carlos Molleda, University of Oregon, jmolleda@uoregon.edu
- Donna Z. Davis, University of Oregon, dzdavis@uoregon.edu
- Kelly Byrd Marín, Notified PR Platform, kelly.byrd@notified.com

Panel Description

Artificial Intelligence, big data and immersive technologies have turned technology for PR professionals into a booming business. But how do educators incorporate these essential tools into their curriculum so that students can learn and apply these technologies into the PR profession? Our panel of seasoned educators, administrative leaders, and industry practitioners will explore the required components of successfully bringing PR technology into the classroom. Session take-aways will include how to get support from leadership, the emerging PR technologies every student (and faculty member) needs to understand and how to build successful industry partnerships with technology and software providers.

Teaching Public Relations & Organizational Listening: Reflecting Upon Pedagogical and Research Implications

Panelists:

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- Ashley English, Texas Christian University, A.English@tcu.edu
- Katie R. Place, Quinnipiac University, Katie.place@quinnipiac.edu
- Rosalyn Vasquez, Boston University, Rosalynn@bu.edu
- Alvin Zhou, University of Minnesota, alvinyxz@umn.edu

Panel Description

Organizational listening has gained recent popularity as a topic of research in the public relations discipline. Amidst this theoretical growth, how can organizational theory and practice enrich public relations pedagogy and future research? In this panel, five panelists of diverse racial, ethnic, gender, institutional type, and tenure backgrounds will discuss their organizational listening research insights that may guide more effective, ethical, and timely teaching of public relations. Specifically, panelists will discuss implications from their research on organizational social listening and chatbots, organizational listening and social advocacy, organizational listening and diversity, equity & inclusion (DEI), and organizational listening to marginalized and underrepresented publics for public education. Listening, like other core competencies, should be included in all stages of public relations practice. Panelists will offer insights on how to integrate listening competencies, theories, and concepts into a variety of public relations educational course content.



Research Papers

Shaping Corporate Character via Chatbot Social Conversation: Impact on Organization-Public Relational Outcomes

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Abstract

As an empirical effort to explore the public relations potential of AI-enabled technologies such as chatbots, this study examined how chatbot social conversation—a communication strategy that encompasses both social presence and conversational human voice and is conceptualized in consideration of chatbots’ mediated communication environment—can contribute to organization-public relational outcomes (i.e., OPRs). To understand how this process works, we incorporate the personification approach to organizations, and also investigate the impact of chatbot social conversation in shaping public perceptions of corporate character (i.e., agreeableness, enterprise, competence, and ruthlessness). A survey of 778 Facebook users in the United States was conducted, where participants were randomly assigned to have a guided conversation with an AI-enabled social chatbot utilized by real companies on Facebook. Results confirm that chatbot social conversation can serve as a strong antecedent of the corporate character of the organization that deployed it and OPRs. Perceived corporate character also directly influences the quality of OPRs, demonstrating the potential of using AI-enabled social chatbots for public relations purposes.

Keywords: chatbots, organization-public relationships, corporate character, AI

The recent technological advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) has brought new interest in its potential use in public relations practices (Syvänen & Valentini, 2020). An AI-enabled social chatbot is one such application that has been widely employed by the industry and is considered to become even more important in the coming years for organizations' digital public relations blueprints (Carufel, 2017). Scaling up organizations' two-way communication and relationship-building capacities, AI-enabled social chatbots are automated virtual assistants that provide problem-solving information to concerned stakeholders and can carry meaningful conversations with users.

Deviating from business and marketing literature on chatbots' utilitarian use for service encounters (e.g., Adam et al., 2020), we shift focus to their relational implications in this study and consider how chatbot social conversation—a communication strategy that encompasses both social presence and conversational human voice and is conceptualized in consideration of chatbots' mediated communication environment—can contribute to organization-public relational outcomes (i.e., OPRs). To understand how this process works, we incorporate the personification approach to organizations and also investigate the impact of chatbot social conversation in shaping public perceptions of corporate character (i.e., agreeableness, enterprise, competence, and ruthlessness). Corporate character constitutes an accessible metaphor that can powerfully characterize corporations' overall image, distinguish them from competitors, and help stakeholders evaluate organizational culture and brand personality (Davies et al., 2001).

A survey of 778 Facebook users in the United States was conducted to evaluate our proposed model. Participants were randomly assigned to have a guided conversation with an AI-enabled social chatbot utilized by real companies on Facebook (Domino's Pizza, Jobbot, Toni, Eddy Travels, and Swelly). Results confirm that chatbot social conversation, characterized by

social presence and conversational human voice, can serve as a strong antecedent of the corporate character of the organization that deployed it. Perceived corporate character also directly influences the quality of OPRs, demonstrating the potential use of artificial intelligence and specifically AI-enabled social chatbots for public relations purposes.

Literature Review

AI in Public Relations and the Relational Function of Chatbots

The study of artificial intelligence (AI) encompasses efforts across disciplines to model cognitive processes, recreate them through computational machinery, and develop applied technologies with some level of human intelligence to replace or supplement human labor (Guzman & Lewis, 2020). One application of artificial intelligence that has recently come to fruition and gets increasingly adopted by the business industry is AI-enabled social chatbots (e.g., Fernandes & Oliveira, 2021). Those chatbots are automated virtual assistants capable of having meaningful conversations with stakeholders. However, a survey of relevant literature shows that chatbots have been overly categorized as a customer service and marketing tool that deals with service encounters and helps persuade potential buyers to purchase products (Adam et al., 2020). Instead, the current study considers the *relational* potential of AI-enabled social chatbots.

There are reasons to believe that AI-enabled social chatbots—conversing on behalf of organizations and mediating the organization-stakeholder interactions—can affect relational outcomes that are central to public relations scholarship. First, chatbots can produce emotional and psychological responses from conversation interlocutors that are similar to human-human interactions. Second, an AI-enabled chatbot is a communicative organizational delegate. Its obvious affiliation with the organization that employs this tool should transfer publics' positive

(or negative) chatbot-related experiences to their impression of the focal organization.

Chatbot Social Conversation

With the advance in natural language processing (NLP) and other related technologies, AI-enabled social chatbots can now interact more naturally with humans and infuse unique social energies into their conversations. The development and improvement of voice assistants such as Alexa and Siri in the past few years are excellent examples of this advance. These voice assistants indicate that the continuum from mundane, stiff, and machine-like conversations to engaging, social, and human-like conversations can affect chatbots' relational potentials. We propose the concept and measure of chatbot social conversation to continuously assess this continuum, and define it as engaging conversations between chatbots and users that are characterized by social presence and conversational human voice.

The first component of chatbot social conversation is the chatbot's social presence. Defined as "the extent to which a person feels as if he/she were 'with' the communication partner, engaging in a direct, face-to-face conversation" (Lee & Shin, 2012, p. 516), social presence has been widely used in literature across social sciences to evaluate the degree to which messages and channels could bring two communicative agents closer in a psychological sense and help mimic physical presence in computer-mediated environments. The second component of chatbot social conversation is the chatbot's conversational human voice (CHV). This concept is derived from the public relations literature. Defined as an informal, engaging, and natural communication style for corporate messaging, CHV bridges the literature between interpersonal and organizational communication and has been widely considered an optimal communication strategy for organizations to achieve desirable relational outcomes on blogs and social media platforms (Kelleher, 2009; Men & Tsai, 2015). Social presence can be affected by chatbots'

anthropomorphic designs and platform-variant affordances, while conversational human voice focuses on chatbots' message-based language use. These two components are conceptually distinct but integrally related. We combine them to measure and characterize how AI-enabled social chatbots will be evaluated by stakeholders and how chatbot social conversation can lead to various perceptual and relational outcomes (e.g., perceived corporate character, OPRs) when organizations employ AI-enabled social chatbots in their everyday communication practices.

Perceived Corporate Character

The use of the personification metaphor, that an organization or brand has 'character', is common in the business world (Davies et al., 2001). Although marketing research has extensively explored brand personality at the product level or as brand image, limited attention has been placed to the practice of personalization at the corporate level (Men & Tsai, 2015). Compared to related concepts like brand personality and organizational culture, corporate character is relatively stable and unitary (Moore, 2005). Corporate character is defined as a set of human characteristics associated with an organization that can make it distinguishable (Chun & Davies, 2006). The personification approach also makes corporate character an indirect and projective measure of corporate reputation (Davies et al., 2004; Men & Sung, 2019). While the marketplace can be competitive and in high demand, when corporate character is consistent and aligned, publics perceive the genuineness of the organization (Davies et al., 2004).

Desirable corporate characteristics can provide organizations the ability to differentiate themselves and develop consumer loyalty and corporate reputation. With the popularity of social media and virtual agents, organizations can adopt more human-like qualities and thus enhance relational outcomes (Lu et al., 2022). Additionally, the interactive, intelligent, and conversational features of AI-enabled customer service chatbots can encourage consumers to

disclose more information that will benefit transaction outcomes.

To assess corporate character, Davies et al. (2001, 2004) have developed a multidimensional scale, including five main dimensions: agreeableness, enterprise, competence, chicness, and ruthlessness. Specifically, the agreeableness dimension has been labeled as empathy, warmth, and integrity. An agreeable organization will communicate and act in an empathic, supportive, sincere, open, friendly, trustworthy, and socially responsible manner. The enterprise aspect reflects the organization's modernity, adventure, and boldness. An enterprising organization is seen as cool, trendy, imaginative, innovative, extroverted, and daring. The competence dimension conveys conscientiousness; a competent organization reflects volitional characteristics like being dependable, reliable, secure, hard-working, achievement-oriented, and leading. The chic dimension of the corporate character implies elegance, prestige, and sophistication. In the organizational setting, a chic organization is seen as stylish, elegant, charming, exclusive, refined, elitist, and prestigious.¹ The ruthlessness dimension is concerned with the degree of egotism and dominance. Similar to a ruthless person, "organizations can have less desirable aspects to their corporate character" (Chun & Davies, 2006, p.140). A ruthless organization can perform in a selfish, aggressive, arrogant, inward-looking, authoritarian, and controlling way.

Chatbot Social Conversation and Perceived Corporate Character

Using artificial intelligence-driven online communication, the company further deepens its interactions with consumers on social media (Lu et al., 2022). The use of chatbots enables organizations to conduct human-like conversations and implement relational strategies, thus

¹ In line with previous studies (Ji, Chen, & Men, 2022; Men & Sung, 2019), the chic dimension of corporate character was not measured given its minimum relevance to the focus constructs of the study.

affecting stakeholder perceptions of the organization. Earlier research suggests that organizations infusing humanness and responsiveness on social media can affect important consumer outcomes, such as emotional connection, satisfaction, trust, and purchase intention (Ledbetter & Meisner, 2021). More specifically, when communicating with a chatbot, publics can discover the personality markers of an organization by observing the chatbot's speech style and conversational behavior (Ahmad et al., 2021). When talking to a chatbot, publics expect the chatbots not only to emotionally and culturally understand their queries and requests but also to speak like them. Thus, supportive, pleasant, and friendly AI chatbots can make consumers perceive the organization as trustworthy and credible. Moreover, chatbots that communicate with a conversational human voice make people believe that the organization is excited, joyful and interested in talking to consumers (i.e., agreeableness), which evokes greater consumer trust and perceived goodwill toward the represented company (Hildebrand & Bergner, 2021). Further, personal and informal responses from chatbots show the organization's empathy, patience, and respect for the consumers, which gives the impression that the company can serve its consumer fairly (i.e., competence) (Javornik et al., 2020). Interactive chatbots that manifest humanness and social presence in their communication can be perceived as extroverted and exciting (i.e., enterprise) (Ahmad et al., 2021). Lastly, the use of social presence strategies can maximize the dialogic capacity of an organization's online communication (Men et al., 2018). When feelings of co-presence with the chatbots are salient, consumers perceive a participatory, reciprocal, and inviting atmosphere that encourages conversation (Ledbetter & Meisner, 2021). Therefore, a chatbot that behaves socially and emotionally is less likely to have consumers feel its organization as controlling and totalitarian (i.e., ruthlessness). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Chatbot social conversation is positively associated with perceived corporate character of agreeableness.

H2: Chatbot social conversation is positively associated with perceived corporate character of enterprise.

H3: Chatbot social conversation is positively associated with perceived corporate character of competence.

H4: Chatbot social conversation is negatively associated with perceived corporate character of ruthlessness.

Organization-Public Relationships

Broom and colleagues (2000) defined organization-public relationships as "the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics" (p. 18). As noted by Hung (2005), "OPRs arise when organizations and their strategic publics are interdependent, and this interdependence results in consequences to each other that organizations need to manage constantly" (p. 396). Overall, OPRs are grounded in the perceptions that publics have of the quality of their relationship with an organization, and can be analyzed as a process or an outcome (Grunig, 2006). Given the importance of relationship management to the public relations literature, scholars have proposed numerous ways to measure OPRs (e.g., L. Grunig et al., 1992; Hon & J. Grunig, 1999). A widely adopted OPR scale was developed by Hon and J. Grunig (1999), which effectively evaluated the four relational outcomes individuals experience in their interactions with organizations: trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality.

Grunig and colleagues (1992) argued that organizations that have built and maintained positive relationships with their publics are more effective. This position has been supported by studies suggesting that OPRs are correlated with cost reduction and revenue generation (Huang,

2012). In addition to studying the effects of high-quality OPRs, researchers have also examined its antecedents. Relationship cultivation strategies, such as providing access to organizational decision-making processes, assuring publics that their opinions are valued, fostering positivity, and sharing tasks, are proactive approaches that can be taken by organizations to cultivate quality relationships (Ki & Hon, 2009). Organizations that are perceived to be transparent and authentic also develop better relationships with their publics (Men & Tsai, 2014).

In the social media context, existing literature has associated social presence and conversational human voice—the two components of chatbot social conversation discussed earlier—with positive relational outcomes. For example, Chen et al. (2021) have recently shown that social presence and conversational human voice can contribute to positive corporate word-of-mouth and improve stakeholders' relational trust in start-ups. Zhou and Xu (2022) have demonstrated that the formation of dialogue between organizations and publics requires media channels with high social presence, and that social presence can reduce the perception of power imbalance and facilitate organization-public relationship building. For conversational human voice, studies such as Sweetser and Kelleher (2016) have consistently shown that infusing organizational voices with humanness and adopting a casual communication style can improve corporate reputation and strengthen organization-public relationships.

AI-enabled social chatbots, therefore, should also be able to elicit desirable OPR outcomes through these two communication and design strategies. A chatbot's increased social presence can induce parasocial relationships between human communicators and the bot (Lee et al., 2005), increase encounter satisfaction, and potentially lead to positive OPR outcomes. Adopting a personable, humorous, and positive messaging style, a chatbot's conversational human voice can communicate organizations' commitment to the public and functions as a

relational maintenance strategy that positively contributes to trust and satisfaction (Kelleher, 2009). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H5: Chatbot social conversation is positively associated with the quality of OPRs.

Corporate Character and OPRs

A strong and unique corporate character has become a new competitive advantage in the modern market (Trapp, 2021; Xiao & Yu, 2020). As an important expressive metaphor, corporate character allows publics to understand corporate characteristics and predict organizational behavior more efficiently and accurately (Moore, 2005). Consumers show higher trust and loyalty to responsible and sincere brands, especially given society's growing interest in authenticity and corporate social responsibility (i.e., agreeableness, Sen et al., 2016). On the other hand, being active and innovative has become the key for technology-based companies to increase their long-term success (Xiao & Yu, 2020). The up-to-date and innovative designs and services from an organization can keep its consumers fresh all the time, thereby increasing consumer brand loyalty (i.e., enterprise, Pappu & Quester, 2016). Additionally, organizations that provide secure and reliable user experiences help reduce fear and risk perception, thus increasing consumer satisfaction (i.e., competence, Valdez-Juárez et al., 2021). Conversely, when an organization acts in a controlling and authoritarian manner, it leads to an unequal and asymmetrical power relationship that makes publics dissatisfied, disloyal, and disengaged (i.e., ruthlessness, Kim et al., 2017). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6: Corporate character of agreeableness is positively associated with the quality of OPRs.

H7: Corporate character of enterprise is positively associated with the quality of OPRs.

H8: Corporate character of competence is positively associated with the quality of OPRs.

H9: Corporate character of ruthlessness is negatively associated with the quality of OPRs.

Method

We conducted a web survey with 778 Facebook users in the US recruited via an international sampling firm, Dynata in September 2020.² Quota sampling was utilized to recruit respondents that match the demographics of the population. The average age of the respondents in the final sample was 49 years. Among the respondents, 53.2% were women and 46.8% were men. Additionally, 91.3% of the respondents had received some college education and above. Among the respondents, 80.6% were White; 6.6% were Asian; 7.6% were Black or African American; 3.3% were Hispanic; and 0.9% were Native American. In terms of Facebook usage, approximately 60% of the respondents spend at least one hour per day on Facebook.

In the survey, respondents were randomly assigned to a pre-selected company's chatbot hosted on Facebook, where they were asked to have a 5-minute guided conversation with the chatbot. The researchers pre-selected five chatbots (i.e., Domino's Pizza, Jobbot, Toni, Eddy Travels, and Swelly) to represent a variety of brands from various industries for this study based on comprehensive secondary research, screening and testing.³ Once respondents landed on the chatbot page, they were directed to type in 10 scripted questions/statements sequentially and read carefully the chatbot's response. After the conversation, two memory check questions were asked based on the chatbot's responses for data quality control. Those who passed the attention check questions would proceed to answer remaining questions.

All measurement items used in this study were adopted from previous literature and

² We targeted Facebook users as Facebook provided a cost-effective chatbot building solution for brands and organizations and is easy for respondent to access (Beck, 2020).

³ Specifically, we first examined Fortune 100 companies' and Top 100 Unicorn companies' (The Global Unicorn Club, 2019) Facebook page and compiled a list of 30 brands' active Facebook chatbots. We then tested these 30 chatbots and rated their performance on a scale of 1 (worst performing) to 3 (best performing). Five well-performing chatbots that represent various industries were selected.

adapted to fit the current study context. Specifically, eight items from Lu et al. (2016) were used to measure social presence (e.g., “In the social chatbot’s conversation with me, there is a sense of personness. $\alpha=.98$) and four items from Sweetser and Kelleher (2016) were used to measure conversational human voice (e.g., “The chatbot makes communication enjoyable,” $\alpha=.92$), the two dimensions of chatbot social conversation. The measures of perceived corporate character were adopted from Davies et al. (2004). Specifically, 12 items were used to measure agreeableness (e.g., “The company that the chatbot represents is... friendly” “...pleasant”, $\alpha=.98$); nine items measured enterprise (e.g., “...cool” “...trendy,” $\alpha=.96$); eight items measured competence (e.g., “...reliable” “...leading,” $\alpha=.95$); and six items measured ruthlessness (e.g., “...arrogant,” “aggressive,” $\alpha=.93$). Finally, we used 17 items from Hon and J. E. Grunig (1999) to measure OPR outcomes of trust (6 items, e.g., “This company treats people like me fairly and justly,” $\alpha=.97$), satisfaction (4 items, e.g., “I am happy in my interactions with the company,” $\alpha=.97$), commitment (4 items, e.g., “I can see that the company wants to maintain a relationship with people like me,” $\alpha=.95$), and control mutuality (3 items, e.g., “This company really listens to what people like me have to say,” $\alpha=.94$). All the focal variables were measured on a seven-point Likert Scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree”, 7 = “Strongly Agree”).

As for potential control variables, we measured prior attitude toward the chatbots using four items adapted from the technology trust scale (Lippert, 2007) (“I can rely on chatbots to be working when I need them,” $\alpha=.95$); familiarity with (“How familiar are you with the company,” (1 = “not familiar at all”, 5 = “extremely familiar”) and prior attitudes toward the organization (“What is your overall attitude toward the company,” 1 = “very negative”, 5 = “very positive”), as well as perceived chatbot function (i.e., Think about the questions you asked the chatbot and rate on a scale of 1-5: How utilitarian (information-driven) and fun (entertainment-driven) are

they?).

Results

Results of the descriptive analyses are presented in Table 1. Regression analysis was conducted to examine the potential effects of measured control variables on the focal variables of the study. Results showed prior attitudes toward the organization, perceived utilitarian and fun functions of the chatbot significantly influenced the independent and dependent variables. Therefore, they were controlled in the subsequent structural equation modeling analysis.

The study used the two-step first-order structural equation modeling analysis to test the hypothesized model (Figure 1) in AMOS 26.0.⁴ The maximum likelihood method was employed for model estimation. The test of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model showed acceptable fit to the data: $\chi^2(24) = 214.40, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 8.93, RMR = .03, RMSEA = .10$ (90% confidence interval: .089–.114), $TLI = .97$, and $CFI = .98$. Following the model modification indices, one error covariance was added between control mutuality and commitment ($c=.34$). The modified CFA model showed satisfactory fit to the data: $\chi^2(23) = 150.39, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 6.54, RMR = .03, RMSEA = .08$ (90% confidence interval: .07–.098), $TLI = .97$, and $CFI = .98$.

A second step evaluation of the structural model with prior attitude toward the organization, perceived utilitarian function, and perceived fun function of the chatbot controlled also yielded satisfactory fit to the data: $\chi^2(37) = 195.07, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 5.27, RMR = .03, RMSEA = .07$ (90% confidence interval: .064–.085), $TLI = .97$, and $CFI = .99$, and was thus retained as the final model. Eight of the nine hypothesized structural paths demonstrated

⁴ First-order SEM was utilized considering the number of parameters for estimation in the model and the sample size.

significant results at the $p < .001$ or $p < .01$ level (see Figure 2).

Test of Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1-4 proposed the associations between chatbot social conversation characterized by social presence and conversational human voice and perceived corporate characters of agreeableness (H1+), enterprise (H2+), competence (H3+), and ruthlessness (H4-). Results presented in Figure 2 showed that with the effects of prior attitudes toward the organization and perceived utilitarian and fun functions of chatbot controlled, chatbot social conversation demonstrated strong positive effects on perceived agreeableness ($\beta = .79$, $p < .001$), enterprise ($\beta = .78$, $p < .00$) and competence ($\beta = .70$, $p < .001$) of the organization, supporting H1, H2, and H3. However, contrary to the expectation, the effect of chatbot social conversation on perceived ruthlessness of the organization was non-significant, rejecting H4.

In terms of the connections between perceived corporate characters of agreeableness (H6), enterprise (H7), competence (H8) and ruthlessness (H9) and the quality of OPRs. Results confirmed our predictions, supporting all the four hypotheses. Specifically, perceived agreeableness ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$) and competence ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$) were strongly and positively associated with the quality of organization-public relationships. Perceived enterprise showed a weak positive association with the quality of organization-public relationships ($\beta = .10$, $p < .05$). In contrast, perceived ruthlessness showed a weak negative association with the quality of organization-public relationships ($\beta = -.04$, $p < .05$). Finally, regarding the direct effect of chatbot social conversation on the quality of organization-public relationships proposed in hypothesis 5, results confirmed the prediction, revealing a moderate-level positive effect ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$).

In addition to hypothesis testing on the direct effects in the model, this study also conducted a formal test of indirect effects using a bootstrap procedure ($N = 5,000$ samples).

Results showed significant positive total indirect effects in paths from chatbot social conversation to the quality of organization-public relationships via perceived corporate characters of agreeableness, enterprise, competence, and ruthlessness ($\beta = .54, p < .01$ [95% CI: .46 to .61]).

Discussion

Social chatbots provide unprecedented opportunities for organizations to interact and communicate with their stakeholders (Syvänen & Valentini, 2020). As such, chatbots are seen as the new frontline “employees” who represent their organizations and are critical to developing and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders.

Chatbot Social Conversation and Perceived Corporate Character

Consumers come to chatbots often for utilitarian purposes. However, today's social media users no longer see chatbots as mere conversational assistants; instead, many expect chatbots to understand them emotionally and connect with them socially (Cheng & Jiang, 2020). This study advances chatbot-mediated communications by integrating theories of conversational human voice and social presence, and examines its impact on consumer perceptions of corporate character and relationships with the organization. This study highlights that chatbot-mediated communication is an important approach to shaping public perception of corporate character. Specifically, chatbots that projected themselves as “intelligent beings” socially and emotionally (i.e., social presence) and utilized an informal, friendly, engaging and positive communication style to talk with users (i.e., conversational human voice) can contribute to the development of a perceived positive corporate character (i.e., agreeableness, enterprise, and competence) of the organization that they represent. This result suggests that similar to conversations or interactions in interpersonal communication, organizations can manage their self-presentation to leave a

favorable impression on consumers in the chatbot-mediated environment. Chatbots make organizations more visible and accessible, and offer unprecedented opportunities for organizations to be perceived as relational and sociable. Contrary to our expectation, however, chatbots' social conversation demonstrated insignificant effects on publics' perception of corporate ruthlessness. This finding suggests that humanized and socialized chatbot communication is more likely to come along with positive judgments of corporate character, rather than being associated with the dark aspect of corporate character.

Corporate Character and OPRs

Organization-public relationships (OPRs) is a key outcome of organizations' public communication efforts. Just like with interpersonal relationships, maintaining high-quality organization-public relationships require organizations to be open, positive, supportive, and reliable (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016). The personification approach has been used extensively to examine how perceptions of an organization affect its relationships with key stakeholders (Davies et al., 2004; Men & Sung, 2019).

This study provides additional empirical evidence of how corporate character, a personification of corporate reputation, is related to organization-public relationships. When an organization is perceived as authentic and dialogic, rather than machine-like and task-oriented, people can feel its genuineness and establish mutually beneficial relationships (Westerman et al., 2020). In a related vein, an ethically competent organization convinces consumers that the organization will balance business economic interests, consumer well-being, and long-term social responsibility (Chen et al., 2018), and therefore is considered reliable and responsible. Additionally, an aspiring organization that focuses on external opportunities can engender customer satisfaction by providing innovative brand experiences for consumers (Lin, 2015). In

this way, the organization is no longer seen as a business entity, but more as a relational partner that participates in the co-creation of the shared reality.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study extended the application of relationship management theory in the AI context and delineated the role of chatbots in cultivating OPRs. To our knowledge, this is among the first empirical studies that examined the impact of chatbot-mediated communication on public relations outcomes. Extending the theoretical perspectives of social presence and conversational human voice to the chatbot-mediated communication context, the findings showcased the potential of chatbots in fostering positive corporate character of agreeableness, enterprise and competence. It also demonstrated that corporate character is a strong underlying mechanism that facilitates relationship cultivation in the presence of chatbot social conversations. Additionally, this study specifies which types of corporate character have the most significant impact on OPRs in the chatbot communication context. In a nutshell, this study shows that humanized chatbot communication can further personify the organization and instill positive personality traits to organizations, which ultimately cultivates favorable OPR outcomes.

From a strategic perspective, the study's findings provide implications for public relations and communication professionals. This study first indicates that using chatbots in ways that enable effective communication with publics is an important component of relationship-building in this digital age. Publics want chatbots to help them with their immediate needs reliably, but they also appreciate chatbots that display a sense of warmth, human touch, sensitivity, and humor. Making sure that chatbots simulate human interactions pleasantly and appeal to others is critical and helps build relationships with publics. As disembodied conversational agents, chatbots assume the role of an organization's spokesperson when interacting with publics. As

these conversational agents have the potential to impact perceptions of corporate character and OPRs, organizations should ensure that chatbots can interact in a warm and personable manner. Communicators should monitor how people respond to chatbots to confirm that these “spokespersons” are representing the brand positively.

Limitations and Future Research

The study has encountered several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, this study used a cross-sectional survey and SEM analysis to test the theoretical model. This type of analysis is limited in establishing true causal effects between variables. Future studies looking at chatbots and OPRs can use a longitudinal design to test the examined relationships. In-depth interviews could also help understand the nuances and provide depth to the results. Second, although the perceived function of chatbots were controlled in the analysis, this study focused on the relational aspect of the chatbot conversation without fully considering their utilitarian roles of the message content (e.g., accuracy, completeness, complexity, or appropriateness of the content), which could also cast effects on the study’s dependent variables. Future research should consider this important aspect in the analysis of chatbots’ strategic communication functions. Third, this study focused on chatbot communication with external publics. With more and more organizations adopting AI-based tools internally, future studies could explore how chatbots can be utilized for internal communication purposes and employee relationship cultivation.

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Table 1*Descriptive information and correlation matrix for observed focal variables.*

Construct	Mean (SD)	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Social presence	4.55 (1.62)	.98	1									
2. Conversational voice	4.78 (1.47)	.92	.87	1								
3. Agreeableness	4.04 (1.30)	.98	.78	.80	1							
4. Enterprise	4.88 (1.34)	.96	.79	.80	.92	1						
5. Competence	4.90 (1.26)	.95	.73	.75	.88	.89	1					
6. Ruthlessness	3.18 (1.52)	.93	.11	.10	-.02	.06	.09	1				
7. Trust	4.94 (1.33)	.97	.76	.76	.90	.87	.87	.01	1			
8. Satisfaction	4.86 (1.48)	.97	.77	.76	.87	.85	.85	-.001	.93	1		
9. Commitment	4.59 (1.52)	.95	.77	.74	.84	.84	.82	.09	.89	.91	1	
10. Control mutuality	4.81 (1.43)	.94	.76	.76	.86	.86	.84	.05	.91	.90	.92	1

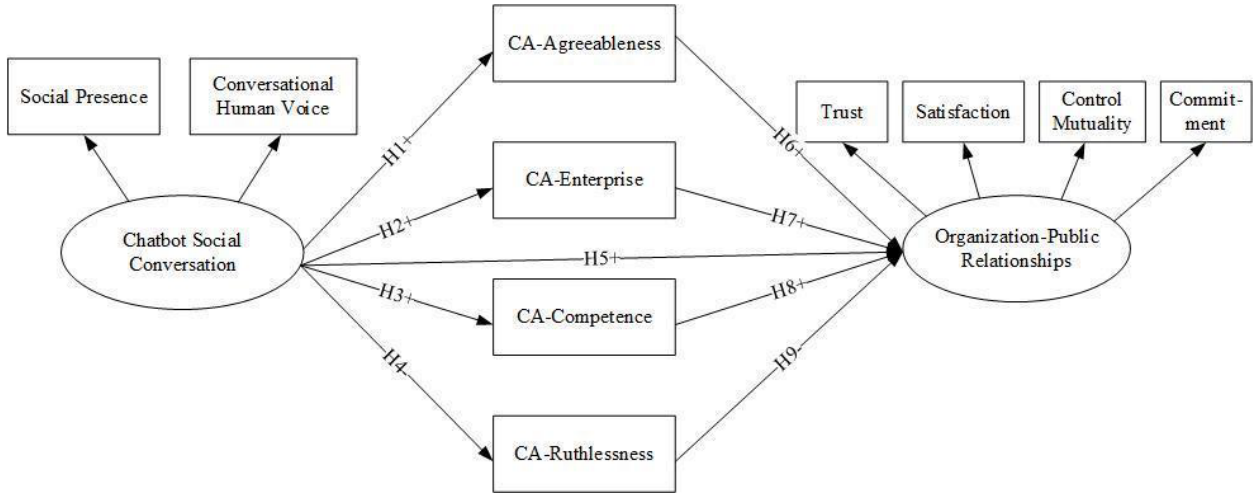


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the impact of chatbot social conversation on perceived corporate character and organization-public relationships.

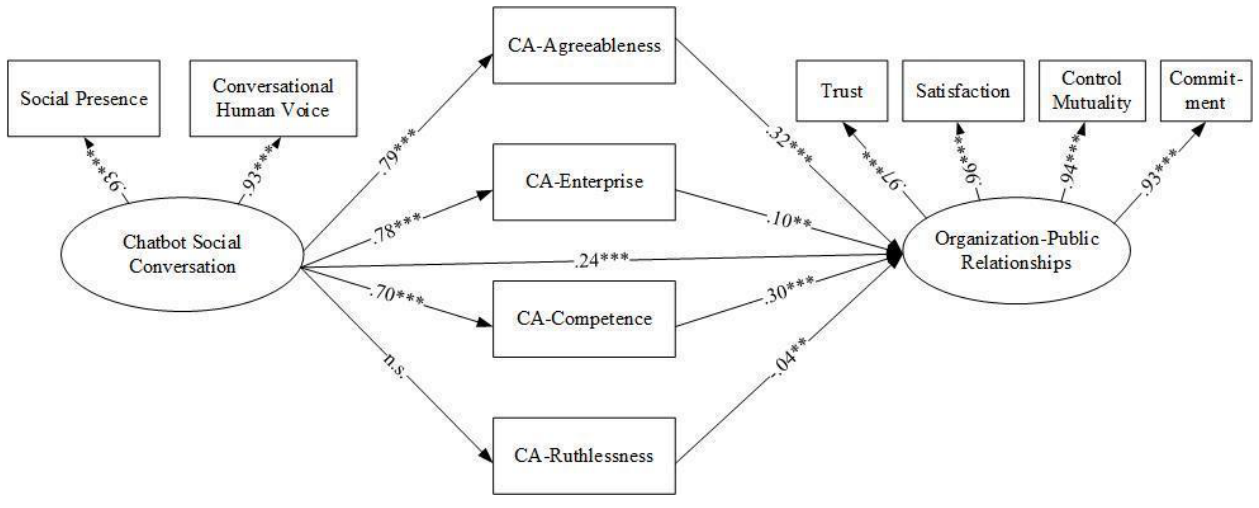


Figure 2. Results of SEM analysis. Note. ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

“You don't have to become a data scientist”: Practitioner Recommendations for Cultivating PR Student Data Competency

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The communication industry is transforming into a data-driven field (Fitzpatrick & Weissman, 2021; Weiner, 2021). People around the world consume and share information as they play, work, learn, engage, and advocate in digital spaces. PR practitioners must accordingly upscale their abilities and efforts to use technology to work in the digital world. As part of this digital revolution, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Big Data are becoming integrated into contemporary public relations practice (Wiencierz & Röttger, 2019; Wiesenberg et al., 2017). Sommerfeldt and Yang (2018) opined: “The question is no longer if, but how to best use digital communication technologies to build relationships with publics” (p. 60).

Despite the vast opportunities afforded by data and technology, many PR practitioners are behind on the learning curve (Virmani & Gregory, 2021). According to the 2020-2021 North American Communication Monitor (Meng et al., 2021), 40% of PR practitioners lack data competency; 29% are under-skilled, while 11% are critically under-skilled.

Educators know the importance of embedding data and technology competency into public relations curriculum. Five of the 12 professional values and competencies promoted by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC) relate to digital analytics (Ewing et al., 2018). In the most recent Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) report (2018), educators and practitioners indicated “research and analytics” was the fourth-most desirable skill—out of 13—for entry-level PR practitioners.

The growing need for data confidence and proficiency among entry-level practitioners

underscores why it is imperative that PR educators evaluate *how* they are teaching data and data analytics to students. Researchers interviewed 28 high-level PR practitioners with significant data and analytics experience to examine how educators can best prepare students to curate, analyze, and discern actionable insight from data.

Review of Literature

How PR Practitioners are Using Data and Technology

According to a McKinsey report, companies' adoption of digital technologies "sped up by three to seven years in a span of months" in 2020 (Galvin et al., 2021, para. 3). In 2021, the pandemic accelerated companies' adoption of digital technologies, and according to McKinsey, the future belongs to organizations that fully embrace digital technology, skills, and leadership (Galvin et al., 2021). PR practitioners are responding and leaning into this digital transformation as their usage of digital approaches and technologies increases (Wright & Hinson, 2017). Data infuses the entire PR process, and communication professionals can examine data from social platforms, email, websites, mobile apps, internal platforms, business data streams, and more to inform strategic and tactical decisions. Communicators can examine and analyze data for environmental scanning, issues management (Kent & Saffer, 2014; Triantafillidou & Yannas, 2014), crisis communication, combatting disinformation and misinformation (Weiner, 2021), audience identification and segmentation (Stansberry, 2016), influencer and journalistic outreach (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018; Wiencierz & Röttger, 2019) and campaign evaluation (Weiner, 2021).

The Arthur W. Page Society developed a communication approach called "Comm Tech," which is designed to help chief communication officers (CCOs) apply data and analytics to create campaigns that are hyper-targeted and optimized to drive business outcomes (CommTech

Quickstart Guide, 2020). According to Page members Samson and O’Leary (2020), CCOs must help their communication teams evolve from a proactive to predictive function, transform how they understand and engage stakeholders, and improve their digital skills and agility among team members so they can respond to complex problems and opportunities using real-time data.

A commonly referred-to term is Big Data, which is “advanced technology that allows large volumes of data to drive more fully integrated decision-making” (Weiner & Kochhar, 2016, p. 4). Big Data is often defined by four V’s: volume, velocity, variety, and value and consists of many small structured and unstructured data streams, including PR data derived from news coverage, internal communication, and social media (Weiner & Kochhar, 2016). PR practitioners can collaborate with other organizational units to examine Big Data to make decisions regarding product or service demand, competition, and community trends (Weiner, 2021, p. 24). Communicators are also starting to use AI to enhance their capabilities (Virmani & Gregory, 2021). Defined as the “ability of machines to perform tasks that typically require human-like understanding” (Knowledge@Wharton, 2018, para. 1), AI is being used for tasks such as responding to consumer questions, monitoring social media, conducting journalistic and influencer outreach (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018), and engaging employees (O’Neil et al., 2021).

Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching Data and Analytics

Educators and practitioners alike agree upon the importance of including data and analytics in the PR curriculum. When asked about the future of PR education, Duhé (2016) said educators should focus on three pillars: fast-forward thinking, interdisciplinary learning, and analytical reasoning. The latter relates to students’ ability to curate, analyze, and effectively describe disparate forms of data. In the 2018 CPRE report, educators and practitioners rated the skill of working with research and analytics a 4.16 (on a scale from 1-5) in importance, yet

scored entry-level practitioners only a 3.11 in terms of having that skill (on a scale from 1-5). Relatedly, educators and practitioners rated critical thinking as a 4.45, and scored entry-level practitioners a 3.07 in terms of having those skills. In addition to the importance of data skills emphasized by CPRE, five of the ACEJMC (2022) professional values and competencies relate to research, data, and technology. Recommended competencies include presenting information; thinking critically, creatively, and independently; conducting research and evaluation; applying basic numerical and statistical concepts; and applying tools and technologies.

In addition to the CPRE (2018) report, Krishna et al.'s (2020) survey of PR practitioners and Brunner et al.'s (2018) analysis of PR job announcements both indicated the importance of research and measurement skills for entry-level practitioners. Based upon a content analysis of university websites and job advertisements, Auger and Cho (2016) concluded that PR curricula were overall aligned with the needs of practice, except for social media and technology.

Other recent pedagogical work has examined how PR educators are teaching data and analytics, which students have indicated they desire (Meng et al., 2019; Waymer et al., 2018). Ewing et al. (2018) researched how PR faculty are teaching social media analytics by analyzing course syllabi and conducting a Twitter chat with 56 educators and practitioners. Participants (mostly educators) suggested students know how to measure social media results, understand the context of social media, engage in social media listening, and conduct digital storytelling. The researchers' analysis of syllabi revealed very few included learning outcomes related to analytics in general or required certifications with an analytic underpinning. Fang et al. (2019) also examined digital media content in 4,800 courses offered in 99 advertising and public relations programs. Approximately one in four universities offer digital media courses, and there is a greater emphasis overall on skills than concepts in courses.

Lutrell et al. (2021) investigated how social media, digital media, and analytics courses have been incorporated into the PR curriculum in programs accredited by either ACEJMC and/or Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR). Only 32% of 94 programs require either an undergraduate or graduate course in social media, digital media, or analytics; 16% of programs offer these courses as electives. McCollough et al. (2021) examined 154 syllabi to see how programs are teaching new media. Their study indicated 21% of courses offered content related to analytics and interpretation; only a few mentioned “social listening, data insights, or return on investment” (p. 41). Importantly, these two studies indicate only one of three accredited programs—or one out of five when considering syllabi—are teaching data and analytics.

Feedback from Practitioners About Data Skills and Knowledge Needed

Research has also focused on feedback from practitioners on how to best prepare students for the PR field. According to communication executives in the United States and China, PR education is not adequately preparing students for emerging media and technology (Xie et al., 2018). The executives named digital and social media as one of the six primary skills needed to succeed and said students should be trained to be “digital thinkers” (Xie et al., 2018, p. 10).

“Critical thinking, continuous learning, emotional intelligence, and curiosity” (Xie et al., p. 301) were ranked as the most important soft skills for entry-level practitioners.

Communication practitioners have repeatedly said students do not need to be trained to be digital scientists (Neill & Schauster, 2015; Wiesenberget al., 2017). Yet, students must embrace numbers, math, business, and statistics (Neill & Schauster, 2015; Wiencierz & Röttger, 2019; Xie et al., 2018). Other suggestions include teaching students how to conduct data analysis (Freberg & Kim, 2017), evaluate a campaign’s impact (Freberg & Kim, 2017), engage in social

media listening (Neill & Schauster, 2015), and manage a measurement budget (Xie et al., 2018).

Lee and Meng (2021) interviewed South Korean executives for their perceptions of data competency needed among communication practitioners. According to these practitioners, having the right mindset is more important than having the skills to work with data and tools. Lee and Meng (2021) posited that data competency can be fostered by building cognitive analytics, data management, technology literacy, sensemaking skills for data transformation, and crisis management digital skills.

Fourteen managers from PR agencies described what analytics-related knowledge and skills are needed for entry-level practitioners (Adams & Lee, 2021). They said educators should focus less on the tools and more on content. The agency practitioners recommended critical thinking, general measurement approaches, communicating data insight, social media listening tools, influencer marketing, message resonance, and data storytelling.

In summary, this review of literature has indicated the growing need for data and analytics competency among entry-level PR practitioners. Educators are seeking to enhance how they teach data and analytics, but research suggests there is room for improvement. Scholars have noted the need for more feedback from industry professionals about teaching data competency (Ewing et al., 2018; Fang et al., 2019; Luttrell et al., 2021). This study builds upon Adams and Lee's (2021) research by expanding the sample from agency employees to communicators working in a wide range of industries. Moreover, the focus of this project is on data, in general, and not limited to analytics. The study seeks to answer the following questions:
RQ1: What knowledge, skills, and abilities do students need related to data and public relations?
RQ2: What basic software/tools are organizations using to analyze data and digital analytics and which of these tools should students learn?

RQ3: What can educators do to improve student readiness in these areas?

Method

Researchers recruited 28 PR professionals with data and analytics experience using purposive and snowball sampling. Researchers recruited from their professional networks, many of whom are members of either the Institute for Public Relations Measurement Commission or the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) and have decades of experience in public relations, research, and analytics. Most participants work for either corporations or agencies, but some work at nonprofit organizations and consultancies; industries represented included air transportation, communication/information, consumer packaged goods, education, entertainment/sports, finance/insurance, government, and healthcare. More than 50% had more than 20 years of experience. Researchers conducted the interviews via Zoom between November 2021 and January 2022. Interviews, lasting approximately 60 minutes, were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Researchers analyzed the interviews using the three processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Researchers analyzed transcripts line-by-line to generate categories and created broad categories based upon the conceptual framework and variables under investigation. Researchers worked together to identify the major patterns and themes suggested by the coding categories. Next researchers reread the transcripts to code the material according to the identified categories and to identify frequency of responses and representative quotes and stories.

Results

RQ1: Knowledge and Skills Students Need Related to Data and Digital Analytics

When asked what knowledge and skills PR students need related to data, several patterns

emerged. Before they can analyze data, participants said students must have an understanding of PR fundamentals and basic research and statistics concepts. From a hard skills perspective, students must explain data accurately and clearly through solid storytelling and data visualization. Finally, participants discussed the importance of soft skills, including a willingness to learn, adaptability, and critical thinking. Participants said they could teach employees about tools; however, it was challenging to teach soft skills.

Knowledge Needed: Understanding PR Fundamentals and Business Functions

In order to conduct effective data analysis for an organization, participants pointed to the foundational need for students to understand fundamentals first, especially how PR connects to other business functions. According to one communication manager, it is important for students to grasp “the rationale behind public relations,” which means core PR classes “are really important for this [digital analytics] role, getting that domain expertise in the communications and PR area.” Another participant agreed that knowledge of PR skills, such as writing, reporting, and pitching, is essential for data storytelling.

Having knowledge of the organization beyond the PR department is crucial. Students need to know enough to communicate with others outside their area. Interview participants encouraged students to learn business basics so they would be able to guide communication efforts that would help meet organization goals. One CEO explained, “if you can't make it relevant to a business leader because you don't know very much about business, you've got a problem.” He said students should learn “all of the contextual pieces” of the organization, from finance to human resources—not to become an expert in every area but to “learn enough” to understand the context—“You don't have to become a data scientist, but you do have to understand what the fundamentals are so that when you sit down and actually do some of this

work or even pose some of these questions, you will have a background” that allows you to proceed effectively. A vice president for social and content marketing emphasized the importance of understanding the bigger picture; PR is “one driver, but how do we fit in with the rest of the channels and that consumer experience?” A communication consultancy CEO also recommended students learn every aspect of the organization they work for:

For students to be successful and to deliver value to their organization in the future, I think it's very important to think broadly to understand how does value happen in an organization. Go out with the sales reps on the road and work in different parts of the organization and learn how people view the customer, the processes internally, the data that results from both of those, and of course, the management structure and layers and ways of getting things done.

Connecting to organizational strategy/objectives. Many of the participants’ responses focused on goals, objectives, and what to measure, which means students need to understand the purposes behind data analysis. One participant said students need to know “how communications data can work in a business—why it's important, why it's something that we need to be doing.” Several participants pointed to the problem of opening an analytics tool without understanding the “why” first. One participant offered the example of someone going into Google Analytics and looking at site visitors and referral sources but not first considering “Why do we care about that?” One CEO said students need to understand that “it's the questions that come first and then the analytics, and then the analytics tell you whether or not you're measuring the stuff you need to be measuring.” An EVP of analytics agreed, “We really try to first make sure everybody starts with business goals, communications objectives, and audience alignment, and that's something that is still very confusing to a lot of clients, and even a lot of our junior staff still has a hard

time.” She encouraged:

making sure a goal is a quantifiable goal, so it has a who, what, by when, by how much, whatever, in my opinion, if they get used to doing that, it almost becomes obvious, “Well, do I know enough about my audience to know that this is the right goal? Do I know enough about the culture or the landscape to know if this is something I can do?” If I do, great. Then what are my benchmarks, so I know if I’ve achieved that goal? And it forces that quantified goal to become a way to make sure analytics is part of planning, a part of optimizing, and a part of then the measurement at the end.

Strategy. If faculty have used the ROSTIR (Research, Objectives, Strategy, Tactics, Implementation, Reporting) model in introductory classes, students have learned the importance of objectives being in place before strategies are developed and that students should define their strategy before considering tactics (Luttrell & Capizzo, 2022); students need to grasp how these steps are connected to digital analytics, as well. A CMO said:

Remind students that strategy is timeless.... It's a very natural tendency on the part of students and practitioners to get caught up in the tactics. But say, “Okay, how are we tying this back to the brand here? . . . How is this tied to the overall approach? How is this supporting this larger goal?”

One participant pointed to how vital it is for students to understand strategy before ever using an analytics tool. “A lot of the analytics tools are dependent on you understanding what a strategy is and understanding how you can take your goals and turn them into key performance indicators, your KPIs, and then how you can build reports from that.” Students must comprehend strategy to be able to select the appropriate analytics.

What to Measure. An analytics manager with 15 years of experience said students need

to learn to measure *outcomes* rather than just *outputs*. She explained outcomes are “really hard to measure,” but it is ideal if students understand the importance of business outcomes. Her advice connects to both the second and third iterations of the Barcelona Principles. According to Barcelona Principle No. 2, “Measurement and evaluation should identify outputs, outcomes, and potential impact” (AMEC, 2020). Barcelona Principle No. 3 says, “Outcomes and impact should be identified for stakeholders, society, and the organization” (AMEC, 2020).

Knowledge Needed: Research and Statistics

A communication manager with more than 16 years of experience said, in addition to a “domain expertise about media,” PR students need an interest “in numbers and understanding of just the basic analytics principles and what it means to explore data.” To work in PR now necessitates “an understanding of statistics of some sort.” A participant who heads the analytics team for a large agency said, “this is no longer *nice* to have. You don't have to be a data person, but you do need to have a base understanding of how to read a chart.” Another agency executive pointed to the need for students to know how to write a survey, and an agency founder said all communicators need to complete at least one statistics class that allows students to practice with “a wider range of datasets.”

A director of data science said students should not run away from statistics. “Statistics is not math; it literally is not math. You don't have to do any calculations in statistics. You have to understand how to apply something and when to press the right buttons; there's no math.” A founder of a communication analytics-focused company with more than 25 years of experience agreed students need to move beyond fear of statistics if they want to work in professional communication:

A lot of people go into PR or comms or even marketing because at some level they say,

‘Wow, I really did not like math in college or high school, and this looks like something that is math-free.’ That would be a huge mistake to believe that today. Nothing is math-free, numbers-free, technology-free. If you had a real problem with STEM, science, technology, math in school, you definitely should not go into marketing and communications in the future.

Participants suggested students learn about database systems, spreadsheets, Boolean syntax, data literacy, and dashboards. In fact, one source said, “Get really good Boolean operating codes, then that’s your bread and butter.” In addition to Boolean syntax, another source suggested learning the programming language SQL: “A foundational skill for analytics is SQL and being able to query, investigate, and understand large datasets.” Other participants argued there’s no need for students to learn R and Python because companies can hire a data scientist; instead, PR employees need to be able to work with data scientists and to discern the insight that has relevance for business outcomes and PR programming. A participant with 30 years of experience said, “They don’t need to be data scientists. They need to have an understanding of it... ask questions. . . . be good probers of the data.” Students must recognize “what’s an important number and what’s not” and to “be curious about where things came from.” More than any particular tool or ability, participants said students need to be comfortable with data: “how to structure it, how to blend it, how to analyze it, and how to communicate about it.”

Hard Skills Needed: Data Visualization and Storytelling

Participants repeatedly said PR students do not need the same expertise as a data scientist. They need to be able to take complex information and convert it “into simple-to-understand information.” Participants spoke of “data-driven storytelling” and simply “being able to explain,” which includes presentation skills to “tell your story.”

Data visualization tools were frequently mentioned by participants, including Tableau and Alteryx; however, one participant warned that tools that create an automatic visual for users might be dangerous: “I’m not a huge fan of data analysis using visualization tools purely because I think it is ripe for the potential of misrepresenting the data.” She recommended teaching students basic visualization within communication classes, including the importance of labeling information correctly and providing data sources. Other participants mentioned the frequent need to create their own graphs and other visualization pieces at work, despite the existence of automated tools, so a basic knowledge of good design is helpful.

Soft Skill Needed: Willingness to Learn

While demonstrating curiosity and a commitment to life-long learning is essential in PR, participants pointed out “genuine curiosity” is critical when it comes to mining and analyzing data and determining insights for communication strategy. Ten of the 28 participants emphasized the importance of curiosity. For example, a corporate communication professional said, “A digital analytics practitioner must have curiosity and strong communication skills” because that interest “will keep them asking why, keep them digging, which will uncover a deeper understanding in their analyses.” Another participant said “I try to hire people who are curious” and those with “an aptitude for understanding the bigger story and the strategy.”

The participants advised educators to help students and young professionals understand the value of recognizing there’s always going to be more to learn, showing a willingness to learn, and being comfortable with asking questions. A communication executive at a not-for-profit healthcare organization said, “Be willing to say, ‘I’m not an expert at it, but I want to increase my level of understanding,’ because that’s just what it’s going to take for them to be successful.”

One participant said people with “inquisitive minds” and “a point of view” are more

successful working with data and digital analytics. Another executive working for a company specializing in artificial intelligence discussed the value of “being open to trying something” and “digging into the numbers” to discern patterns and insights. According to a participant who directs analytics at a large agency, “Being a person who always wants to know more, wants to understand more, wants to learn more” will lead to both personal and professional success.

Soft Skill Needed: Embracing Change and Unexpectedness

Participants discussed how evolving digital platforms and tools create challenges with data access and analysis, which can be frustrating and time consuming. Students need to learn to deal with these challenges and be open to using different approaches to capture and analyze data. In the words of one seasoned practitioner: “Just encourage [students] to get creative and to try things and to not get upset when things get broken.” A corporate communication executive explained: “The number-one quality we look for in candidates is adaptability” because “analytics is a science and, as such, it is always on a journey of discovery.”

Soft Skill Needed: Creative and Critical Thinking Skills

Overwhelmingly, the research findings demonstrated the value of creative and critical thinking skills to effectively work with data and digital analytics. Participants described digital analytics as an art and science and how PR students and professionals need to be both creative and analytical when accessing and reviewing data. A corporate communication manager emphasized the importance of “being comfortable with ambiguity” and “pushing back” to dig deeper into the data to determine relevant insights. Another participant explained: “There’s a creative leap in interpreting data and its application.” A director of data science said students must not accept “what the data may appear to say at face value.”

To help students develop critical thinking skills, several participants discussed the value

of educators encouraging students to ask thoughtful questions. For example, educators can present a problem, share some data, and direct students to probe in a way that leads to insights connected to business and communication goals. This approach for teaching insight creation is practiced in the workplace. An executive for a global agency explained they conduct training sessions to teach employees how to connect the data back to the communication problem and how to use data to lead to actionable insights.

RQ2: Software and Tools Used to Analyze Data

When asked about software and tools for data analysis, participants described almost 80 software tools and programs, including those they use either in house or in collaboration with external partners. Seven tools were mentioned by five or more participants: Google Analytics, Adobe Analytics, Talkwalker, Brandwatch, Cision, Salesforce, and Tableau. Google Analytics was mentioned the most.

Participants explained the excitement and challenge of this explosion of tools. While practitioners may now choose from a wide range of tools, no single program is capable of accomplishing the myriad tasks needed, which means data must be coordinated from multiple sources, and practitioners frequently combine tools or create their own tools to meet their needs.

When asked which of these tools they recommend for students to learn, 53 different tools/programs were named and of these, only five were mentioned by four or more participants: Google Analytics, Excel, Tableau, Adobe Analytics, and Brandwatch. Participants repeatedly emphasized that educators should not worry about teaching the latest data analytics tool because tools change, and employers can teach the tools. Instead, participants suggested educators help students become more comfortable with the meaning of numbers and research in general.

RQ3: How Educators Can Improve Student Readiness

Participants shared suggestions to help educators prepare students for data and analytics competency. To conquer students' fear of analytics, some practitioners recommended educators embed data and analytics in multiple courses, with one participant explaining: "You have to socialize them to it and maybe spoon feed in little baby steps, but all along from the beginning."

Some participants said educators should dig into the context. For example, if students are analyzing social media conversations on Brandwatch, they should also analyze media coverage and competitor information to understand the nuances of micro changes in those conversations. Respondents recommended that PR educators partner with other academic units on campus, such as business or data science, or with industry professionals or agencies, to team-teach data competency to students.

Participants suggested educators use real clients and datasets to deepen learning, something also recommended in the interviews conducted by Adams and Lee (2021). One manager at a global agency said educators should incorporate open-ended assignments that encourage students to ask questions, inspire motivation, and figure out solutions on their own. Respondents also provided a number of assignment suggestions, including:

- Use AMEC research award entries to write case studies. Students could interview the professionals who submitted an entry to discern best practices and write the study.
- Have students assume the role of a junior executive in a communications agency, and in a 48-hour timeframe, create a client report with insights and infographics.
- Encourage students to participate and learn in online conversations about PR data and analytics on platforms such as Reddit, Slack, and LinkedIn.

- Have students develop weekly reports to examine different sources of data to consider societal factors that may be driving change.
- Give students a large data file on the first day of class. Teach them how to clean the data and how to gain insights in steps across the semester.
- Require students to attend a dissertation defense presentation from another department to gain practice taking complex ideas and data from outside their field and communicating key takeaways in a way that is understandable to a lay person. They could summarize the highlights or pitch the newsworthy findings in a news release.
- Develop a data integrity assignment that requires students to write and explain their data source, including any possible biases and/or limitations.
- Analyze social conversations on Brandwatch and connect the analysis to what's happening in the news and from a Google search. Connect the analysis to both theory and conceptual frameworks when looking for insight and making recommendations.
- Examine where social media fits within the consumer journey for a business and how it impacts outcomes relative to other channels.
- Use a client or university website to understand how to improve campaigns and readership using data from Google Analytics.

Discussion

In this study, seasoned communication practitioners from a wide range of industries shared recommendations on how PR educators can best prepare students to succeed in our increasingly digitized world. According to participants, students need a range of knowledge and hard and soft skills to work effectively with data and analytics. Most importantly, students must understand PR fundamentals, including how PR connects to other organizational functions and

goals (Adams & Lee, 2021; Brunner et al., 2018; Ewing et al., 2018; Krishna et al., 2020). Practitioners explained that knowing business basics and one's own industry are critical for asking the right questions, considering the nuances and context, and discerning actionable insight. Understanding how data aligns with or drives organizational objectives overshadows knowledge of any one digital tool or metric. While practitioners explained students do not need to be a data scientist (Neill & Schauster, 2015; Wiesenberg et al., 2017) nor know a programming language, they must have a strong grounding in research and statistics (Brunner et al., 2018; Krishna et al., 2020). Students must understand statistics and research in order to know how to examine frequency distributions, correlations, regression analysis, A/B testing, and more when examining data. Qualitative research skills are also needed for examining digital conversations and discerning meaning in data. Finally, students must also know how to succinctly and compellingly tell a story using data visualization for a wide range of audiences. Students must learn how to filter unnecessary data points to construct a simple story.

Much of the feedback from practitioners relates to soft skills, which employers often weigh more heavily than hard skills when making hiring decisions (Lee & Meng, 2021; Xie et al., 2018). The soft skills mentioned by participants included a willingness to learn, adaptability, and critical thinking, all of which align with the cognitive analytics and sensemaking skills recommended for data competency by Lee and Meng (2021) and Xie et al.'s (2018) research. PR educators, mentors, and internship supervisors can all help to cultivate these necessary soft skills. Study practitioners suggested assignments that could foster critical thinking and adaptability, such as requiring students to wade through data dumps, thinking about data biases when cleaning and sorting data, and figuring out how the data provides solutions to specific problems.

Given constantly changing technology, a plethora of programs, and the high price tag of

many tools, it is daunting to decide which digital tools to teach to PR students. However, participants explained data competency relates more to the approach than the tool.

Encouragingly, the tool most widely recommended by participants was Google Analytics, one that provides free training and certification. Excel was another basic and cost-effective tool recommended frequently and vehemently by practitioners. According to participants, students must know how to create and analyze a pivot table and create graphs using Excel; therefore, educators may want to require Excel certification. For faculty who want to learn new tools or software, the key is to start and keep it simple. Educators can tap into resources, like Matt Kushin's Social Media Syllabus blog and Karen Freberg's Social Media Professors Facebook Community Group.

While this study builds upon other research touting the necessity for PR students to learn to work with data, the question remains whether educators should create a stand-alone course and/or to integrate data analytics into existing courses. Given increasingly tight resources and crowded curriculum requirements, a separate course might not be possible; therefore, educators should consider spoon feeding data and analytics training across the curriculum, including introductory public relations, campaigns, research, and social media courses. Educators could introduce data and common terminology and metrics in introductory classes and later require students to use and analyze data in more advanced courses (Kent et al., 2011). Educators should continue to foster connections with industry professionals to serve as guest speakers, mentors, and project partners and to use real data and clients (Adams & Lee, 2021; Meng et al., 2019). Finally, students must take some responsibility for their own learning about how to work with data. Students can invest in their own learning by earning certifications, reading blogs and posts related to data analytics, attending brown bags and webinars, and completing internships.

While this study sheds much-needed insight into how to teach data and analytics, the findings are limited to a sample of 28 communication practitioners. Future researchers might implement a survey with a larger sample of communication professionals to ask about data competency and tools needed. Future research could also compare the efficacy of various pedagogical approaches used by educators to teach data and analytics. Another possibility is to examine and describe data and social media labs housed in communication academic programs.

In conclusion, this research has indicated that while educators have many new tools and ways to teach data competency to PR students, the basics have not changed. To succeed, students need foundational knowledge in PR concepts and models, strategy, business acumen, and research; skills in analyzing data and connecting to strategy and storytelling; and soft skills in critical thinking, adaptability, and a desire to learn. Educators should focus less on the tools and more on the knowledge outcomes and skills identified in this study. By investing small amounts of time in professional development and focusing on the basics (e.g., Google Analytics and Excel), educators can cultivate data competency among themselves and their students.

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Shaping the News Agenda: A Thematic Analysis of CDC and WHO COVID-19 News Releases and Statements

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In 2020, much of the world came to a near standstill when the coronavirus pandemic hit. Initially thought to be isolated in China, the virus grew at an exponential rate, affecting the Western hemisphere starting in early February. Journalists, sometimes called the first storytellers of history, struggled to keep up with the surges in various countries. The COVID-19 pandemic dominated much of the world's news media coverage in 2020. "The way a new health issue emerges into media discourse has consequences for the public's response, likely for the long term" (Gollust et al., 2020, p. 968).

During public health crises, authoritative health organizations and the news media are often viewed as credible sources of information (van der Meer & Jin, 2020). During a health crisis people are often confused about the steps to protect themselves (Ledford & Anderson, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have disseminated information about COVID-19 to newsrooms around the world. Although health organizations must communicate with the public during health crises, we argue that health organizations must also establish themselves as influential subject matter experts to garner sustained interest.

The CDC and WHO are the leading U.S. and international government organizations responsible for responding to large-scale health crises (Liu & Kim; Sastry & Lovari, 2017). The CDC's roles include detecting and responding to new and emerging health threats; tackling health problems causing death and disability for Americans, and using science and advanced technology to prevent disease. The World Health Organization's primary role is to direct and

coordinate international health within the United Nations. It supports countries' national health policies and strategies.

Lessons learned from infectious disease outbreaks include the importance of effectively communicating through formal channels (De Sa et al., 2009). Messaging during public health crises typically express recommended actions as well as implicit content (Quinn, 2018). Therefore, it is imperative to understand CDC and WHO central themes in media messaging.

Theoretical Framework: Agenda-building theory

Agenda building is “how some news items get on the media agenda while others do not. The process of agenda building includes journalists identifying, selecting, and developing story ideas, and weighing the importance of using facts, sources, and background research” (Len-Ríos et al., 2009, pp. 315-316). Originated by Lang and Lang (1959) and extended by Cobb, Ross, and Ross (1976), agenda building explains the process by which groups articulate and transform their interests into salient issues that garner attention, public approval, and responsiveness. Agenda-building theory broadens the range of recognized influences on the public policy-making process (Cobb & Elder, 1971). Such influencers use information subsidies to and shape the news agenda (Berkowitz & Adams, 1990).

Agenda building has proven effective as a framework for communication scholars (e.g., Avery & Kim 2008; Kioussis, Laskin, & Kim, 2011; Len-Ríos, et al., 2009). News sources can influence agenda building by shaping information to journalist needs (Berkowitz & Adams, 1990); however, such influence likely depends on perceived credibility. Information subsidies can have a profound impact on building the media agenda. The CDC and the WHO no doubt contributed to shaping media discourse about COVID-19. This theory can help uncover yet unrecognized insights about health agencies as agenda builders.

Literature Review

The authors reviewed research about the study phenomenon—shaping media discourse about a public health emergency. They excluded quantitative studies in favor of those from an interpretivist framework. Several scholars have explored how organizations shape media discourse about public health emergencies, studying inherent danger; how public health advisories promote behavior change; government agencies as authority figures; preventive versus responsive actions, and collaborative information-sharing.

Danger inherent in public health emergencies

The inherent danger of public health emergencies is a frequent theme of research. In Austin's (2011) analysis of how the CDC framed health information in social media, the theme of safety linked to health was evident; additionally, the CDC framed health as a serious issue. Analysis of Canadian government-based news releases about COVID-19 revealed a tonal shift from reassurance to concern (Fafard et al., 2020). Liu (2009) analyzed media releases distributed by the three organizations. Among the frames evident were “immediate disaster education”, “ongoing disaster education”, and “severity”. A framing analysis of the H1N1 pandemic comparing messages distributed by the CDC, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the WHO, alongside corporate messaging, revealed that government organizations were more likely to use disaster frames (Liu & Kim, 2007). A comparison of how the CDC and print media covered anthrax found that 79 percent of CDC messages focused on anthrax or bioterrorism compared to 53 percent of news stories (Mebane et al., 2003). Sastry and Lovari (2017) analyzed Facebook posts by the CDC and the WHO around Ebola to understand constructed meanings. The authors designated the second phase of analysis, “Ebola as a global threat”; in the third phase, they labeled the virus an “enemy”.

Public health advisories promote behavior change

Studies suggest that straightforward health information dissemination can facilitate behavior change. Analysis of how the CDC framed health information in social media revealed that posts tailored to the public emphasized individual responsibility (Austin, 2011). Fafard et al. (2020) analyzed news releases about COVID-19 from Canadian government websites. Government websites promoted public responsibility to slow transmission. To study how federal agencies and state leadership framed hurricanes, Gallagher et al. (2007) analyzed news releases before and after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The “government response” and “health issues” categories included straightforward, objective language. Murphree et al. (2009) examined FEMA’s responses to the hurricanes. They found frames with straightforward messaging about assistance registration. The “instructions for dealing with Katrina and Rita” frame focused on logistical information.

Government agencies as authority figures

Another prominent theme in the literature is government agency as authorities. The CDC framed itself as an authority by focusing on scientific-based approaches to health in Austin’s (2011) analysis of Facebook and Twitter posts. The authority figure theme was also evident in Murphree et al.’s (2009) analysis of FEMA press releases. In the *superhero* frame, the agency announced generous funding on behalf of hurricane victims. Similarly, the CDC and WHO were positioned as authority figures when Sastry and Lovari (2017) analyzed Facebook posts about the Ebola virus.

Preventive versus responsive actions

Several scholars debated the merits of preventing versus responding to public health emergencies (e.g., Austin, 2011). In Fafard et al.’s (2020) analysis of COVID-19 news releases,

they found descriptions of preparedness and mandates to slow virus transmission. Mebane et al. (2003) found in their anthrax study that the CDC addressed antibiotics as prevention and antibiotics after exposure. In Sastry and Lovari's (2017) analysis of Facebook posts about Ebola, the CDC predominantly focused on contributions of emergency management specialists deployed to African countries as a response strategy.

Collaborative information-sharing

Information sharing also emerged as a smaller theme in research. In Austin's (2011) analysis of how the CDC framed health, the CDC encouraged information sharing regarding specific health issues. Asserting that emergency managers and the media frame disasters differently, Liu (2009) found collaboration among governmental groups and NGOs.

The following research question explores how the CDC and WHO shaped the news agenda about COVID-19:

RQ: What media messaging strategies did the CDC and WHO employ when communicating about the COVID-19 pandemic?

Method

To explore how the coronavirus pandemic was framed in media messaging, the authors used thematic analysis, a "method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). They analyzed news releases and statements about the pandemic issued by the CDC and WHO in 2020. The time frame was chosen to align with the first appearance of the virus in the U.S. and the announcement of a pending vaccine. The 12-month period was deemed adequate to explore how these public health organizations constructed media narratives.

News releases and statements were obtained from organization websites. A search was

done for news releases and statements containing the keywords “coronavirus”, “COVID-19”, “SARS-CoV-2”, or “2019 novel coronavirus” in the headline and/or first paragraph. Releases and statements were excluded if they were duplicates or not relevant. The result was a final sample total of 160 news releases and statements: Eighteen news releases and 44 statements from the CDC, and 67 news releases and 31 statements from WHO.

The authors first divided the dataset by organization for review and analysis. All news releases and statements were examined in their entirety using a holistic approach aimed at understanding how the CDC and WHO organized discussion of the coronavirus. They conducted individual line-by-line analysis, looking for patterns such as repeated and reinforced words that emphasized particular ideas. Their analysis also involved noting narrative devices such as catch phrases and metaphors.

After developing themes and categories, the authors discussed how they were assigned and compared data that applied to multiple themes, then refined them. They combined their data into a single, coherent set of themes only after both authors agreed to the final selection.

Findings

Although their priorities and audiences differed, both the CDC and WHO adopted similar messaging strategies in their news releases. Six dominant themes were uncovered: Authority, Combat, Evidence-based Decision-Making, Personal Responsibility, Community Health, and Global Village.

Theme 1: Authority

The authority theme featured reinforcing words to position the health agencies as authoritative, trustworthy organizations that are on top of the situation through surveillance and continuous monitoring of the pandemic. By placing the CDC in proximity to other experts, the

following two quotes imbue the organization with similar attributes.

CDC continues to monitor the international situation with our teams on the ground in affected countries, as well as domestically in the four states with confirmed cases (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020a).

This case was detected through the U.S. public health system—picked up by astute clinicians...The federal government has been working closely with state, local, tribal, and territorial partners, as well as public health partners, to respond to this public health threat (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020b).

In several news releases, the organizations portrayed themselves as proactive, strategizing and partnering with other agencies, and serving as credible sources of information. This theme was especially dominant at the onset of the pandemic. The trend continued in the months that followed, positioning the CDC and WHO as authoritative voices.

As the WHO communicated some of its surveillance efforts—in what could be viewed as a controversial overreach into people’s lives—the organization rendered potential concerns invisible by focusing on its capabilities to monitor virus spread: “Mounting evidence demonstrates that the collection, use, sharing and further processing of data can help limit the spread of the virus and aid in accelerating the recovery, especially through digital contact tracing” (World Health Organization, 2020a).

Theme 2: Combat

In the combat theme, COVID-19 was framed as a threat; public health efforts were framed as aggressive responses: “As communities move toward a blended mitigation and containment strategy, I encourage all Americans to continue to embrace powerful public health measures—social distancing, hand washing and face coverings. We are not defenseless in the

battle against this pandemic” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020c). The CDC invoked mental imagery through repetition of reinforcing words such as war, battle, or fight: “This new funding secured from Congress by President Trump will help public health departments across America continue to battle COVID-19 and expand their capacity for testing, contact tracing, and containment” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020d).

Texts indicated how the CDC and WHO described the pandemic as a threat that could be overcome. Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told G20 Leaders’ Summit attendees: “You have come together to confront the defining health crisis of our time: We are at war with a virus that threatens to tear us apart—if we let it” (World Health Organization, 2020b).

Similarly, the CDC described the government’s approach as a form of sustained resistance: “The federal government will continue to respond aggressively to this rapidly evolving situation” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020e).

By framing the pandemic as a solvable problem, the organizations empowered readers to get involved in the “fight”, using unity as a theme to achieve victory: “State and local public health departments are on the frontlines of our fight against the pandemic, and these new resources will help them build the testing and surveillance capabilities needed to beat the new threat we face” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020f).

The WHO effectively reframed the pandemic as an enemy combatant by designating healthcare workers as frontline heroes and paying tribute to individuals who died of the virus.

World Health Organization Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus today joined the leadership of Spain, paying homage to those who have lost their lives in the country due to COVID-19, saluting the heroic efforts of health workers and praising the

government's resolute and robust response to reverse the virus's transmission (World Health Organization, 2020c).

The previous quote reinforces the image of combat by using language typically reserved for fallen soldiers.

Theme 3: Evidence-based decision making

Both organizations emphasized their reliance on data for decisions. Repeated reference to the importance of data established the CDC and WHO as reputable health experts adopting a science-based approach.

The Guidance standardizes reporting to ensure that public health officials have access to comprehensive and nearly real-time data to inform decision making in their response to COVID-19. As the country begins to reopen, access to clear and accurate data is essential to communities and leadership for making decisions critical to a phased reopening (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020g).

The CDC situated its guidance about safe reopening, wearing face masks, and providing vaccines alongside the American Medical Association—reinforcing itself as a leader in public health: “CDC reviewed the latest science and affirms that cloth face coverings are a critical tool in the fight against COVID-19 that could reduce the spread of the disease, particularly when used universally within communities” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020h). Emphasis also was on scientific evidence to support vaccine development:

In their joint statement, international medicines regulators and WHO reiterate that therapeutics and vaccines against COVID-19 can only be rapidly approved if applications are supported by robust and sound scientific evidence that allows medicine regulators to conclude on a positive benefit-risk balance for these products. (World Health

Organization, 2020d).

Theme 4: Personal responsibility

The CDC and the WHO emphasized personal responsibility by advising individuals to play their part in stopping virus spread. The organizations repeated guidance on individual roles, such as wearing face masks, social distancing, and staying home when sick. The organizations also juxtaposed ordinary individuals and medical experts.

Everyone should continue to do their part to implement prevention strategies, such as focusing on activities where social distancing can be maintained, washing your hands frequently, limiting contact with and disinfecting commonly touched surfaces or shared items, and wearing a cloth face covering when you are around people you do not live with, especially when it is difficult to stay 6 feet apart or when people are indoors (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020i).

As communities work together to get us back to where we used to be, it is essential that everyone—for their own good and that of their family’s—follow CDC and the federal government’s recommendations to protect against COVID-19. This includes wearing masks, practicing social distancing and good hand hygiene, and staying home when you are sick (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020j).

In the preceding quotes, the CDC again framed the virus as a solvable problem—but this time, it invited individuals to get involved in the solution.

Theme 5: Community Health

Data demonstrating the community health frame repeated straightforward, safety protocols and information about COVID-19 such as guidelines around quarantining, the need for contact tracing, and evidenced-based scientific standards of review. The WHO positioned itself

as a key resource by discussing how it granted the public access: “The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Wikimedia Foundation, the nonprofit that administers Wikipedia, announced today a collaboration to expand the public’s access to the latest and most reliable information about COVID-19” (World Health Organization, 2020f).

Likewise, the CDC and WHO offered specific guidance to organizations and communities on how to respond to the pandemic. In the following examples, the WHO addressed concerns regarding the prison population and the tourism industry.

We, the leaders of global health, human rights and development institutions, come together to urgently draw the attention of political leaders to the heightened vulnerability of prisoners and other people deprived of liberty to the COVID-19 pandemic, and urge them to take all appropriate public health measures in respect of this vulnerable population that is part of our communities (World Health Organization, 2020g).

Tourism’s response needs to be measured and consistent, proportionate to the public health threat and based on local risk assessment, involving every part of the tourism value chain – public bodies, private companies and tourists, in line with WHO’s overall guidance and recommendations (World Health Organization, 2020h).

The CDC also offered guidance to ensure safe school reopening.

Today, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is releasing new science-based resources and tools for school administrators, teachers, parents, guardians, and caregivers when schools open this fall... to help protect the health and safety of everyone—including students, teachers, and other staff (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020k).

Addressing leaders of nations to make public health a priority, Dr. Tedros Adhanom

Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, said: “The pandemic highlights the urgent need for all countries to invest in strong health systems and primary health care, as the best defense against outbreaks like COVID-19, and against the many other health threats that people around the world face every day” (World Health Organization, 2020i).

Theme 6: The Global Village

In the global village theme, data referenced solidarity and cooperation; specifically, an effort to join forces to address issues related to the pandemic. In a news release that confirmed the first travel-related case in the U.S., the CDC addressed the limited testing capabilities, as well as its readiness to share test kits internationally: “Currently, testing for this virus must take place at CDC, but in the coming days and weeks, CDC will share these tests with domestic and international partners” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020l).

Some countries agreed to pool their resources to ensure worldwide access to vaccines. The WHO appealed to unity by focusing on shared interests and efforts: “Thirty countries and multiple international partners and institutions have signed up to support the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP), an initiative aimed at making vaccines, tests, treatments and other health technologies to fight COVID-19 accessible to all” (World Health Organization, 2020j).

The global village theme also reiterated specific steps the CDC and WHO took through collaborative efforts. For example, CDC Director Robert R. Redfield was quoted in a news release that highlighted global test-kit distribution: “Distribution of these diagnostic tests to state laboratories, U.S. government partners and more broadly to the global public health community will accelerate efforts to confront this evolving global public health challenge” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020m). Likewise, the WHO emphasized the need for global

cooperation.

We recognize that the fastest and most effective solution to the COVID-19 crisis, and the full mitigation of its health, social and economic consequences, is through global multilateral collaboration and international solidarity that supports all countries and populations, including the world's poorest and at-risk populations such as women and children (World Health Organization, 2020k).

By drawing the reader's attention to the WHO and its organizational partners, the following quotes shine a spotlight on shared efforts to eradicate the pandemic. Terms like "coordinated", "successful", and "advances" framed financial contributors as powerful forces in sharp contrast to the term "vulnerable" to describe communities receiving aid.

Since April, the ACT Accelerator partnership, launched by WHO and partners, has supported the fastest, most coordinated, and successful global effort in history to develop tools to fight a disease. With significant advances in research and development by academia, private sector and government initiatives, the ACT Accelerator is on the cusp of securing a way to end the acute phase of the pandemic by deploying the tests, treatments and vaccines the world needs (World Health Organization, 2020l).

The COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund has been set up to facilitate an unprecedented global response by supporting the WHO Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan. As part of the agreement, an initial portion of the money from the Fund—which currently stands at more than \$127 million—will flow to UNICEF for its work with vulnerable children and communities all over the world (World Health Organization, 2020m).

Despite the aspirational tenor, the preceding releases were issued many months before vaccines became broadly available.

Discussion

Analysis of the CDC and WHO releases reveal several compelling findings that enhance understanding of their messaging strategies during the first year of the pandemic. Rather than relying on their reputations as health experts, the CDC and WHO incorporated language to emphasize their status. These organizations combined straightforward health information with emotionally laden language to convey the danger of COVID-19. They carefully constructed messaging to communicate the role of individuals, communities, and healthcare workers in fighting the virus. Their messages functioned as channels of reliable pandemic information.

It is unsurprising that the authority theme aligns with scholarship given the essential role of health agencies during public health emergencies (van der Meer & Jin, 2020). Studies that positioned health organizations as leaders (Liu, 2009; Murphree et al., 2009), indicate that credible information sources hold substantial importance as vehicles for public engagement. The fact that the CDC has previously emphasized the expertise and credibility of its staff as authoritative sources on health issues in its social media posts (Austin, 2011; Sastry & Lovari, 2017) suggests that the organization recognizes the value of amplifying its status.

Health organizations tend to portray the severity of health issues and the need to fight or take specific actions to overcome them, especially for threatening health conditions (e.g., Austin, 2011; Fafard et al., 2020; Liu, 2009). The framing of health issue severity was also evident in the present study, with notable tonal differences. The CDC and WHO wanted the public to view the pandemic as a severe threat that warranted a battle mentality. Citizens are expected to support soldiers during wartime. In the COVID-19 pandemic, these soldiers were “frontline” health care workers. Such messaging is somewhat consistent with the “superhero frame” Murphree et al. (2009) found when analyzing FEMA disaster news releases. Thus, the dataset indicates that these

two health organizations portrayed themselves as capable warriors who could rescue pandemic victims.

The evidence-based decision-making theme was an important finding due to the novel nature of COVID-19. Health organizations rely on data in public-facing communications, which connotes an evidence-based approach to public health (e.g., Austin, 2011; Fafard et al., 2020). In the present study, both the CDC and WHO communicated how science determined changes to public guidance. The authority and evidence-based themes revealed a deliberate effort to position themselves as trustworthy. This supports previous studies, which found that the public tends to view authoritative health organizations and the news media as credible sources during health crises (e.g., van der Meer & Jin, 2020). Indeed, trust in the media increased at the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic (Edelman Trust Barometer Spring Update, 2020), signifying that the public pays attention to health information during a crisis, which can impact the way that they choose to respond (Gollust et al., 2020).

The personal responsibility theme appears to be a pattern for health organizations, such as the CDC and WHO, to highlight the role of the individual in helping to mitigate health risks (e.g., Austin, 2011; Fafard, et al., 2020; Quinn, 2018). While scientists and health care workers were on the frontlines battling the disease, individuals were requested to play their part to keep themselves and others safe. In this way, the organizations empowered individuals.

With the community health frame, the CDC and WHO conveyed information needed to help individuals make informed health and safety decisions. Previous research supports this theme. Studies have found that public-health messaging, which highlights risk factors and safety measures, is a predominant theme in public-facing communications from health organizations (e.g., Austin, 2011; Mebane, et al., 2003). The CDC and WHO highlighted preventive and

responsive actions that communities could take to mitigate spread of the virus.

Consistent with the global village theme, previous research demonstrates that health organizations often promote collaborative efforts (e.g., Austin, 2011; Fafard et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic presented a challenging health situation for the entire world, necessitating collaboration. Findings from previous studies suggest that the global village concept is more apparent during global epidemics or health outbreaks, such as Ebola or H1N1. Health organizations tend to highlight the interconnectedness of countries and collective efforts in fighting diseases that threaten global populations (e.g., Sastry & Lovari, 2017).

Theoretical Implications

In press releases and media statements, the CDC and WHO portrayed COVID as a legitimate concern that must be shared by the media. They also presented themselves as credible sources of relevant information. By communicating about shared interests with other countries, the CDC and WHO likely informed public policy. Information subsidies broadened the range of influencers through those identified and quoted in news releases and statements. Journalists must weigh several options to determine what stories to cover in the name of civil discourse. Decisions journalists made about the CDC and WHO resources were likely buoyed by the organizations' ability to establish themselves as authority figures. These organizations showcased their capabilities of combatting the illness, enabling journalists to allay public fears. They projected a sense of calm by working alongside other countries. They also shared specific actions to facilitate community health.

Conclusion

The CDC and WHO strategically shaped media messages about the pandemic using specific keywords and reinforcement of particular ideas. The key messages in their news releases

and statements suggest that they relied on established health messaging strategies. Perhaps, the novel and evolving nature of this pandemic was ill-suited to new messaging strategies. Both organizations amplified their authority by conveying an evidenced- and science-based approach to decision-making. They also captured the gravity of the moment through liberal use of war metaphors. Collectively, these themes suggest deliberate framing of the pandemic.

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Exploring the Impact of Perceived CSA Accommodations on Employee Attitudes and Behavioral Intentions

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Introduction

An April 2020 *Forbes* article asked, “Is your business understood by your most important stakeholders?” (Sheets, 2020, para 1). As 2020 continued, this question became increasingly more relevant as societal expectations of organizations shifted from s prioritizing profits to people (Porter Novelli, 2020). Especially during the pandemic, more and more global companies prioritized employees as their most important stakeholders (Hunt et al., 2020). The 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer found that trust in business was continuing to decrease in the US. They point to the observation that trust is granted based on “competence (delivering on promises) and ethical behavior (doing the right thing and working to improve society)” (para 8). In an effort to position businesses to gain trust and serve as catalysts for change, they encouraged CEOs to focus on all stakeholders, collaborate, and speak out on social issues. In fact, they found that 92 percent of employees believed it was important for employers to speak out on social issues.

Speaking out on social issues is viewed as corporate social advocacy (CSA) (Dodd, 2018; Weinzimmer & Esken, 2016). As a public relations function, CSA is seen as the alignment of an organization or CEO with a divisive sociopolitical issue that differs from an organization’s everyday CSR efforts (Dodd & Supa, 2015). While societal expectations for organizations to take stances on social issues are high, each instance of CSA results in stakeholders falling on each side of the stand. This is particularly likely with highly controversial issues. Therefore, it is

especially essential for organizations to remain true to their mission, values, and purpose and use them as their north star when deciding when to take a stand and which side to take. When a stance is taken that is inconsistent with the mission, values, or purpose, perceptions of corporate hypocrisy are likely to occur (Wagner et al., 2009).

The year 2020 had numerous challenges, from worldwide protests against racial inequality to a monumental US presidential election all while navigating a deadly global pandemic. This unrest resulted in heightened organizational expectations as communicators sought to navigate this uncharted environment. The purpose of this study is to better understand the expectations and implications of companies taking stands on social issues. Specifically, it applies the Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management to examine employee accommodation expectations of company CSA efforts and relationships with organizational trust, corporate hypocrisy, and behavioral intentions. Furthermore, this study aims to identify the role of employee political ideology on accommodation expectations and organizational outcomes (organizational trust, corporate hypocrisy, and negative behavioral intentions).

Literature Review

Corporate social advocacy. Corporate social advocacy (CSA) is an increasingly important concept in public relations research and the profession. CSA can be defined as “an organization making a public statement or taking a public stance on social-political issues” (Dodd & Supa, 2014, p. 5), as it is commonly considered a tool that is used by organizations to engage with publics and gain legitimacy (Coombs & Holladay, 2018). Given that the controversial social-political issues that an organization can voluntarily engage in are often outside of their primary business interests, CSA broadens the realm of strategic issues management and corporate social responsibility activities (Dodd & Supa, 2015). Examples of

CSA include Starbucks' support of same-sex marriage (Dodd & Supa, 2014) and Dick's Sporting Goods' stance on gun control (Siegel, 2019). As CSA has gradually become an effective business strategy that can represent an organization's identity, companies must make strategic decisions considering CSA's distinctive elements (Park & Jiang, 2020; Rim et al., 2020).

Previous research has identified several essential characteristics of CSA, including that it is not motivated by profit-related concerns but aims to promote a specific social value beyond the organization's financial interests (Wettstein & Baur, 2016). Also, CSA might result in complex and unpredictable outcomes for the relationship cultivation process with stakeholders as it may attract stakeholders with similar positions who perceive it as beneficial while others in opposition may feel upset or excluded (Dodd & Supa, 2014). Previous literature demonstrates that CSA impacts organizations on multiple outcomes, such as consumer purchase intentions (Gaither et al., 2018; Weinzimmer & Esken, 2016), brand loyalty (Park & Jiang, 2020), organizational reputation (Bronn & Vrioni, 2001), public attitudes and word-of-mouth behavior toward an organization (Kim et al., 2019; Rim et al., 2020), as well as financial performance (Dodd & Supa, 2014). For example, a survey showed that a brand's social stance affected more than half of consumers' purchase intentions (Edelman, 2017). Likewise, an experiment conducted by Dodd and Supa (2015) found an increase in purchase intention when publics shared similar opinions about the organization's social stance, while incongruencies led to lower purchase intentions. CSA may positively affect relationship cultivation with different stakeholders (Park & Jiang, 2020), which influences attitudinal and organizational behaviors (Balmer, 2001). Thus, organizations should strategically evaluate situations when deciding whether to take a stand and align their behaviors with stakeholder expectations (Rim et al., 2020).

The Contingency Theory. The Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management (Contingency Theory) arose as an alternative to the normative Excellence Theory (Grunig & Grunig, 1992), which proposed a two-way symmetrical model of public relations between organizations and their publics. In contrast to Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of public relations (press agency model, public information model, two-way asymmetrical model, and two-way symmetrical model), the Contingency Theory proposed what the authors perceived to be a more comprehensive depiction of the continually evolving relationship between organizations and their publics. Acknowledging limitations of the four models of public relations, including weak data to support them, conceptual concerns, and functionalist criticisms, they argued that accommodating publics' needs is a much more complex process that is better explained on a continuum "which ranges from complete advocacy of a position, regardless of stakeholder pressure, to total accommodation or capitulation to a public demand" (Cameron et al., 2001, p. 244). Therefore, the Contingency Theory aimed to provide a more realistic portrayal of accommodation dynamics between organizations and their publics (Yarborough et al., 1998).

In interviews, researchers found that when practitioners were asked whether they would accommodate their publics' requests or advocate for their organization, they frequently said, "It depends" (Cancel et al., 1997, p. 31). Therefore, the Contingency Theory proposed that practitioners will take various factors into account when determining appropriate actions. As a result, this places them in different positions on the accommodation-advocacy continuum. Cancel et al. (1997) identified 87 variables that may influence the stance an organization takes, differentiating between external variables such as "richness or leanness of resources in the environment," "number of competitors or level of competition," and "degree of social support of business" and internal variables such as "open or closed culture," "homogeneity or heterogeneity

of employees,” and “characteristics of dominant coalition (top management)” (p. 60-62). Further, Jin and Cameron (2006) developed a scale for practitioners to measure Action-based accommodations (AA) and Qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodations (QRA) in various situations between the organization and its publics’ willingness to accommodate and how stances change and maintain over time. Researchers found that practitioners’ “willingness to make concessions or give or offer trade-offs” depends on various factors, resulting in practitioners wavering across the advocacy-accommodation continuum on a situational basis especially when moral, legal or regulatory implications are at play (Jin & Cameron, 2006, p. 423). With Contingency Theory-based accommodations, varying employee CSA expectations prevent organizations from satisfying everyone (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Yoon et al., 2006), but it does allow organizational leaders to view different actions on a continuum which can be used to strategically manage salient organizational-outcomes.

Organizational Trust. Public relations scholars defined organizational trust as “one party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 19). According to this definition, there are three dimensions of employees’ trust in their organization: competence (belief that it will accomplish what it says it will do); dependability (belief that it will consider employees’ opinions when making decisions); integrity (belief that it will treat employees fairly and justly) (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Previous research has shown that organization-level factors, such as organizational support, justice, competence, integrity, and transparency, considerably affect employees’ trust in organizations (Chathoth et al., 2007; DeConinck, 2010; Men & Bowen, 2017). In this case, employees’ trust largely depends on their previous experiences and perceptions of the organization’s actions as beneficial (Saruhan, 2013).

Trust has been identified as a significant intangible asset for organizations and serves as a

vital role in cultivating quality relationships within organizations (Audenaert et al., 2018; Grunig et al., 2002). Previous studies have demonstrated the positive associations between organizational trust and multiple organizational outcomes, such as organizational commitment (Top et al., 2015), identification (Pirson & Malhotra, 2011), and satisfaction (Pincus et al., 1990). Moreover, research has focused on a series of employee-based outcomes, including positive communication behaviors (Hubbell & Chory-Assad, 2005), a higher level of employee engagement (Yue et al., 2019), improved performance (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010), in addition to increased motivation and a feeling of ownership (Bare et al., 2014). Ni (2007) proposed that organizational trust can be primarily affected by two groups of predictors: management-related and organization-related factors. From a management communication context, effective symmetrical communication can strengthen employees' belief that they can freely express their thoughts and that their opinions are carefully considered (Kang & Sung, 2017; Men & Yue, 2019), which cultivates positive perceptions of the organization, leading to more trust (Jo & Shim, 2005). Given these relationships, this study proposes:

H1: When an employer takes a stand on a social issue, organizational trust will be positively related to accommodation expectations (Contingency Theory AA and QRA).

Corporate Hypocrisy. Corporate hypocrisy can be broadly defined as “the belief that a firm claims to be something that it is not” (Wagner et al., 2009, p. 79). Stemming from social psychology, people perceive hypocrisy when there is a “distance between assertions and performance” (Shklar, 1984, p. 62). Previous research has applied hypocrisy at the individual and organizational levels as dispositional characteristics (Aaker, 1997). Like how an individual would evaluate a person, people may perceive organizations as hypocritical based on inconsistencies between their public stances and actions (Wagner et al., 2009). While research on

perceptions of corporate hypocrisy related to CSA is lacking, some parallels can be drawn from studies about corporate social responsibility (CSR). Wagner et al. (2009) found that individuals perceived higher hypocrisy levels, negatively impacting attitudes toward the firm, when they were exposed to the firm's CSR statements before its inconsistent behaviors. However, some scholars argue that hypocrisy may not always be considered harmful. For example, Lipton (2007) illustrated how organized hypocrisy might be desirable when it prompts inconsistent organizational behaviors that lead to a long-term transformation of social norms.

Organizations will never satisfy all their diverse stakeholders when communicating their social responsibility initiatives due to differences in expectations (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Yoon et al., 2006). Thus, there will always be some perception of inconsistency between the organization and its various stakeholders. Fassin and Buelens (2011) proposed a sincerity/hypocrisy index describing the degree of congruence between an organization's communication and the implementation of CSR actions. When organizations focus less on implementation and more on communication, perceived hypocrisy and skepticism over CSR motives can occur. In a CSA context, when organizations communicate stances on controversial issues, they risk being perceived as hypocritical due to the high likelihood of opposition from some people (Dodd & Supa, 2015). Therefore, this study predicts the following hypothesis:

H2: When an employer takes a stand on a social issue, corporate hypocrisy will be negatively related to accommodation expectations (Contingency Theory AA and QRA).

Employee Expectations. When employees believe that their company's CSA initiatives are appropriate, legitimate, and sincere, they may discuss it positively and promote it voluntarily, essentially serving as an advocate (Thelen, 2020). However, when employees believe the company is behaving hypocritically, inauthentically, or not fulfilling its value to society, they are

more likely to exhibit negative behaviors toward the company, such as talking negatively or leaving (Jiang & Shen, 2020). Furthermore, there is a negative impact on employee behaviors when they perceive a misalignment between their employer's values and their own or that their opinions do not matter (Valenti, 2019). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: When an employer takes a stand on a social issue, negative behavioral intentions will be negatively related to accommodation expectations (Contingency TheoryAA and QRA).

Political Ideology. People self-identify and define others into social groups based on abstract social categories, such as friends, family, race, religion, and political ideology (Tajfel, 2010). Perceptions of others as members of the same group (in-group) or outside or opposing groups (out-group) can impact people's attitudes and behaviors differently. For example, people can hold negative attitudes toward members of opposing American political parties (Greene, 2004). For this study, the researchers focused on how organizational political ideology may impact employee perceptions of CSA efforts. Jost (2006) adapted Tedin's (1987) definition of political ideology "as an interrelated set of moral and political attitudes that possesses cognitive, affective, and motivational components" (p. 653). Political ideology is based on people's values, which are typically consistent and enduring over time (Jost et al., 2008; Sears & Funk, 1999). In the U.S., there are two major diverging political ideologies: liberalism (left) and conservatism (right), which can be classified on the liberal-conservative axis (Poole & Rosenthal, 1984).

According to Schneider's (1987) attraction-selection-attrition (A-S-A) model, different organizational goals attract people who choose to stay with the organization if they perceive it as a good value fit. Negative employee outcomes arise when employees perceive a political-ideological misfit of organizational values (Bermiss & McDonald, 2018; He et al., 2019; Hewlin, 2003). For example, employees may experience psychological and emotional distress when they

suppress their values to confirm with the organization's values (Hewlin, 2003). For example, dissimilar political identities at work have been linked to more incivility, increasing burnout and turnover intentions while reducing job satisfaction (He et al., 2019). Research has yet to explore how organizations' CSA efforts influence employee expectations. In particular, this study sought to examine how differences in employees' political ideology may impact their expectations of organizations' CSA accommodation strategies, therefore the following RQs are explored:

RQa-e: When taking a stand on a social issue, how does employee political ideology impact perceptions of employer accommodations Contingency Theory (a) AA and (b) QRA, organizational trust (c), corporate hypocrisy (d), and negative behavioral intentions (e)?

Method

Participants and Procedures. To test the proposed research questions and hypotheses, a quantitative online survey was conducted during a three-week period from November to December 2020. At the time of the survey, the United States was in month ten of the global pandemic with Covid-19 rates and deaths increasing. This was also six months after the tragic death of George Floyd which spurred heightened attention on racial inequality. Additionally, the election had passed, and while President Trump had yet to formally concede, President Biden was announced as the 46th president of the United States. Much news coverage and public discussion focused on the division between republicans and democrats and, more specifically, their conflicting political ideologies and value systems. This heightened, politically charged climate is inescapable in the workplace, turning the remaining few apolitical organizations into political environments that may face heated debates among heterogeneous employee groups. Thus, respondents were given a divisive situation where they were under the assumption that their organization was taking a social issue stance that was not supported by at least 25% of their

fellow employees, deeming it a controversial stand for the organization. An example of an issue stance that does not bring about controversy would be a position that was supported by nearly all employees, such as feeding the homeless. The study population consisted of adults working full-time across a variety of industries in the U.S. The global survey building platform and data collection service, Qualtrics, was used to recruit participants and create the online survey. A quota sampling technique was employed to ensure that the demographics of the sample were representative of the adult U.S. population. After removing any data that failed the response check items, a final sample of 485 valid responses was used for data analysis.

Measures. The concepts of trust, corporate hypocrisy, and behavioral intentions were each measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). The two accommodation scales (Action-Based Accommodations and Qualified-Rhetoric-Mixed Accommodations) were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from “completely unwilling” (1) to “completely unwilling” (7).

Organizational Trust. To measure employee trust toward the organization, six items were adopted from Hon and J. Grunig (1999) including: “My company treats people like me fairly and justly,” “Whenever my company makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me,” “My company can be relied on to keep its promises,” “I believe that my company takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions,” “I feel very confident about my company's skills,” and “My company has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do” ($\alpha = .94$, $M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.43$).

Corporate Hypocrisy. Employees’ perceptions of corporate hypocrisy were measured using six items based on Wagner et al. (2009) (i.e., “By taking a stand on this social issue, my company would be acting hypocritically,” “By taking a stand on this social issue, what my

company says and does would be two different things,” “By taking a stand on this social issue, my company would be pretending to be something that it is not,” “By taking a stand on this social issue, my company would be doing exactly what it says,” “By taking a stand on this social issue, my company would be keeping its promises,” and “By taking a stand on this social issue, my company would be putting its words into action” ($\alpha = .82, M = 3.29, SD = 1.17$).

Negative Behavioral Intentions. Negative behavioral intentions were measured using three items adapted by DiStaso et al. (2015): “I would likely speak negatively about my company,” “I would consider leaving my company,” and “I would likely stop using my company's products or services” ($\alpha = .88, M = 2.93, SD = 1.54$).

Contingency Theory Accommodations. To measure Contingency Theory accommodations both Action-based accommodations (AA) and Qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodations (QRA) were adapted from Jin and Cameron (2006). Action-based accommodations (AA) were positioned as accommodations as actions for the employees who want the employer to take a stand on the social issue. They were measured with five items including: “Yield to the demands of these employees,” “Agree to take a stand on what these employees proposed,” “Accept the propositions of these employees,” “Agree with these employees on future action or procedure regarding this social issue,” and “Agree to act on the issue suggested by these employees” ($\alpha = .93, M = 4.38, SD = 1.39$).

Qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodations (QRA) were positioned as verbal accommodations for the employees who did not support the employer taking a stand on the social issue. They were also measured using five items: “Apologize to the employees who were not supportive of the stand,” “Address why the decision to take a stand on this social issue was made,” “Express empathy for the opposing side of the stand,” “Make concessions with the

employees who are not supportive of this stand,” and “Admit to taking a stand that some employees did not want.” ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.39$).

Political Ideology. Respondents were asked to identify their political ideology. Overall, the sample was slightly more liberal ($n = 187$, 38.5%), followed by conservative ($n = 156$, 32.2%), and moderate ($n = 142$, 29.3%).

Data Analysis. Data cleaning and preliminary analyses were all performed in SPSS® (Version 24.0). To test H1, H2, and H3, correlations were conducted to examine the relationships between accommodations (Contingency Theory AA and QRA) and organizational trust, corporate hypocrisy, and negative behavioral intentions. To answer the RQs about the impact of political ideology, a series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted.

Results

We examine the correlations, variable means, and standard deviations among the study variables used in this study. H1-3 looked at the relationships between Action-based accommodations (AA) and Qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodations (QRA) and organizational trust, corporate hypocrisy, and negative behavioral intentions. H1 predicted a positive relationship between organizational trust and accommodations. When responding to an employer stance on a social issue, employees indicated that organizational trust was strongly correlated with AA ($r(483) = .51$, $p < .001$) and QRA ($r(483) = .56$, $p < .001$), supporting H1. We also found support for H2, which predicted a negative relationship between corporate hypocrisy and accommodations. When responding to an employer stance on a social issue, employees indicated that corporate hypocrisy was negatively correlated with AA ($r(483) = -.42$, $p < .001$) and QRA ($r(483) = -.44$, $p < .001$).

H3 predicted a negative relationship between negative behavioral intentions and

accommodations. When responding to an employer stance on a social issue, the likeliness for negative behavioral intentions was negatively correlated with Action-based accommodations ($r(483) = -.26, p < .001$) and Qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodations ($r(483) = -.26, p < .001$). Therefore, H3 was supported. The RQs explored the impact of political ideology on perceptions of employer accommodations (RQa Action-based accommodations and RQb Qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodations), organizational trust (RQc), corporate hypocrisy (RQd), and behavioral intentions (RQe). The results from one-way ANOVAs revealed significant differences between those with liberal versus conservative ideologies for perceptions of accommodations. Liberals ($M = 4.52$) expected a higher willingness for their employers to make Action-based accommodations (AA) ($F(2, 482) = 3.02, p \leq .05$) than conservatives ($M = 4.16$). Liberals ($M = 4.58$) also expected a higher willingness to make Qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodations (QRA) ($F(2, 482) = 3.56, p < .05$) than conservatives ($M = 4.25$). Political ideology was not significant with organizational trust, corporate hypocrisy, and negative behavioral intentions.

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to better understand the expectations and implications of companies taking stands on social issues. Specifically, it applied the Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management to examine employee expectations of corporate social advocacy (CSA) efforts and relationships with organizational trust, corporate hypocrisy, and behavioral intentions. Additionally, this study aimed to identify if employee political ideology impacts expectations of accommodations and organizational outcomes (i.e., organizational trust, corporate hypocrisy, and negative behavioral intentions). As discussed previously, putting people before profit has been a priority for companies in 2020 (Porter Novelli, 2020). This emphasis aligns with CSA as it centers on promoting social values (Wettstein & Baur, 2016), making this

an especially relevant research study.

Theoretical Implication. This study utilized the Contingency Theory to explore employee expectations about employer willingness to make CSA accommodations. For this study, each accommodation was specific to different employee groups' agreement with the company taking a stand on a social issue – AA for employees who agree and QRA for employees who disagree. Therefore, this study applied the Contingency Theory to new decision-making, companies taking stands on social issues. In accordance with the Contingency Theory, the current study provides a more realistic representation of how organizations and employees interact through accommodation. Specifically, the findings were consistent with previous research that found when an organization's actions reflect individuals' values, it positively influences their attitudes and behaviors toward the organization (Balmer, 2001). Although focusing on increasing positive behaviors is important, many organizations concentrate on minimizing negative behaviors (e.g., speaking negatively about the company, leaving or no longer using its products/services) because oftentimes they can lead to a crisis. Similar to previous research (Valenti, 2019), this study found that negative behavioral intentions decreased as perceptions of employer willingness to accommodate increased. When employees believed their employer would be willing to accommodate and support congruent values as Wagner (2009) recommended, perceptions of corporate hypocrisy were lower.

Finally, this study found differences in expectations about employer willingness to accommodate based on political ideology. Expressly, liberals believed their employers were more likely to make Action-based accommodations (AA) for employees who were in support of the CSA compared to their conservative counterparts. In line with previous literature on political ideologies, liberal-leaning employees were more likely to expect their employers to

accommodate their CSA expectations and push for social change (Jost et al., 2008; Poole & Rosenthal, 1984). Likewise, for Qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodations (QRA), liberals again felt more strongly than their conservative colleagues, in line with previous literature on conservative ideologies that choose to keep business apolitical (Jost et al., 2008).

Practical Implications. It is beneficial to organizational leaders to understand how taking a controversial stand on a social issue when it aligns with employee and organizational values, may decrease negative behavioral intentions, or even lead to positive behaviors, such as positive word of mouth (Thelen, 2020). Public relations practitioners should position divisive organizational stances on the accommodation-advocacy continuum to determine if it represents the organization's values and whether they will choose to accommodate or advocate for the supporting group while weighing potential harmful outcomes that may arise. Moreover, identifying key variables when determining what actions to take is essential for practitioners (Cancel et al., 1997), such as the political ideology of employees or the "homogeneity or heterogeneity of employees" (p. 60-62), to mitigate harm and promote positive outcomes.

Organizational leaders should tread cautiously when taking a divisive stance on a social issue that is not supported by all employees - a feat that is quite certainly near impossible. As this study found, employees will expect a willingness by employers to make accommodations to employees on both sides of a controversial social issue when a stand is made. It is important to note that in closed cultures, the negative impact of taking a stand may be stronger (Audenaert et al., 2018; Grunig et al., 2002), especially if the collective perceives it as isolating in-group members (Tajfel, 2010). Employers must accommodate all employees by considering their opinions when making decisions, or they may face threats to employee organizational trust (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Alternatively, the responses indicate that with proper accommodations,

organizational leaders can use inconsistent behaviors, such as taking a divisive stance that is not necessarily congruent with the majority of employee values, to evoke perceptions of hypocrisy, prompting a lasting transformation process in which social norms evolve.

Limitations and Future Research Directions. Despite the study's contributions, a few limitations should be considered for future studies. First, this study primed participants to assume their fellow employees at their organization held the position that they wanted their employer to take a social issue stance. However, this study did not specify the type of social issue, which means that the researchers are unaware of the potential issue that came to mind for each participant when primed, thus, potentially impacting outcomes. Additionally, participants in varying industries might have different perceptions of CSA on certain social issues. Future studies may consider conducting a case study to examine such effects in a real-world context.

Second, this study relies on employees' self-report data, which carries some concern of single-source bias. Also, the cross-sectional survey design cannot draw any causal relationships between variables, which highlights a need for future research that may infer causal links. Although quantitative surveys provide generalizable findings, it is challenging to understand how the process works without a qualitative examination component. Future research on this topic may benefit from conducting interviews or focus groups to further explore how organizations' contingency-based accommodations on social issues stances would influence employees' attitudes and behaviors. Third, this study examined employee trust, perception of corporate hypocrisy, and behavioral intentions when organizations respond to employee requests to take a social stance. Future research might further explore the underlying mechanisms of Contingency Theory CSA accommodations by considering other factors, such as organizational identity, employee advocacy, and organizational commitment, to provide a more holistic understanding of the process.

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Measuring Fan Support in Socially Controversial Issues: The Publics Affinity Response Matrix (PARM) in Crisis Communications

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Introduction

College football sports fandoms are notorious for their stalwart support of their organizations, “maintain[ing] the faith, even when the team is performing poorly” or embroiled in public relations crises (Smith & Stewart, 2007, p. 156).¹ Year after year, sports fans will cheer on their teams, maintaining identity as stakeholders, even while enduring negative press, coaching staff turnover, and seemingly damning controversy. Curiously, some fanships will be “fickle and critical,” especially during public relations crises (Smith & Stewart, 2007, p. 156), but others will not. This paper examines the perceptual differences in these groups relative to the communication type, and proposes a Publics Affinity Response Matrix (PARM) for practitioner and industry use.

When controversies strike, organizations and publics have choices. This paper examines the outcomes of crisis response and organization-public relationships using two case studies of public relations controversies on college football teams. In this paper, we conceptualize a model of fanship publics as affinity-having stakeholders in relation to outcomes of organization-public relationships (OPR). This work sits at the nexus of organizational responses to social issues, understanding publics through fandoms, and stakeholder perception and behavior.

In June of 2020 Mississippi State University (MSU) football player Kylin Hill tweeted

¹ Reysen and Branscombe (2010) indicate that, as scholarship surrounding the phenomenon of the fan continues to grow and develop, we ought to keep in mind that a) there are many types of fans that are unrelated to sports, and b) fans may be devoted to the organization, fellow fans, or some combination. While not our primary focus, our study suggests the value of charting fan studies in these and other vectors.

that he would not play under the then-state flag. His coaches and teammates immediately supported his stance (Horka, 2020). MSU athletic communications were proactive with their support of Hill's stance, prompting the Southeastern Conference, a hosting collegiate sports conference of MSU, to lend its support, which eventually led Mississippi to change its state flag (Ganucheau, 2021). Before the change, Mississippi was the last state to have a confederate symbol on its flag. In contrast to the response by MSU, the Baylor case was chosen as an example of an organization responding reactively and improperly to a crisis. From 2015 to 2019, Baylor faced a slew of sexual assault lawsuits against football players, showcasing a rape culture openly facilitated by the athletic staff and the university's administration. The football coach, several athletic staff members, and ultimately the university's president were fired, and the Title IX coordinator resigned (Chavez & Croft, 2018). Baylor was reactive in its approach to this issue even as it became a major crisis, and did not ally itself with victims, at times openly disparaging them. In the next section, we provide a literature review detailing a paradigm, several scales, and useful measurement tools that inform our hypotheses and the research question that precedes our model's development before explaining our methodology and findings.

Literature Review

Organization-Public Relationships (OPR)

A prevailing paradigm through which relationships are measured in much strategic communications literature is organization-public relationships (OPR) (Hon & Grunig, 1999). According to Hon and Grunig, the value of these relationships crafted and mediated by public relations practices can be adequately measured through OPR outcomes. Public relations scholars typically report efficacy of six OPR outcomes in various contexts: trust; control mutuality; commitment; satisfaction; communal relationships; and exchange relationships. Ki and Hon

(2007), for example, found that satisfaction and communal relationships of college students were strongly related to their attitude toward their university and positive behavioral intention. Yang (2007) found positive OPR outcomes to be associated with favorable organizational reputations. Men and Hung (2012) assert that assessing OPR outcomes is beneficial for organizations' strategic communications planning.

Studies designed to find antecedents led to discussions of OPR outcomes as assessment tools for strategic communications (e.g., Bruning & Ledingham, 2002; Ledingham et al., 1999). Ki and Hon (2009), then, developed six relationship cultivation dimensions: access; positivity; openness; sharing of tasks; networking; and assurance, and examined their linkage to OPR outcomes as well. Other antecedents, such as authentic leadership (Men & Stacks, 2014), credibility of candidates in political communication (Sweetser & Browning, 2017), and personification of organizational social media (Sung & Kim, 2021) were also later examined. In addition, Browning et al. (2020) introduced corporate advocacy as a relational communication strategy that strengthens OPR outcomes.

Situational Theory of Publics (STP)

Grunig (2006) originally developed the situational theory of publics (STP) to study individuals' information-seeking behavior when making economic decisions, though subsequent use of this measurement tool has included the segmentation of publics by affinity and awareness. For strategic communications, this provides a field to examine various stances toward organizations and their posture or response to public relations efforts. According to Chung et al. (2016), analogous publics face similar situations. Those publics can be categorized by their situational perceptions and how they influence an organization's decisions. Using STP, publics are divided into affinity groups based on their awareness and degree of involvement in a social,

cultural, or organizational problem or issue and the extent to which they are spurred to action about this particular problem (Kim & Grunig, 2011). Using these measures, publics were originally segmented into four different groups: (1) the non-public; (2) the latent public; (3) the aware public; and (4) the active public (Han, 2014).

Hallahan (2001) further crystallized STP by conceptualizing of dynamic, movable fields instead of static publics. This new model named a new group — aroused publics, and segmented inactive publics away from non-publics. Inactive publics have a low level of knowledge and involvement of an issue, but are not non-publics as per Grunig (2006). Because of Hallahan's (2001) dynamism, publics can escalate or deescalate in response to strategic or crisis communications, or in the absence of effective public relations and relationship building. As such, inactive publics can become aware publics, and aware publics can become aroused publics, which can in turn become active publics. Our research design explores the characteristics of the dynamics of these publics' responses in relation to their fanship of an organization.

Dynamics of Publics on Social Issues

Identifying publics and knowing the extent of their involvement and knowledge about an organization and/or its potentially controversial issues yields the possibility of accuracy in predictions about how each public would perceive and respond to crisis communication types.

Knowing how to measure and interpret this data generally can inform a strategic communications team, and paves the way for more successful strategic communications planning. An OPR, publics, and fanship affinity measurement matrix would be useful for theorists and praxis, and there is precedent in the field to support these measurements. Kim and Sung (2016) found that a public with positive OPR outcomes is less likely to recognize the problems of a controversial issue. They also found that positive OPR outcomes were a negative

predictor of involvement recognition and constraint recognition. Also, high levels of problem recognition and involvement recognition coupled with a low level of constraint recognition predicted a higher level of communication intention. Chon (2019) found political affiliation with trust influences people's intention toward the government in a crisis. Chon also examined how different publics would react to a governmental crisis and found that problem recognition level was a strong predictor. Therefore, we posit three hypotheses here:

H1: OPR outcomes would negatively affect the level of problem recognition.

H2: OPR outcomes would negatively affect the level of involvement recognition.

H3: OPR outcomes would negatively affect the level of constraint recognition.

Chung et al. (2016) segmented participants in four publics to examine their differences, and found an interaction effect between types of publics and the message they receive regarding a not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) issue in their community. Specifically, they found that active and inactive publics are less likely to be affected by the message type, while aroused and aware publics were more heavily affected by the types of messages they received. Here, we add two more hypotheses:

H4: Four different publics (Active, Aroused, Aware, and Inactive) would show different levels of behavioral intention.

H5: There are interaction effects between the type of publics and the type of organizational responses toward a social issue on the behavioral intention.

Publics of Sport Organizations

Publics identifying themselves with a sports organization are less likely to disassociate themselves from their team, even when the team is not successful (Wann & Branscombe, 1993).

These publics establish solid OPR outcomes with their organization. Wann and Branscombe developed the most widely used fandom/fanship scale, the Sports Spectatorship Identification Scale (SSIS). A large degree of identification with a team, their study found, informed respondents' optimism about a team's winning potential and influenced their opinions and desires about others sharing in the fandom. Another indication was attribution of a positive status to the team's fans. Fans with a large degree of affinity with a team are "most likely to believe that other fans of their team are special" (Wann & Branscombe, 1993, p. 12). Other experiments and measures involving sports fandoms followed, including research into televised consumption of sports games and news, fan motives, and gender differences in how people react to their team (Gantz et al., 2006). Hirt et. al. (1992) measured how college sports fandoms' reflected glory and failures affect individual fans' perceptions of their own abilities to succeed or fail. Yargic and Kurklu (2019) examine correlations of screentime and fanship among adolescents in Turkey using SSIS. Wann and Branscombe (1993) developed the SSIS from social identity theory.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) originated the social identity theory, contending that a person's identity is multifaceted and heavily involves their identification with certain groups. Simply put, a person typically associates themselves with certain groups, and disassociates themselves from others. Membership in a social group such as a sports team's fandom exists when "the individuals concerned defined themselves and are defined by others as members of a group" (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p. 15). Providing a positive sense of self and self-reference is key to this in-group identification, and social groups provide a way for a person to understand, define, situate, and place themselves. Social comparison can solidify or alter a group member's understanding of the relative social status of the group itself and the person within the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When an intergroup conflict threatens the legitimacy of a group, those

with large affinity with their group may intend to continue their affiliation. Tajfel and Turner (1979) posited, however, that unsatisfactory social identity caused by an intergroup conflict would also stimulate social creativity. In times of strife, fans may reflect on or change their narratives about their fanship or their team. Here, we posit a research question and two hypotheses:

RQ1: How do OPR outcomes established by fans and non-fans of collegiate sports organizations influence the levels of problem recognition, involvement recognition, and constraint recognition on social issues?

H6: Participants with higher fanship would show more support toward the organization regardless of their response types. There is an effect of fanship on behavioral intention.

H7: There is an interaction effect between the level of fanship and types of publics.

Methods

To answer our research question and examine these hypotheses, we conducted an online survey using a 2 (Fanship: High vs. Low) X 2 (Response type: Proactive vs. Reactive) X 4 (Publics: Active vs. Aroused vs. Aware vs. Inactive) matrix between-subject research design.

We used two different cases of crises among collegiate football teams: Mississippi State University Bulldogs (MSU) and Baylor University Bears (Baylor). To stimulate study participants to think of what happened at MSU or Baylor, we asked them to read an article. For the MSU case, we used an *ESPN* article written by Scarborough (2020). For the Baylor case, we used a *Sports Illustrated* article written by Ellis (2016). Participants selected or were assigned their college fanship, then were compelled to stay on the article screen for at least one minute before proceeding. We also asked participants to recall what they read through a series of attention check questions. If they did not select at least one correct answer, they were withdrawn

from the survey.

Participants

After obtaining IRB approval, we collected nationwide data using the Qualtrics platform's participants pool. Because we used a case in Mississippi and one in Texas, half of the participants were recruited from those states. Among 502 total participants, 118 (23.5%) were from Mississippi and 123 (24.5%) were from Texas. Among national participants, the largest number of participants were recruited from California ($N = 23$, 4.6%). If participants were from or grew up in Mississippi or Texas, or they indicated that they were MSU fans or Baylor fans, they were assigned to that case accordingly. Other participants were randomly assigned to one of the two cases. As a result, 263 participants (52.4%) read the MSU article and 239 participants (47.6%) read the Baylor article.

In terms of gender, 269 participants (53.6%) were females and 230 (45.8%) were males. For ages, the largest number of participants were 25-34 years old ($N = 111$, 22.1%), followed by 65+ years old ($N = 101$, 20.1%), 35-44 years old ($N = 98$, 19.5%), 18-24 years old ($N = 76$, 15.1%), 55-64 years old ($N = 59$, 11.8%), and 45-54 years old ($N = 57$, 11.4%). Among participants, 52 (10.4%) indicated themselves of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin. The largest number of participants identified as White or Caucasian ($N = 367$, 73.1%), followed by Black or African American ($N = 110$, 21.9%), Asian ($N = 17$, 3.4%), and Native American or Alaska Native ($N = 10$, 2.0%). We also asked political preferences, with the largest number of participants identifying as Democrats ($N = 172$, 34.3%), followed by Republicans ($N = 163$, 32.5%), and Independents ($N = 127$, 25.3%).

Sports Spectatorship Identification Scale (SSIS)

SSIS was a scale developed by Wann and Branscombe (1993) from a 7-item measure

along a 7-point Likert scale. Kim et al. (2020) tested usability of the SSIS scale and found that using four items provides enough information to accurately indicate fanship level. Following Kim et al.'s suggestion, we used four items, including "It is important to me that MSU (Baylor) win," and "I see myself as a fan of MSU (Baylor)." Cronbach α for this scale was .95. We categorized respondents into two groups based on the mean score. For the MSU group, the mean SSIS was 4.03 (SD = 1.75). For the Baylor group, the mean SSIS was 3.22 (SD = 1.72). Thus, we categorized 132 (50.2%) participants in the MSU group as the low fanship group and 131 (49.8%) participants in the high fanship group. For the Baylor group, we added 116 (48.5%) participants to the low fanship group and 123 (51.5%) participants to the high fanship group.

Organization-Public Relationships (OPR) Outcomes

To measure OPR outcomes, we adopted questions developed by Hon and Grunig (1999). Trust was measured by 11 items using a 7-point Likert-type scale (Cronbach α = .94). Eight items were used to measure control mutuality (Cronbach α = .85). To measure commitment, we asked 8 questions (Cronbach α = .88), and we also asked 8 questions to measure satisfaction (Cronbach α = .86). Communal relationship was measured by 7 items (Cronbach α = .82), and exchange relationship was measured by 4 items (Cronbach α = .80).

Publics

To segment participants into four publics, we adapted the problem recognition scale, involvement recognition scale, and constraint recognition scale from Lee et al. (2020). To measure problem recognition level (PBL), we asked three questions, including "I think this is a serious social issue," and used a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree). Cronbach α was .85. For involvement recognition level (IVL), we asked four questions, including "I feel closely connected to this issue," and Cronbach α was .89. For constraint

recognition level (CRL), we asked five questions. However, because the reliability of this scale was lower than .70, we only used two items: "People like me can influence the decision-making of MSU (Baylor)," and "People like me can do something about the risk situation of MSU (Baylor)," which showed strong reliability (Cronbach $\alpha = .88$). Then, we reversed the scale for analyses.

To segment publics into four different types, we first grouped participants into low and high PBL, IVL, and CRL groups. Based on mean score, we categorized 220 (43.8%) participants into the low PBL group and 282 (56.2%) participants into the high PBL group. For IVL, we added 254 (50.6%) participants into the low IVL group and 248 (49.4%) participants into the high IVL group. For CRL, 238 (47.4%) participants were categorized as high CRL group and 264 (52.6%) participants were categorized as low CRL group. Then, we followed Chung et al. (2016) to categorize publics (See Figure 1). As a result, we categorized 140 (27.9%) participants as Active publics, 33 (6.6%) participants as Aroused publics, 70 (13.9%) participants as Aware publics, 119 (23.7%) participants as Inactive publics, 72 (14.3%) participants as Aware/Active publics, and 68 (13.5%) participants as Inactive/Aroused publics.

Behavioral Intention

We adopted five questions from Chung et al. (2016). Those questions include: "I oppose / support what MSU (Baylor) has done," and "I intend to donate my money to oppose / support MSU (Baylor)." We used a 7-point bipolar scale (1 = Greatly oppose, 7 = Greatly support), and Cronbach α was .89.

	High IVL	Low IVL
High PBL & Low CRL	Active	Active/Aware
High PBL & High CRL	Active/Aware	Aware
Low PBL & Low CRL	Aroused	Inactive/Aroused
Low PBL & High CRL	Inactive/Aroused	Inactive

Figure 1. Segmentation of Publics, adopted from Chung et al. (2016)

Results

Familiarity with the Issue

We asked participants how familiar they were with the issue using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = Never heard of it, 7 = Extremely familiar with it). Generally, participants were not very familiar with the issues ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 2.04$). Participants were more familiar with the MSU case ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 2.15$) than the Baylor case ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.87$), $t(500) = 3.66$, $p < .001$. Also, participants with higher SSIS levels were more familiar with the MSU case, $r(261) = .28$, $p < .001$, and the Baylor case, $r(237) = .32$, $p < .001$.

OPR Outcomes and STP

Overall, OPR outcomes of the MSU group were higher than the Baylor group, except for exchange relationship. For example, the overall OPR outcome of MSU group was ($M = 4.43$, $SD = .81$), which was higher than the Baylor group ($M = 3.82$, $SD = .83$), $t(500) = 8.32$, $p < .001$. However, for exchange relationship, the Baylor group scored higher ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.14$) than the MSU group ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.20$), $t(500) = -3.57$, $p < .001$.

We also compared male and female participants. Among the MSU group, there was only one statistically significant difference between males and females, on control mutuality. Females showed a higher level of control mutuality ($M = 4.65$, $SD = .96$) than males ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.08$), $t(261) = -2.52$, $p < .05$. For the Baylor case, females showed a lower level of trust ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.22$) than males ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.31$), $t(234) = 3.64$, $p < .001$. Also, females

showed a lower level of control mutuality ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.15$) than males ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.00$), $t(234) = 3.22$, $p < .01$. Lastly, females showed a lower level of satisfaction ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.10$) than males ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.10$), $t(234) = 2.26$, $p < .05$.

To answer the research question and first three hypotheses about what OPR outcomes tell us, we ran hierarchical multiple regression analyses. We tested demographic variables of age, education level, and household income as well as familiarity with the issue as control variables in model 1, fanship (SSIS) as the second predictor in model 2, and OPR outcomes in model 3 to see predictors of PBL, IVL, and CRL. (See Table 1).

For PBL, in the first model, education level was a strong predictor, $\beta = .11$, $t(500) = 2.21$, $p < .05$, and this model explained 1% of variances, which was not statistically significant. SSIS was not a big predictor in model 2; however, when we added OPR outcomes in model 3, it explained 11% of variances, $F(11, 490) = 6.49$, $p < .001$. Among OPR outcomes, commitment was the strongest predictor, $\beta = .37$, $t(500) = 3.72$, $p < .001$. Communal relationship was also a strong predictor, but it negatively affected PBL, $\beta = -.36$, $t(500) = -4.41$, $p < .001$.

When we examined OPR outcomes for the MSU and the Baylor groups separately, SSIS was a large factor in model 2, $\beta = .30$, $t(261) = 4.87$, $p < .001$, and the model explained 8% more, $F \text{ change}(1, 257) = 23.72$, $p < .001$. However, when we added OPR outcomes, SSIS was not a significant factor, but commitment, $\beta = .37$, $t(261) = 2.66$, $p < .01$, and communal relationship, $\beta = -.24$, $t(261) = -2.26$, $p < .05$ became the strong predictors. The model explained 17% of variances, which is 7% more than the second model, $F \text{ change}(6, 251) = 4.04$, $p < .001$. For the Baylor case, along with age, $\beta = .13$, $t(237) = 2.09$, $p < .05$, communal relationship was the only strong predictor, which negatively affected the PBL, $\beta = -.38$, $t(237) = -3.63$, $p < .001$ in model 3. Model 3 explained 19% of variances, $F(11, 227) = 6.00$, $p < .001$. Because mixed

results between commitment and communal relationship were found, H1 was partially supported.

For IVL, SSIS was a strong predictor, as the second model explained 14% more of variances, $F(5, 496) = 45.99, p < .001$. Model 3 with OPR outcomes added 8% more explanation of variances, $F(6, 490) = 9.56, p < .001$. While SSIS was still a strong predictor, $\beta = .28, t(500) = 5.22, p < .001$, commitment, $\beta = .43, t(500) = 4.82, p < .001$, communal relationship, $\beta = -.21, t(500) = -2.92, p < .01$, and exchange relationship, $\beta = .11, t(500) = 2.06, p < .05$, were all stronger predictors of IVL. Interestingly, age was a negative predictor, $\beta = -.10, t(500) = -2.44, p < .05$. Again, communal relationships negatively affected IVL. Therefore, H2 was partially supported.

Lastly, CRL, younger participants felt higher CRL, $\beta = -.14, t(500) = -3.10, p < .01$, and familiarity with the issue was a strong predictor, $\beta = .17, t(500) = 3.71, p < .001$, in the first model. The second model, which explained 16% more of variances, $F \text{ change}(1, 496) = 100.11, p < .001$, showed a strong predictor in SSIS, $\beta = .43, t(500) = 10.01, p < .001$. In model 3, which explained 9% more of variances, $F \text{ change}(6, 490) = 10.12, p < .001$, along with SSIS, $\beta = .19, t(500) = 3.60, p < .001$, commitment, $\beta = .23, t(500) = 2.60, p < .05$, and exchange relationship, $\beta = .14, t(500) = 2.56, p < .05$, were all strong predictors. Therefore, H3 was not supported.

Table 1. *Hierarchical Multiple Regression Results on SPT factors*

Predictors (IV)	PBL		IVL		CRL	
	B	β	B	β	B	β
			Model 1			
Age	.01	.02	-.13	-.15***	-.12	-.14**
Education	.11	.11*	.08	.08	.02	.02
Income	.03	.04	-.08	-.09	-.01	-.01
Familiarity	-.001	-.002	.15	.20***	.13	.17***
R2	.02		.08***		.05***	

			Model 2			
Age	.02	.02	-.10	-.12**	-.09	-.10*
Education	.11	.12*	.10	.10*	.04	.04
Income	.04	.05	-.04	-.04	.04	.04
Familiarity	- .02	-.02	.05	.07	.02	.02
SSIS	.05	.07	.33	.40***	.38	.43***
R2	.01		.22***		.21***	
R ² Δ	.004		.14***		.16***	
			Model 3			
Age	.04	.05	-.08	-.10*	-.07	-.07
Education	.07	.08	.07	.07	.03	.03

Income	.03	.04	-.05	-.05	.02	.02
Familiarity	-.03	-.04	.03	.04	-.01	-.02
SSIS	-.02	-.02	.22	.27***	.17	.19***
Trust	-.20	-.19	-.04	-.03	-.02	-.02
Control Mutuality	-.09	-.07	-.16	-.13	.19	.14
Commitment	.40	.37***	.49	.43***	.28	.23*
Satisfaction	.19	.16	.02	.01	.10	.08
Communal Relationship	-.42	-.36***	-.27	-.21**	-.03	-.02
Exchange Relationship	.05	.04	.14	.11*	.19	.14*
R2	.13***		.30***		.30***	
R ² Δ	.11***		.08***		.09***	

Note. R^2 reports adjusted R^2 . PBL – Problem Recognition Level, IVL – Involvement Recognition Level, CRL – Constraint Recognition Level, SSIS – Sports Spectatorship Identification Scale, Familiarity – familiarity with the issue, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Publics vs. Behavioral Intention

To examine H4 to H6, we conducted three-way ANCOVA tests, controlling age, gender, household income, education level, and political preferences. We excluded aware/active publics (N = 72, 14.3%) and inactive/aroused publics (N = 68, 13.5%) from the analyses to compare only four publics. Table 2 shows group comparisons between the MSU group and the Baylor group as well as the high SSIS group and the low SSIS group. Overall, participants in the MSU

group showed a higher level of behavioral intention ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.47$) than the Baylor group ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.42$), $t(360) = 4.43$, $p < .001$. Also, the high fanship group showed higher levels of support ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.32$) than the low fanship group ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.17$), $t(360) = -12.22$, $p < .001$. Table 3 shows that both publics, $F(3, 340) = 8.29$, $\eta^2 = .07$, $p < .001$, and SSIS, $F(1, 340) = 28.67$, $\eta^2 = .08$, $p < .001$, had the main effects on behavioral intention. Therefore, H4 and H6 are supported. Regarding interactions, Table 3 shows the interaction between publics and types of responses (cases) was statistically significant, $F(3, 340) = 4.41$, $\eta^2 = .04$, $p < .01$. Therefore, H5 is also supported.

Table 2. Comparisons of Behavioral Intention among publics

Fanship	Publics	MSU Group			Baylor Group			t
		n	M	SD	n	M	SD	
Low SSIS	Active	14	4.51	1.48	17	2.80	1.29	3.45**
	Aroused	2	3.80	.28	6	3.87	1.20	-.07
	Aware	18	3.69	1.25	36	2.82	.83	3.05**
	Inactive	55	3.21	1.01	25	3.01	1.06	.82
	Total	89	3.53	1.22	84	2.95	1.05	3.34***
	F		3.93*		2.61			
High SSIS	Active	68	5.61	.86	41	4.83	1.65	3.24**
	Aroused	8	4.68	1.16	17	4.59	1.36	.16
	Aware	8	4.33	1.43	8	3.60	.84	1.24
	Inactive	11	4.07	1.45	28	4.04	.56	.09
	Total	95	5.25	1.16	94	4.45	1.35	4.36***
	F		9.67***		1.60			
Overall	Active	82	5.42	1.06	58	4.24	1.80	4.89***
	Aroused	10	4.50	1.09	23	4.40	1.33	.21
	Aware	26	3.88	1.31	44	2.96	.87	.36***
	Inactive	66	3.36	1.13	53	3.55	.98	-1.02
	Total	184	4.41	1.47	178	3.74	1.42	4.43***
	F		35.03***		5.52***			

Note. One-way ANOVA tests were conducted among publics within groups, Independent sample t-tests were conducted among same type of publics between two cases, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. *The interaction effects among publics, response type, and fandom on behavioral intention*

intentions	df	F	ηp^2
Case	1, 340	9.77**	.03
Publics	3, 340	8.29***	.07
SSIS	1, 340	28.67***	.08
Case X Publics	3, 340	4.41**	.04
Case X SSIS	1, 472	.67	.002
Publics X SSIS	5, 472	2.41	.02
Case X Publics X SSIS	5, 472	.75	.01
R2		.43	

Note. Case – MSU case vs. Baylor case, Publics – Active, Aroused, Aware, Inactive, R^2 reports adjusted R^2 . ηp^2 indicates partial Eta squared. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

More specifically, active publics in the MSU group show the highest level of support ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.06$) among all publics; however, their support level in the Baylor group ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.80$) was lower than aroused publics ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.33$). Also, the behavioral intention level of aware publics in the Baylor group ($M = 2.96$, $SD = .87$) became lower than inactive publics ($M = 3.55$, $SD = .98$).

For H7, we compared interactions of publics and types of responses in both the low SSIS group and the high SSIS group, For the low SSIS group, the interaction was statistically significant, $F(3, 159) = 4.15$, $\eta p^2 = .07$, $p < .01$. More specifically, active publics showed the highest level of support ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.48$) in the MSU group, but active publics in the Baylor group showed the lowest level of support ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.29$). Aware publics in the Baylor group also showed a lower level of support ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.06$) than inactive publics ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.06$). In the high SSIS group, though, active publics still showed the highest level of support ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.65$) in the Baylor group, while the aware publics showed the lowest level of support ($M = 3.60$, $SD = .84$). The interaction effect was not statistically significant.

Table 2 also shows that in the Baylor case, while active publics in the low SSIS group showed the lowest level of support ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.29$), active publics in the high SSIS group showed the highest level of support ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.65$), $F(3, 164) = 2.84$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, $p < .05$. However, in the MSU case, there was no interaction effect between publics and SSIS level. Therefore, H7 was partially supported.

Discussion & Conclusion

There are three conclusions from this research. First, the formation of a useful tool to design future research and understand findings —the Publics Affinity Response Matrix (PARM). This paper examined the OPR outcomes and perceptual differences in public and affinity groups relative to communication type during a social issue crisis within an organization, and proposed PARM for academic and industry use.

Second, the value of applying novel data insights to better understand and potentially predict behavior of dynamic publics. We chose to study college football fans, but our design and results show this method is creatively pragmatic enough for other strategic communications contexts. For example, we wanted to know if a team's relationship(s) with their publics would negatively affect the level of problem recognition during a crisis. We found that communal relationships were indeed a strong *negative* predictor of problem recognition and involvement recognition. This means that people strongly allied with an organization are less likely to recognize problems and involvement with crises or issues. This confirms the findings of Kim and Sung (2016, p. 95), that these deeper relationships make people more supportive in problematized situations. We suggest that, by treating sports fandoms as stakeholders and applying lessons learned from our study to the field of strategic communications, new areas of valid inquiry will open up between and in both fields. Insight comes by considering data in a new

light.

Third, in a word, fanship beats crisis. But fanship can be fickle in reactive situations. In-group identified publics are the most supportive when their organization does the right thing, and will gloss over missteps and reactive strategies. These were the most supportive publics in the MSU group. Large affinity publics also supported Baylor, even when recognizing problems and their high involvement with the issue. This builds on the findings of Kim and Rhee (2011), who studied employee publics similarly to how we have studied fanships and fandoms. Among non-fans, though, active publics were very critical of Baylor and very supportive of MSU. This showcases the power of proactive public relations during a social issue crisis. Some generally supportive publics will vocally change their support of an organization if social issue communications are reactive instead of proactive.

Coombs and Holladay (2018) understood that “increasingly stakeholders want to hold firms accountable for their actions and lack of actions on a variety of issues. This means the time is ripe for more systematic examination of social issues management” (Coombs & Holladay, 2018, pg. 91). Using PARM can help solve for this need. The application of our variables has precedent in Chon (2019)’s work on political crises, and in Ki and Hon’s (2007) study on applying OPR’s link to certain attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. A strong communal relationship with an organization can be helpful during a crisis response. It is paramount, however, to identify aware publics and understand how changing dynamics in a social issue crisis can affect this public’s ability to recognize a problem. Our research shows that these publics will likely become more critical if an organization does not proactively respond to a social issue. Practitioners, analysts, and researchers can use PARM to proactively test or reflexively study responses or potential responses to strategic communications typologies and to

take the temperature of publics in terms of OPR outcomes.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study. We studied college football fandoms instead of other nationally recognized organizations. In addition, some of the segmented groups ended up not having enough participants. Therefore, we cannot fully generalize our findings. Although this could present an issue in application of the data to practitioner knowledge, we think this data set is applicable, especially in a time where organizations are seeking communal relationships and in-group identifications with dynamic and rapidly changing publics.

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**When your university is in the news for the wrong reasons:
Discourse of renewal applied to racist actions by students and retrospective
outlook of campus community**

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Abstract

This case study used textual analysis of organizational messaging, public responses and media coverage to examine crisis communication following racial incidents on a university campus. Discourse of renewal concepts observed included: organizational learning, ethical and value-based communication, prospective vision, and engaged organizational rhetoric with effective leadership. The findings of this case study show the importance of effective, prospective- visioned leadership successfully communicating to publics how the organization is learning and moving forward with efforts to protect minority students and fulfilling diversity, equity and inclusion goals set forth in crisis messaging and mission statements.

Keywords

Crisis communication, Discourse of Renewal, diversity, equity and inclusion, racism, retrospective outlook

From January to March 2019, the University of Oklahoma (OU) was besieged by several racist incidents that sparked protests and campus-wide conversations focused on reform. This case study examined post-crisis discourse when OU administrators, students, faculty, local groups, and mass media addressed the racist incidents. Publics were outraged over the lack of action taken on the part of the university, as well as the lack of direct language addressing the incidents. Meanwhile, student groups led the way in rebuilding and renewal discourse.

This study is important in understanding racial crises on college campuses because, while most universities today have incorporated diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) language into their missions, they are not following this up with action. Thus, racial tensions on university campuses have increased as White and Black students often perceive race relations very differently (Sydell & Nelson, 2000). Studies show perceived differences in: campus cultural climate (Ancis et al., 2000), pressure to conform to stereotypes (Ancis et al., 2000), racial

discrimination (Marcus et al., 2003), White student prejudices (McCormack, 1995; Phenice & Griffore, 1994), White supervisor scrutiny (Harper et al., 2011), expression of subtle racism or microaggressions (Biasco et al., 2001; Harper et al., 2011), equitable treatment on campus (Ancis et al., 2000), attitudes toward diversity efforts (Vaccaro, 2010), and blaming minorities for racial conflict on campus (Cabrera, 2012). In addition, universities often do not publicly respond to racial incidents occurring on a national scale, leaving minority students questioning the DEI values of their institution (Oduro, 2022). The lack of response can be blamed partially on the fact many higher education institutions do not include messaging about hate speech in student conduct codes (Hall, 2019). As noted by Seeger and Ulmer (2002), even if the organization is not the direct cause of the crisis, it still needs to “assist constituencies in making sense of the crisis situation and in framing the anticipated aftermath” (p. 127). Thus, when racist incidents with students, faculty and staff occur, regardless of if they happen on campus, universities have a responsibility to respond as ignoring completely can be viewed as a “form of complacency in the systemic racism that still lingers within universities” (Oduro, 2022).

We suggest the messages used by universities in the aftermath of racial incidents profoundly affect students’ and other publics’ perceptions of the institution. To examine this, our study utilizes discourse of renewal as it focuses on finding growth opportunities in the aftermath of a crisis (Ulmer et al., 2019). There is sparse research that applies the theory to the college setting, with one notable exception being a previous study evaluating leadership responses to “stacked crises” at an institution of higher education (Slagle et al., 2022). Similar to this study, we examined the following discourse of renewal concepts in OU’s responses to racially charged crises: a) organizational learning, b) ethical and value-based communication, c) prospective vision, and d) engaged organizational rhetoric with effective leadership.

Discourse of Renewal

Crisis communication theories have given organizations a framework for image and reputation in the aftermath of a crisis. Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) focuses on reputation management. Its recommendations focus on enduring a crisis with as little damage to an organization's reputation as possible (Coombs, 2015). On the other hand, discourse of renewal changes the outlook by looking at the possibility of opportunities for growth after a crisis (Ulmer et al., 2019). Organizations focusing on renewal look past their pre-crisis image and take a more provisional route in their communication and activities (Ulmer et al., 2007). The approach is grounded in the organization's values and relationship with publics (Seeger & Padgett, 2010). Discourse of renewal has been evaluated in several different contexts, including company and leadership responses to the September 11, 2001 attacks (Seeger et al., 2005; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002), crisis team members' approaches in the aftermath of school shootings (Thompson et al., 2017), actions and changes after an *E. Coli* outbreak led to a child's death (Reierson et al., 2009), and CEO responses to devastating facility fires (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002).

Discourse of renewal facilitates "more inclusive communication processes between organizations and communities" and looks past just the organization's needs in a crisis (Seeger & Padgett, 2010, p. 128). Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2019) identified the presence of four prominent characteristics that can be used as a framework to evaluate an organization's discourse of renewal: 1) organizational growth and learning, 2) values-based response and ethical communication, 3) a prospective vision in the aftermath, and 4) engaged organization rhetoric from effective leadership.

Organizational Learning

A failure or a crisis, in the perspective of renewal of discourse, allows for organizational

learning or unlearning. For renewal to occur, there must be an organizational commitment to correcting the problem to avoid future crises (Ulmer et al., 2019). The commitment reduces public uncertainty and causes publics to place their faith in the organization. An organization should prioritize future learning and preparation that can take place. This perspective aims to avoid similar and future crises by training organizational members with new and updated strategies (Ulmer et al., 2019). Discourse of renewal shifts the attention from the crisis itself to how the organization and community can “reform the failing parts of the organization, thus encouraging renewal and growth” (Reiersen, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2009, p. 116). Renewal also involves comparing an organization’s preparedness by looking at crises in other organizations and learning from those to evaluate inadequacies and bolster their strategies (Ulmer et al., 2019).

Seeger and Padgett (2010) used a comparison to natural fires as an example of how crises can lead to growth, “in natural ecosystems, fires are often seen as processes necessary to remove dead wood, underbrush and old growth, while creating clear and fertilized spaces for new growth” (p. 136). This new growth can include a number of possibilities, including new safety procedures. Ulmer and Sellnow (2002), in their evaluation of organization responses to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, explained how airlines took immediate and corrective action to protect passengers by adding reinforced doors to planes’ cockpits. These changes showed publics the airlines were learning from the crisis and implementing procedures to better protect passengers. This growth, however, must be communicated to publics to ensure they understand how and what types of organizational learning took place (Ulmer et al., 2019).

Ethical and Value-Based Communication

The core values organizations espouse are highlighted during crises and can help organizations instigate ethical and value-based responses. Organizations that do not have an

established mission or core values, or hold unethical or immoral principles that influence their decisions, face more difficult obstacles in the face of a crisis (Ulmer et al., 2019). During the economic downfall in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, publics were inspired by the government, as well as American companies and organizations, through an emphasis on American values like patriotism and independence (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002). By creating a value-based response, focus is taken away from the crisis, and put more on opportunities for renewal (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002).

The renewal process is characterized by reconnecting with the organization's values and relying on those to turn a crisis into a chance for positive change. Organizations known to have strong values and relationships with publics are more likely to experience renewal following a crisis as they can rely on those previously-established values (Ulmer et al., 2019). Renewal also emphasizes a more provisional communication method, rather than strategic. While strategic methods are seen as only focusing on the image of the organization, provisional communication emphasizes the aspects of renewal explained here, like organizational learning (Ulmer et al., 2019).

Prospective vs. Retrospective Vision

While other crisis communication theories focus on mitigating the amount of responsibility the organization should admit to, discourse of renewal does not look for blame, but examines how the organization should grow from the situation (Ulmer et al., 2019). Rather than looking to the past, known as a retrospective outlook, organizations should focus on the future thereby taking a prospective vision of the crisis. This includes a focus on what the organization hopes to accomplish and learn in the aftermath of the crisis, rather than focusing on mitigating blame and liability (Seeger & Padgett, 2010).

Seeger and Ulmer (2002) evaluated the unique crisis responses of two CEOs, Milt Cole and Aaron Feuerstein, who both lost their facilities due to fires. While it is common for organizations in crisis to keep commitments vague, both CEOs immediately took prospective outlooks in their declarations of rebuilding. As noted by Seeger and Ulmer (2002), “these immediate public commitments essentially upstaged the more typical crisis story of blame and denial” (p. 134). In their study of postcrisis responses to school shootings, Thompson et al. (2017) explained schools show prospective vision when offering counseling services for students in the wake of a school shooting, thereby making necessary tools available for key publics in the aftermath (Thompson et al., 2017). Rather than look at history, evaluate fault, and place blame, this type of focus on the future and long term well-being of students represents a prospective vision and is essential for renewal.

Engaged Organizational Rhetoric from Effective Leadership

An organization that uses effective rhetoric in the face of a crisis can inspire publics and emphasize restoration post-crisis. This includes organization leaders telling a story of the crisis that allows publics to understand the crisis and its meaning through the perspective of the organization (Ulmer et al., 2019). Effective and visible leadership is important to the success of this rhetoric as noted by Ulmer et al. (2019), “organizational leaders who hope to inspire others to imitate and embrace their views of crisis as an opportunity establish themselves as models of optimism and commitment” (p. 190). CEO of financial services company Cantor Fitzgerald, Howard Lutnick, accomplished this in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks (Seeger et al., 2005). Through media interviews, Fitzgerald made emotional commitments to take care of the families of the 700 employees the company lost. Although Lutnick’s reputation was not overwhelmingly positive pre-crisis, the future and human-focused rhetoric he used led to support

from the public (Seeger et al., 2005).

Ulmer et al. (2019) posited building a positive reputation for the organization through previous ethical practices can establish a “reservoir of goodwill” (p. 115). In Seeger and Ulmer’s (2002) analysis of CEOs Cole and Feuerstein, successful renewal in the aftermath of the crises was credited to positive relationships the leaders had made with publics pre-crisis. The values of the leaders trickled into the crisis responses of the organizations. Reiersen et al. (2009) noted a similar finding in their case study of Odwalla’s apple juice *E. coli* outbreak when leadership of the company fell back on its core ethical values and shut down production, recalled the products, and were transparent in their communication with publics.

Racial Incidents on the OU Campus

On January 18, 2019, an OU cheerleader posted a tweet calling out two female students in blackface. The tweet contained a video from Snapchat of two females (one filming and one in blackface). The visible student wore black paint on her face and could be heard saying the N-word. In a storm of responses, the following entities addressed the video: James Gallogly (OU President), Jane Irungu (Office of University Community), OU Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion office, the OU TriDelta sorority (of which one of the females was a member), OU Panhellenic Association, OU Office of the Student President, and the OU Black Student Association (BSA).

The first statement on January 18 came from the OU Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion office, which called the video “inappropriate and derogatory” and said they were “following up with the students” (Allen, 2019a). Gallogly and Irungu’s (2019) statement on January 18 used similar terminology, addressed the students’ freedom of expression, and said the students offered to apologize. The Panhellenic Association said they “condemn the racist, repulsive comments on the Snapchat video” (Thomas, 2019). TriDelta president, London Moore, called the actions

“insensitive and offensive” (Moore, 2019a). In what was probably the most damning statement, the OU Office of the Student President used the terms “racist video,” “disgusting language,” “shameful,” and “bigoted remarks” (Gibbs Jr., 2019a). The OU BSA’s (2019a) statement demanded changes to the OU Code of Conduct to address zero-tolerance for hate speech, inclusion of required social and cultural competency curriculum, increase in multicultural hires across all levels, and increased financial and other support for their programs. In addition, it called attention to a racial incident with a different OU fraternity (Sigma Alpha Epsilon or SAE) that occurred in 2015 and stated “we are still waiting for the university to adequately address the demands on the list of grievances presented” (BSA, 2019a). Various other publics also responded to the video. OU football players called for “consequences” and “more than an apology” (McCourry, 2019). TriDelta issued a follow-up statement calling the actions “racist, offensive, and disgraceful” while announcing the female student in the video was removed from the sorority (Moore, 2019b). OU Unheard alluded to a larger systematic issue, stating “since the new administration many marginalized communities feel [the] OU campus is even less inclusive” (Miller, 2019b).

Both female students in the video issued apologies on January 19. In the apologies, the female students called their actions “insensitive and irresponsible” and a “moment of ignorance” (Hazelrigg, 2019b). By January 21, both students had withdrawn from the university. In a statement on January 21, Gallogly (2019a) stated “legal boundaries” existed preventing the University from acting but the students would not return to campus, noting “This type of behavior is not welcome here and is condemned in the strongest terms by me and by our University.” Many called the apologies and withdrawal insufficient, asserting that disciplinary actions must be implemented to prevent future incidents (Douglas, 2019). The Intersarsity Black

Campus Ministries organized an MLK prayer walk and Karlos Hill (Chair of African and African American Studies) wrote an editorial applauding former OU President David Boren's "swift and decisive response to SAE" -- where the fraternity was removed from campus immediately (Hill, 2019). Boren's immediate response in 2015 stated, "Those who have misused their free speech in such a reprehensible way, I have a message for you. You are disgraceful. You have violated all that we stand for. You should not have the privilege of calling yourselves, 'Sooners'" (McPherson, 2019). The same piece also noted that Boren held a press conference the same day of the SAE incident while Gallogly held a conference three days after the incident came to light (McPherson, 2019).

A Rally to Stop Racism was held on January 22 where things became heated in a back-and-forth with Gallogly (Hutchinson, 2019a) as students and faculty described "systematic and institutional racism on campus" (Handie, 2019). Several different issues took the spotlight away from the incident: 1) a third student who was present during the filming of the video came forward (Allen, 2019b), 2) former Dean of International Studies, Suzette Grillot, approached President Gallogly with a "resign now" sign and said, "I'm not gonna be as kind as the people that came before me and say in a year from now we're going to ask for your resignation. I'm going to fucking ask for it now" (Miller, 2019c) and 3) Gallogly, at the rally, expressed that "he believed there were students who hold hate towards him and want him to fail" (Handie, 2019).

The following day, a second racist incident occurred when an unidentified male walked around campus wearing blackface (Allen, 2019c). Responses from the OU Office of the Student President and BSA were swift in calling for continued efforts in "combatting racism and all forms of discrimination to truly form a safe environment for all of us" (Gibbs Jr., 2019b) and asking students to continue using the #BetterTogether hashtag and sharing racial incident posts

with the University (BSA, 2019b). In the following days a Better Together event with hundreds of students marched across campus to Gallogly's office, the OU BSA announced it was creating the BSA Emergency Response Team (BERT) to respond to racial incidents on campus (Hazelrigg, 2019c), and multicultural and international organizations organized a "time to talk" event to be held January 26. The Better Together march ended when Gallogly was not at his office to hear the student demands. His lack of presence on campus during the crisis led many to question the president's leadership (Miller, 2019d). An expert on race relations on college campuses, Eddie R. Cole, was interviewed about Gallogly's absence and stated, "even if completely unaware of how to handle student protests over racial incidents, being present is the most central move of a good president. It signals that, at a minimum, students' grievances are worth your time" (Miller, 2019d).

In response to both blackface incidents and student organization appeals, Gallogly (2019b) released a strategic plan memo on January 25 which outlined progress on an updated diversity plan, relocation of the Title IX office, updates to administrative search processes, reduced fees for underrepresented populations, and efforts to meet with student groups affected by racial incidents. Gallogly (2019b) also detailed the hiring of "a man of color who has committed his career to supporting students in higher education, particularly students marginalized by social, economic and racial circumstances." After backlash, an email was sent stating the previous memo had "inappropriately referenced" the race of Dr. David Surratt. It went on to say, "This error was made in an attempt to share ongoing plans that include new voices joining the University to represent students, but it does not excuse the error" (Allen, 2019d).

By January 26, media coverage of the racial incidents on the campus and the university's responses had reached a tipping point. State, regional, national and international media covered

the events. Saturday Night Live's Weekend Update mentioned the incidents as OU's Blackface Scandal (Bonnet, 2019). In response, a citizens coalition which had worked with OU students in regard to the 2015 SAE incident, sent a letter on January 27 to Gallogly and the OU Board of Regents offering assistance in "resolving cultural, racial and harassment patterns" that were "not handled appropriately" (Rains, 2019). By January 29, the OU Faculty Senate Executive Committee released a memo suggesting Gallogly "move quickly and boldly" in "combating structural inequality at OU" (Huthinson, 2019c). The following day, Gallogly met with the OU Board of Regents to discuss the incidents. At the meeting, Regent Frank Keating stated OU has "made enormous progress since the days of Jim Crow," (Miller, 2019e) which drew criticism online from students and alumni who suggested this was a poor yardstick to measure progress by. Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt also joined the conversation suggesting a recently vacated seat on the OU Board of Regents should be filled with a minority (Associated Press, 2019).

The following week, a third racist incident occurred when a video of a former student with a stuffed duck hanging by a noose using a racial slur was posted to Instagram (Hazelrigg, 2019d; Allen, 2019e). OU's BSA again responded with #BetterTogether and a statement saying, "For decades American cultura has cultivated an environment that tolerates and confirms this behavior by refusing to blatantly denounce it" (Miller, 2019g). Expert Eddie Cole commented that "subsequent racist incidents can happen when the first incident is not specifically called out as racist -- like in the first statement put out by the OU administration that called the video 'inappropriate and derogatory'" (Miller, 2019f). The university, in response to this incident, did state the video was "racist" and "deplorable" (Miller, 2019g).

On March 5, Gallogly (2019c) sent a memo outlining the first phase of a plan regarding racism at OU. He outlined several steps the university was taking, noting the work had already

started before the incidents. This plan included the following diversity and inclusion goals: 1) “Cultivate an inclusive university climate,” 2) “Improve recruitment, hiring and retention of faculty and staff from historically underrepresented groups in support of the Affirmative Action Plan,” 3) “Improve recruitment and retention of graduate and undergraduate students from historically underrepresented groups,” 4) “Create an enhanced learning environment based on diversity and inclusion,” and 5) “Strengthen institutional shared infrastructure to achieve diversity goals” (Gallogly, 2019c).

A fourth racist incident took place on March 7, when conversations containing “racist, Islamophobic, misogynistic, and violence-centered comments” from the OU College Republicans GroupMe were released to the public (Allen, 2019e). Gallogly’s response to this fourth incident was to state the comments were protected by free speech. He went on to state that university administration would contact the College Republicans and “emphasize the impacts such harmful language has on valued members of our community and to reiterate that the sentiments expressed are inconsistent with our University values” (Allen, 2019e).

Method

We utilized a case-study method in examining the details of the racial incidents on campus, the university’s public responses, student organization’s public responses, and media coverage of the events. Source materials for data analysis included the university mission statement, released university position statements, press releases and emails, student organization position statements, and local, regional, and national media coverage of the event. These were taken from the date the incident was first brought to the attention of the public via a tweet (January 18, 2019) through what is considered the renewal stage (March 8, 2019). Once all data was collected, researchers used a thematic coding scheme to analyze all documents. This

involved reading each artifact several times, finding relevant themes, and verifying relevant themes with the other researchers.

Findings

Organizational Learning

While former OU President David Boren made changes in the aftermath of the 2015 incident, including mandatory diversity training for all incoming students, and the creation of the Office of University Community (Hazelrigg, 2019a), the incidents here show gaps in learning, as seen in comments and responses from various publics. “Since the new administration many marginalized communities feel OU campus is even less inclusive” (Unheard, 2019). OU Unheard, a student organization formed after the 2015 incident (Hill, 2019), stated other racist acts on the OU campus have gone unaddressed, suggesting they are “symptoms of a large system” (Unheard, 2019).

On January 25, Gallogly (2019b) proposed a list of actions focused on how OU planned to learn and grow from the incidents. This included plans to review the Student Code of Conduct, meet with multicultural group leaders, hold monthly Campus Conversations for students, review university diversity plans, put greater emphasis on the university affirmative action plan, and reduce tuition and fees for underrepresented students. In response, the OU Faculty Senate Executive Committee sent a memo outlining their “joint responsibility on the part of the faculty for positive changes as well as a commitment to acting on that responsibility” (Hutchinson, 2019c).

Other messages from campus organizations also included learning statements. TriDelta’s statement said, “We, as a chapter, are committed to working alongside the Panhellenic and OU community to continue an open and honest dialogue and make strides towards change” (Moore,

2019b). The Panhellenic Association stated it was “committed to taking steps to build bridges to ensure a welcoming environment for everyone and continue to drive our members to be better” (Miller, 2019a). Additional student organizations released statements, pushing for organizational learning from the incident. The OU BSA (2019a) immediately responded with a list of proposed steps for organizational change and learning. OU Unheard (2019) asked OU to take action to make the campus more inclusive and to review previous reports of racist acts brought to light.

Ethical and Value-Based Communication

As posited in discourse of renewal, in the face of crises organizations resort to their framework of ethics and values for their responses (Ulmer et al., 2019). To understand the organization’s values, it is important first to examine the mission statement for the University of Oklahoma. The statement reads, “The mission of the University of Oklahoma is to provide the best possible educational experience for our students through excellence in teaching, research and creative activity, and service to the state and society.” The goals of the university point toward values in “diverse cultural experiences” for students (University of Oklahoma, n.d.). The mission and goals were updated in an email sent campus-wide. The email stated, “Our mission is to enhance OU’s commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, recognize and respect the essential worth of each individual and value differences amongst groups.”

These values were seen in the first response by the Office of University Community, which included the statement, “Our goal is to be a welcoming and inclusive community and we condemn any behavior whose goal is to diminish or belittle other members of the community” (Allen, 2019a). A following statement by Gallogly and Irungu (2019) stated “diversity and inclusivity are and will continue to be the hallmarks of our great university.” The OU football coach at the time, Lincoln Riley, also cited values in his response to the incident after several

athletes on campus took part in the dialogue surrounding the issue. Riley supported the athletes speaking out against the incident, stating, “I’m proud of them. That’s part of coming to college, is learning to speak for yourself and learning to weigh in on values...That’s a part of becoming an American citizen” (Stoia, 2019).

Prospective Vision

Discourse of renewal also looks to the future (Ulmer et al., 2019). A number of statements from within the OU community painted a picture of the future of the university. Student President, Adrian Gibbs Jr. (2019a), stated the community would continue to work to create “a safe environment for all of us.” When another blackface incident occurred on campus a week after the first, Gibbs Jr. (2019b) released another statement, looking again at the future by saying, “we must remember to be proactive, yet peaceful, forceful, yet calm and respectful...[continue] being the light in this dark time in OU history.”

The statement by Gallogly and Irungu (2019) suggested combined efforts on the campus, noting “together let’s each take the personal responsibility to create a welcoming and inclusive university.” Additionally, Gallogly stated “we [OU] must be purposeful to create authentic measures to address and abolish racist experiences for our students, faculty and staff” (Keith, 2019). In a later statement, Gallogly (2019c) focused on the future vision of OU, hoping for a “more diverse, welcoming and inclusive University culture for all faculty, staff and student populations.” Thus, the leadership of OU framed a prospective vision of inclusivity and safety for all students on campus in their messaging.

Engaged Organizational Rhetoric with Effective Leadership

Discourse of renewal requires that communication from the organization must provide necessary information to publics in the aftermath of a crisis to ensure they are knowledgeable of

how it is moving forward (Seeger et al., 2005). In the case of OU, stakeholder publics included current students, prospective students, alumni, faculty, and staff at the university. While the first response from OU Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion condemned the actions of the students, it did not explicitly state the act was racist (Allen, 2019a). Gallogly and Irungu's (2019) statement included similar language and stated, "we expect all of our students, staff and faculty to respect the diversity and cultural backgrounds of others." The statement mentioned "freedom of expression" but provided no information regarding a resolution of the problem other than the students were being followed up with (Allen, 2019a.). Gallogly and Irungu (2019) also stated the students had offered to apologize. This focus on student apologies stands in stark contrast to former OU President David Boren's response to the 2015 incident that used stronger language and led to the removal of the fraternity on campus (McPherson, 2019). In comparison, Gallogly did not adequately denounce the racist behaviors.

The framing and messages used by the University leaders in the immediate aftermath of the crisis were questioned publicly by stakeholders. Student Joshua Davis, a member of Intervarsity Black Campus Ministries, said in an interview with OU Daily that "setting a precedent for an apology being enough to forgive such actions will only lead to more incidents in the future, as other students won't fear disciplinary action" (Douglas, 2019). Student Jamelia Reed wrote in a letter to the student newspaper, "To be black and attend the University of Oklahoma is to pay an institution to slap you in the face because they cannot properly handle a racial incident...to watch your university constantly stumble in making statements against racism" (Branch, 2019). A column by Karlos Hill, Chair of OU's African and African American Studies Department, also supported more decisive action by calling for the creation of a zero-tolerance policy in the OU Student Code of Conduct (Hill, 2019).

Gallogly made additional messaging missteps in the days after the crisis that added difficulty to the success of his rhetoric. At the Rally to Stop Racism on January 22, several speakers addressed what they considered a lukewarm response to the incident by Gallogly, with many in attendance indicating he had a year to make changes. Gallogly took the floor and focused the conversation on how he was being treated rather than the incident (Handie, 2019), stating, “So many of you doubt me. So many of you do not want me to be successful. So many of you have some hatred in your heart” (Hutchinson, 2019b).

Discussion

In this study we examined the following discourse of renewal concepts: organizational learning, ethical and value-based communication, prospective vision, and engaged organizational rhetoric with effective leadership. Like Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (2019) we posited post-crisis communications should look to the future and take advantage of opportunities for growth. Our findings suggest that overall OU leadership was ineffective in successfully engaging with publics most affected by the racist incidents. From the beginning, affected publics viewed the incidents as opportunities for necessary changes to the core values espoused by the university. This aligns with Ulmer et al. (2007; 2019) who posited organizations should use post-crisis communications to envision a positive growth for the organization. It is clear through messages from the leaders and campus student organizations that they shared a strong vision of improved DEI efforts on campus. There was a disconnect, however, between the values espoused and the rhetoric used by leadership in the aftermath of the crisis. Public perception of the formal leader of the university declined as missteps made in discussing DEI issues on campus delayed the recovery process and prolonged rebuilding. These mistakes include not immediately identifying the video as “racist,” being unavailable for meetings with students during a protest, and focusing on how he has been

treated. In addition, Gallogly came across as opportunistic and tokenized a hiring by noting he had hired “a man of color” as the Vice President of Student Affairs.

It is clear the leadership did not accomplish a clear plan of how the organization should learn from the crisis as specific and actionable change was missing in the initial statements. Ulmer et al. (2019) explain that renewal discourse requires these actions be communicated to publics to ensure they are knowledgeable of how learning is taking place. When evaluating the initial statement from Gallogly and Irungu it is easy to see how it avoids strong and concrete commitments to growth, which stands contrary to case studies of successful renewal from CEOs like Cole and Feuerstein who both made bold commitments to rebuild facilities after fires (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002). Gallogly and Irungu (2019) focused primarily on the timing of the incident, close to MLK day, and the University’s commitment to DEI efforts, without giving specific suggestions on what would be changed on campus.

It should be noted that Gallogly had been in his position for less than a year, serving from July 1, 2018 to May 12, 2019 (Stanish, 2019; Murphy, 2019; Jaschik, 2019). Boren, the previous president, had served from 1994-2018 (24 years) and built considerable social capital during his presidency. One faculty member suggested, “the difference between the unity Boren inspired and the criticism Gallogly is now receiving is that Boren did many popular things in the eyes of students...Gallogly didn’t have the goodwill that Boren did” (Miller, 2019d). As identified in discourse of renewal, Gallogly had not built goodwill prior to the crisis which contributed to the failure of renewal in the aftermath (Ulmer et al., 2019).

Universities must balance a number of factors in the aftermath of racially charged incidents. A statement by Gallogly on January 21 supported this, suggesting there were “legal boundaries” regarding how OU could proceed in terms of consequences for the students (Keith,

2019). As noted in previous research, some organizations were able to overcome “attacking” questions of blame and responsibility as statements positive statement regarding ways the organization was moving forward overshadowed attacks (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002). In order to benefit from renewal discourse, it is essential for university communication specialists to be clear in their messaging with publics, especially in their description of how the organization is learning. It is also important to continue updating publics to ensure they viewed as following through on these commitments (Slagle et al., 2022). Additionally, if the potential actions described in the responses do not align with the future actions by the administration and learning does not take place, leaders produce a lower amount of goodwill with publics that become detrimental in future crises (Ulmer et al., 2019). As evidenced by the Lutnick/Cantor Fitzgerald case, when the company’s commitments came into questions, the CEO solidified his promises and carried out the declarations made previously, positively influencing perceptions of his leadership (Seeger et al., 2005). As OU experienced additional racial incidents, the motives of leadership were called into question due to failure to act as promised.

Through this evaluation of the university’s, student publics, and mass media responses to the racial incidents which transpired, it is clear to see that more can be done in how organizations respond to racial incidents. As seen in many of the responses from students and organizations, key components of discourse of renewal, including a prospective vision and organization learning, are essential in helping publics move forward. Many publics in this case demanded a stronger emphasis on building a safer and more inclusive environment, which suggests an optimistic future characteristic of discourse of renewal (Ulmer et al., 2019). Thus, we agree with previous research in this area that application of discourse of renewal concepts such as those noted in this study would create more productive and positive discourse in the aftermath of racial

incidents on college campuses (Slagle et al., 2022). We also posit that higher education institutions must take initiative to respond in the face of local and national racial incidents that impact their students to clear up any assumption of complacency (Oduro, 2022). Future research should continue to evaluate and build on the theoretical principles of discourse of renewal in the context of higher education.

Overall, our findings suggest the racial incidents were seen by students as opportunities for necessary changes to the core values espoused by the university. This aligns with Ulmer, Seeger, and Sellnow (2007) who posited organizations should use post-crisis communications to do what is best for the whole community -- moving the organization forward and finding opportunities the organization has post-crisis. While some areas of discourse of renewal were present in the aftermath, OU's leadership failed in communicating strong commitments to a future vision and organizational learning. Based on this our findings we suggest universities examine their DEI messaging and activities to find out if they are actually doing what they say they are. If they are addressing DEI appropriately, communicate that to publics. When facing racial crises on campus, we suggest using university leaders with established goodwill, who will focus on a prospective vision to communicate with publics during racial incidents, and ensure DEI efforts are actually taking place. Organization messaging and actions should take advantage of learning opportunities inherent in the crisis, and directly tie back to the organization's DEI mission and values. The findings showed the importance of aligning all aspects of a university's crisis response - including promises, goals, and actions - to ensure publics believe in the future of the university and its leadership.

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Teaching Posters

Teaching Students Why Public Relations Works Through the Application of Six-Segment Strategy Wheel

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Abstract

In 1998 Sparks and Conwell asked the question, “does practice or theory prepare practitioners?” They argue that knowledge of public relations and communication theory is important for senior management. Sparks and Conwell also pointed out that knowledge of hands-on application of public relations practices is a requirement for students who would successfully enter and function in various roles within the field. Most public relations educators today would agree; they would argue for, and try to find ways to teach theory with a healthy dose of practical application. Through a case study, Barry (2005) reported that workshops and internships were the most suitable way of teaching public relations. In essence, an understanding of theory teaches future professionals what the field is about. Hands-on application teaches them how to do the job. However, it is crucial for instructors to begin to emphasize why public relations works, beyond just saying it.

This abstract presents a sample lesson that public relations educators can utilize to help students understand why the profession works, from the perspective of how people respond to media messages based on their information needs. The reasoning behind how media messages are influential is hinged on the two-step flow theory of communication.

Theoretical Framework

The two-step flow theory of communication that was first proposed by Katz (1957) and Lazarsfeld (1955) posits that the decisions people make are influenced by social factors. These factors may include opinion leaders, mass media, background and group identification (Carr, &

Hayes, 2014). In order to teach why PR works, based on influence from social factors, students can get introduced to an activity designed around a Six-Segment Strategy Wheel.

Taylor's (1999) Six-Segment Strategy Wheel (SSSW) was created as a model for understanding how consumer's decision-making is influenced by their individual needs. The SSSW applies itself to two-step flow theory through agreement that individuals have needs and those needs are socially situated. This model is studied extensively, and supported by many scholars (see for example, Daniel, Crawford-Jackson, & Westerman, 2018; Ahn, Wu, & Taylor, 2013; Golan, & Zaidner, 2008).

The model has six pie-like segments in a circle. Three of the segments contain individual needs that are classified as transmission- indicating that facts, details, and accurate accounts are needed to meet those needs. The other three needs fall in the ritual-category meaning they should be addressed with glamourization and messages that appeal to the senses. To elaborate further, the three segments of the transmission view include: 1. Rational: Taylor (1999) explains this as the assumption that people are deliberative and logical 2. Acute: This need comes up when purchase decisions are made based on time and information constraints 3. Routine: These are responses that appear to be routine reactions and are delivered with seemingly less deliberation.

The segments that fall under the ritual view of the model include: 1. Ego: Taylor (1999) explains ego as decisions that are emotionally important to a person and allow him/her to make statements about themselves 2. Social: Responses are social when people are concerned about their groups rather than themselves, and 3. Sensory: In Taylor's model, sensory needs are those that are positively appealing to the senses.

Assignment

Two educators utilized the SSSW activity in classes at two different institutions. Students

were often reminded that transmission needs more facts and details (e.g. need: where should I invest?) and ritual needs required messages that appealed to the senses (e.g. coffee samples to promote a new brand of coffee). Instructor 1 introduced students to the model and presented them with images of billboards observable by roadsides in the community. Then students were asked the following questions: Based on the SSSW, 1. What need(s) is the message on the billboard catering to? 2. If you designed the billboard would you have gone for a similar approach, why or why not?

Instructor 2 carried out the same activity. However, the media content students had to analyze included ten tweets and ten captions from Twitter and Instagram accounts of Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Results

Both instructors agreed that the activity was beneficial to student's understanding of how message strategy works. In Instructor 1's class, one of the billboards read "Tonight's the night I am going to ask her to marry me" in big font; and in smaller font, "don't drink impaired, don't kill a dream". Most students agreed that it fell on the ritual side of the strategy wheel because it appealed to people's emotion. Some students argued that they would take a similar approach while others felt drunk driving is a rational need and should be presented with facts. Ultimately, the student's responses demonstrated an understanding of why the framing of a message matters.

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Using Telestrations to Show How Messages Get Lost and How a Message Map Can Help Overcome Communication Barriers

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Abstract

This teaching idea introduces students to the Shannon-Weaver Model of Communication using the drawing game Telestrations. This Public Relations Campaigns class exercise shows students how communication barriers can influence message understanding from sender to receiver and is designed for them to see how easy it is for a simple message to be miscomprehended, the need for audience feedback on messages, and how creating a message map can help preserve message meaning.

Keywords:

Shannon-Weaver Model, public relations campaigns, message map, communication barriers, message comprehension

Rationale for the Assignment

This is a fun and innovative teaching idea that introduces students to the Shannon-Weaver Model of Communication using the drawing game Telestrations (cross between the telephone game and Pictionary). This exercise shows students how communication barriers can influence message understanding from sender to receiver. During a “feedback” stage, students go back through what each person thought the message was, how it changed, and what communication barrier existed that made it change. After feedback, the final step is for students to create a message map that would have helped overcome these barriers and preserve the message meaning. In the Public Relations Campaigns class, it’s important to help students learn how to tailor their messages for public comprehension. Public relations students often design messages in course projects that get “lost” in transmission. Sometimes they use the wrong language, symbols, spokesperson, etc., or their messages contain too many elements. This exercise is designed for them to see how easy it is for a simple message to be miscomprehended, the need for audience feedback on messages, and how creating a message map can help preserve message meaning.

Student Learning Goals

1. Students examine the communication process and see how messages can be miscomprehended.
2. Students learn to identify possible communication barriers.
3. Students see how feedback (i.e., research) prior to implementation can help improve the message before it is transmitted to the public.
4. Students see how a message map can help them identify what items need to be present in messages to aid in receiver comprehension.

Connection to Public Relations Theory and/or Practice

Students examine the sender, encoder, channel(s), decoder, receiver components of the Shannon-Weaver Model as well as barriers to communication. As noted in public relations literature, many communicators think it is the public’s fault when messages are not understood.

This exercise helps students identify what steps they can take as senders to improve decoding and understanding. In addition, the ability to use feedback is a step that highlights the need for message testing before implementation.

Assessment of Student Learning

1. Students will present how their message changed from person to person.
2. Students will identify and find ways to overcome communication barriers.
3. Students will use feedback stage to examine new strategies for message presentation, and create a message map outlining those new strategies.
4. Students will reflect on process and get input from peers.
5. As a group, we will discuss how this can be carried out for their final campaigns.

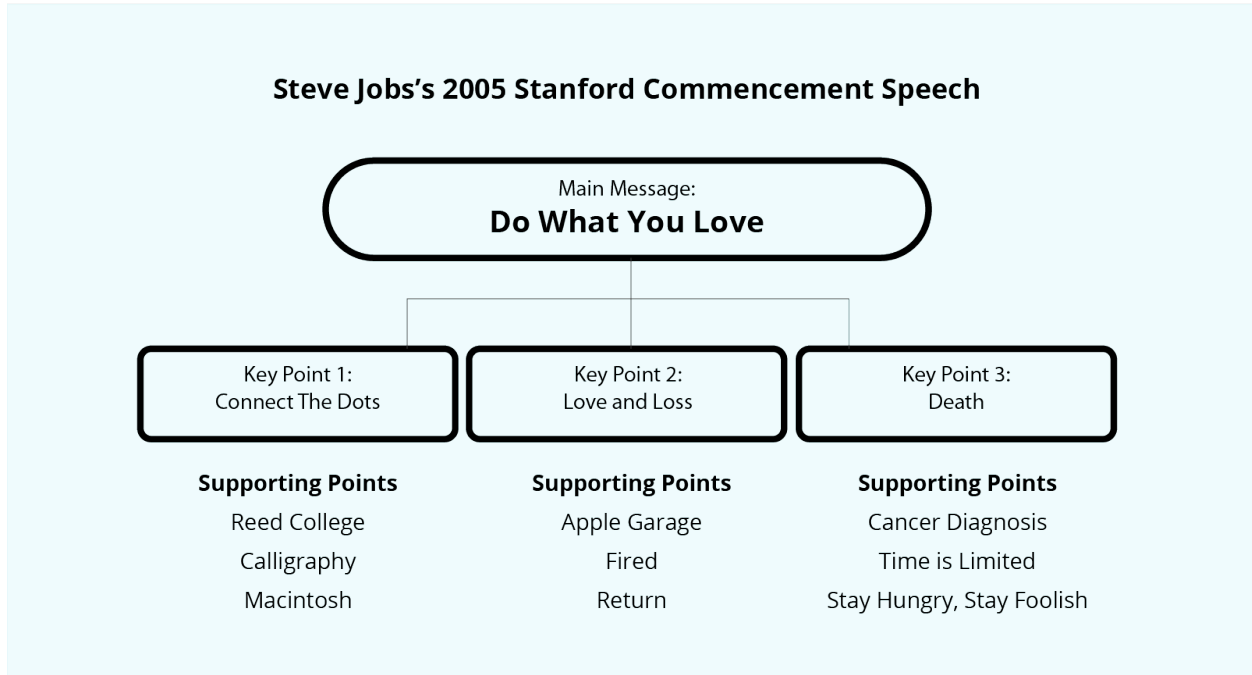
Assignment and Necessary Instruction and Examples

1. Teams should identify who will be the information source (i.e., sender) for each team. Using the Telestrations cards and die, choose the message that is to be sent. Write that message on the cover of your team's Telestrations tablet (i.e., the channel). The sender then has 60 seconds to draw out the message. The tablet then gets passed to the next team member (i.e., the transmitter) who will have 60 seconds to write what message they think the drawing was. This goes on (writing and drawing) until the final team member (i.e., the receiver) "decodes" the message.
2. The next stage is feedback. Go back through what each team member drew and thought the message was. Now identify which barriers to communication (see list below) hindered message comprehension (hint: there will likely be several at each point).
3. Now work in your teams to create a message map (there is a basic one attached here with just words) for how you could more effectively communicate the message. Identify at least three ways you could have communicated (images, language, keywords, #hashtags, emojis, gifs, etc.) that would have helped maintain the message. Be specific.
4. Finally, present what your group went through from start (Telestrations phrase, drawing, interpretations, identification of barriers) to finish (message map). Be prepared at this point for questions and input from your fellow students.

Barriers to Communication (Lumen Learning, 2019)

- Technical (transmission)
- Semantic (precision of language, different interpretations)
- Efficacy-related (behaviors influenced by message)
- Environmental (physical disruptions)
- Physiological-impairment (e.g., deafness or blindness)
- Syntactical (grammar, spelling, punctuation)
- Organizational (poorly structured messages)
- Cultural (stereotypes, communication conventions, intercultural competence)
- Psychological (attitudes, emotions)
- Diversity (gender, race, religion, cultural background, age, sexual orientation shaping communication styles and perspectives)

Message Map Example



(Image from *Harness the Power of Three*, 2017)

Layered Lessons in Earned Media for Deeper Learning

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Overview: The author developed an in-depth, layered approach to teaching media relations over five weeks in an upper-level, skills-based class for strategic communication majors.

After learning about news values and working with the media, students devised a newsworthy way for a client to leverage a national holiday or recognition day to get earned media. For the first assignment, they picked a holiday or recognition day, chose a “mock” client and developed their media strategies, which included identifying target publics and the five W’s (who, what, when, how and why). For example, one student chose National Dog Day and had his mock client, Pedigree, donate thousands of cans of dog food to several Humane Society locations, with the CEO personally delivering some. For the next four assignments, students refined the media strategies for their clients as they learned to write a press release and fact sheet about their event. The students learned to use MuckRack, a news media/influencer database, to build a target media list for their stories. They wrote a pitch e-mail addressed to the media contact whom they believed would be an ideal journalist or influencer/blogger to cover their story.

Rationale: Employers have rated writing and creativity as two of the most significant skills for aspiring public relations professionals (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018; Krishna et al, 2020). Some students think creativity means design skills and proficiency with Canva or Photoshop. They need to understand that the ability to think creatively is even more important for those who want to advance in the public relations profession. The media strategy assignment pushes students to stretch their creative thinking. Ensuring that the writing assignments (press release, fact sheet and pitch letter) are based on the original media strategy requires the students to wrestle with it for several weeks. News values are an abstract concept that some students struggle to grasp. This focused, layered approach to teaching media relations helps students to begin thinking like a reporter while working on their writing skills. Moreover, it requires students to plan the details for a fictitious event for a mock client because they have to write about it in a journalistic style.

Student Learning Goals: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of earned media, including media relations, and the role of journalists and online influencers. Demonstrate the ability to think creatively and write clear messages and finished products that are well-organized and use correct grammar, punctuation, spelling, and AP Style.

Assessment of Student Learning: To be provided. Assignments are in progress, and this is the first semester for this layered approach.

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Developing a Media Strategy

Overview & Introduction

PR professionals are expected to help create awareness and generate publicity for their employer or client. Part of that directive is to ensure that any publicity received is done so carefully so it achieves organizational goals and objectives.

So – what is newsworthy? Or – what makes news? As Wilcox and Reber note in Chapter 3 – PR professionals should understand the basic news values of (1) timeliness, (2) prominence, (3) proximity, (4) significance, (5) unusualness, (6) human interest, (7) conflict, and (8) newness.

One great way to generate publicity and buzz is by bridging an organization’s initiatives or highlights around a national holiday or celebratory day/week/month such as “National Chocolate Day.” This satisfies the news value of “timeliness,” and perhaps also unusualness or significance.

The best way to identify these opportunities is by monitoring current events and situations that directly impact the organization while keeping in mind some ways to create news:

- special events,
- contests,
- polls and surveys,
- top 10 lists,
- product demonstrations,
- stunts,
- rallies and protests,
- personal appearances

For this assignment, you will:

- Create a media relations strategy about a national holiday, recognition day/week/month with ideas for how you can push this content out to journalists and bloggers.

Format

- Template provided
- Pages: 2-3 pages max

Task

1. Download the template and save a copy for yourself
2. Identify a national holiday or recognition day/week/month you want to use as the basis for your promotion. Check out the [National Today Calendar \(Links to an external site.\)](#) or the [National Day Calendar \(Links to an external site.\)](#) for ideas (e.g. National Cheese Pizza Day or National Self-Care Awareness Month). OR you may

- choose a national holiday or major social-cause or protest event. (#BLM, March for Life, etc.)
3. Based on the topic you identified, select one organization or brand as your “client” for the assignment (e.g. Nike, REI, Black Lives Matter, Seahawks, or local shop or restaurant)
 4. Follow guidelines and answer the questions outlined in the template to create your media relations strategy.

Valuable Sources:

- [Elements of a successful media relations strategy \(Links to an external site.\)](#) by Eliza Bianco at Overit
- Chapter 3 in your e-textbook
- Google News (a great tool for finding news about past news coverage about holidays, recognition days/weeks/months.

Example

- Celebratory Day: National Egg Day is June 3
- Website: <https://nationaltoday.com/national-egg-day/> (Links to an external site.)
- Hashtag: #NationalEggDay
- Jimmy Dean: A brand that leveraged this celebratory Day to get earned media

"We think it's a pretty 'egg'citing program and cannot wait to help people celebrate this perfect partnership of sausage and eggs," said Christopher Olson, Jimmy Dean's brand manager.

- Jimmy Dean create a sausage give-away contest using the Snapchat app, and pushed out the news using Cision/PR Newswire, a press release distribution service. In doing this, the brand sought to get the news media and influencers to publicize the give-away. Check it out:
- <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/celebrate-national-egg-day-with-free-sausage-301302421.html> (Links to an external site.)

Was the media relations strategy successful?

At least one influencer (blogger called Guilty Eats) published the news:

<https://guiltyeats.com/2020/06/03/celebrating-national-egg-day/> (Links to an external site.)

Questions to determine a media relations strategy:

- What is the story about? Jimmy Dean Brand's sausage give-away contest to celebrate #NationalEggDay
- Who is it relevant to? Traditional consumers who like sausage and eggs (this isn't going to appeal to vegans)
- What is happening? Consumers encouraged to use a unique lens on Snapchat app to send photo of a receipt for the sausage purchase
- When and where does it take place? Contest went live June 3 at midnight ET with up to 10,000 offers available for redemption

- Why is it newsworthy? What are the news values in this story that make it more likely that Jimmy Dean will get earned media? Timeliness. Maybe unusualness.
- What mediums (publications, bloggers, influencers) might Jimmy Dean reach out to for cross-promotion?
 - Suggested partners based on the #NationalEggDay hashtag include Food Network, EatRight, Just Egg, chefs like Emeril Lagasse, and the American Egg Board
- What other conversations on social media already support #NationalEggDay? Are the positive or negative?
 - #NationalEggDay as a topic is generally positive and light by nature. From a search of the hashtag in Twitter, it mostly yields posts featuring different egg images or meal creations and promotion of organizations that have some sort of connection to egg and farm products. On the flip side are posts about reminders of animal cruelty with an emphasis on how hens can be treated at disreputable farms.

Overview: Building a Media List

Background: Muck Rack is a platform and database for news media contacts, as well as news monitoring, and it is used by professionals in public relations at agencies and companies (in addition to other platforms like Cision and Meltwater). Our class has free access to Muck Rack this semester. You will be shown how to use the platform in class.

Assignment: Create a media list containing 15 media contacts (as designated below). The list should focus on both media outlets and reporters that would cover the news related to your media strategy about the recognition day/week/month

Review: Review or re-watch the Muck Rack training/tutorial on how to build a media list if needed. We will also watch the training video in class.

Media List Building Tools:

- Muck Rack
- Google searches
- Specific news outlets
- Social media

You should start with Muck Rack and start your list within the platform. You can use the other tools like Google searches or specific news sites to get ideas for reporters or outlets to look up in Muck Rack. Do your best to confirm that the contacts on your list are actively covering your industry. Don't just rely on the software to develop your list – THINK about the media outlets that should be on your list.

Your media list will be created as an Excel file (see the sample media lists on Canvas). Once you have your contacts saved within Muck Rack, you can export them to an Excel file. Then spend some time making your list look nice in Excel.

Media List Assignment Requirements:

1. 15 Contacts

- Local Newspapers (2)
- Online News - websites (2)
- Television (2) – different TV stations
- Other (9): blogs, podcasts, magazines, radio stations, your choice

2. Formatted in Excel

For each media outlet, you need to provide the following information (sorted in this order across your spreadsheet):

- Media Outlet
- Reporter/Editor Name (First name, Last name)
- Job Title
- Twitter Handle or Any Social Media Handle (just include at least one)
- Description/Notes – about this contact, the person on the list. Any details and insights that will be helpful when you pitch your story to the individual.

Note, normally you would have email and phone number on the list (not necessarily social handles) but it is not required for this assignment (b/c Muck Rack doesn't provide that detail for our student usage license).

Think about the visual look and feel of the list – make it reflect your brand. Make sure the list is organized and visually attractive.

Overview: Writing a Press Release

Draft a press release based on the media strategy you developed for a recognition day/week/month for a client. You will have a lot of creative freedom with the content in your press release because your news is fictitious -- you've made it up. Your press release must sound factual but you are making up the facts for purpose of this exercise. Remember that you'll need to first sharpen your thinking about the news values inherent in your story. Is it timely (yes)? Will it have great impact? Does it involve a prominent person? Does it pull at the heart strings?

TASK:

- Write **one press release** about an upcoming event or the story behind your media strategy,
- Include a visual with your press release. This could be a photo (must be original or royalty-free), an infographic or any other type of visual that will enhance the story in your press release.
- Include one social media post and hashtag to accompany your press release on the social platform of your choice. This should be in a separate document.
- Use **third-person voice** and a straightforward, factual, journalist writing style. This is NOT fluffy, promotional writing

- Include at least one quote from someone associated with your event. It is ok to make up the quote.
- Ensure your headline is keyword rich for SEO
- Follow AP Style and use perfect spelling, grammar, and punctuation
- Format: Font: Times or Times New Roman
- Length: 1 ½ pages, double-spaced.

GUIDELINES

- Identify and research the topic for your media kit -- the story behind your media strategy or a significant upcoming event on the WSU campus or in the Palouse region. Use the news values you've learned about to determine the angle and topic for your media kit. The core news values most journalists agree on are: timeliness, impact, prominence, proximity, conflict and human interest.
- Using the template as your guide, write a press release that includes these elements:
 - Your name and contact information at the top as the “Media Contact.” This should be above the headline.
 - A compelling, attention-getting, SEO rich headline (subhead optional). Lure the reader in!
 - Dateline (city, state, today’s date). See template.
 - At least one memorable quote that you will attribute to someone associated with the event. You will probably have to make up the quote. You will need to include the person’s full name and job role after the first sentence of the quote. For examples, please look at the press release samples on the PR Newswire website.
 - Boilerplate. This is the paragraph at the bottom of the press release that describes the organization sponsoring your event. You should be able to find such a description on the organization's website. If it's not there, then do your best to write it. It's OK to use the organization's wording verbatim.
 - End the press release with the #### symbols. Again, refer to the template.

IMPORTANT: Please look at the press releases on the PR Newswire website for additional guidance on formatting, attributing quotes, and other considerations.

1. Include a cover sheet with your name, the event you are promoting, the news value(s) for your story.
2. Upload both the press release and separate document with the social media post and hashtag.
3. Turn it in on Canvas

Overview: Writing a Fact Sheet

For this assignment, you will develop a fact sheet to accompany your press release (your previous assignment).

The fact sheet provides the essential facts to support your press release. This can be the facts about an organization, program, sponsored event, issue, venue, VIP. Use your news judgment to determine the focus. Refer to the lecture about fact sheets for more guidance.

Requirements

- Focus on one topic; should be narrow, specific and in-depth
- Organizational name should be prominent
- Verifiable facts only
- Include answers to the 5Ws and H – the who, what, where, when how and why. You don't need to use these words for the headers or sub-heads -- just make sure the information is included
- Be a quick-read. No lengthy, detailed blocks of text.
- At least one page, double-spaced (or 1.5 spacing). No more than two pages

- Bulleted format or sub-heads
- Headline should be specific to your topic (ex. “Free Meals for Children,” “Planned Parenthood’s New Location.” Not "Fact Sheet.")
- A.P. Style, perfect grammar, spelling, punctuation
- Third-person voice; objective tone (no “I,” “we,” “ours”)

Follow these five steps:

1. Identity your purpose and audience
2. Identify your topic
3. Collect information from many sources
4. Outline the fact sheet
5. For your own notes, try writing a summary statement for the entire fact sheet -- this will keep you on track as you develop it

Overview: Pitching the News Media

For this assignment, you will act as a media relations specialist whose job includes pitching stories to the news media on behalf of a client or employer. Your success in many public relations jobs depends upon your ability to pitch stories and persuade news outlets or influential bloggers to write about these stories. Remember, this is earned media. Your efforts are meant to "earn" the visibility that your client desires.

Develop a pitch that is based on your press release and media strategy surrounding the recognition day on behalf of a client. Identify a real journalist in MuckRack who covers stories related to your topic. You will address your pitch to this individual.

Read these how-to guides and insights from Spin Sucks:

[Pitching Tips from Journalists \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

[Five Tips for Crafting a Successful Media Pitch \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Planning your media pitch:

As you prepare to write your pitch, think through the following:

- What’s the story?

- What makes your story newsworthy? Why should the news outlet's readers (or viewers) care? (Does your story pass the "so-what" test?)
- What core news values are at play (timeliness, prominence, proximity, impact, human interest, etc.)?
- What's the call to action for the reporter (what do you want them to do)?
- Are there supporting points/trends to include?
- Which news outlet is ideal for your story, and which reporter or blogger? Why? Who is your client trying to reach and influence? Does the client's target audience read/view this news outlet? If not, then it is not the best choice.

TASK

1. Use the Pitching the News Media template (see below) and answer all of the questions. Questions are: 1) news value(s) in your story; 2) news outlet and journalist or blogger you will pitch; 3) rationale for the news outlet and specific journalist or blogger; 4) when you will pitch the story and when you want the story to appear. (If you are pitching an event, you should do this well in advance to give the news outlet adequate time to plan event coverage.)
2. Write a pitch email using the suggested format in the template. It should be about five paragraphs long. Address it to the reporter you are pitching. Be warm and personable and get to the point.
3. Be persuasive! Convince the reporter to cover your story by using sound news judgment, clear writing and a compelling argument for why the news outlet's readers/viewers will be interested.

Developing a Corporate Social Advocacy Course During Unprecedented Times Assignment

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Rationale

By developing a new public relations elective course, this assignment offers educators a guide to teaching students about the concept of corporate social advocacy (CSA) within public relations to help fill a knowledge gap. As companies are increasingly engaging in controversial sociopolitical issues (CSA), the role of public relations is evolving away from the traditional role of business in society. Therefore, it is essential for young public relations students planning to enter the profession or pursue research in the field to learn about the emergent role of public relations and CSA. By sharing a reduced syllabus, including scholarly and industry articles, educators may choose to incorporate certain content into their preexisting public relations courses or help design a new course for their department.

Student Learning Goals

By the end of this course, students will:

- Learn about how corporate America engages in sociopolitical issues.
- Understand and describe the role of public relations professionals today.
- Establish a professional network of experts who are leading and defining the field.
- Analyze and improve various CSA communication and CEO messages by thinking critically, creatively, and independently.
- Develop the skills needed to identify and approach various internal and external stakeholders when engaging in CSA initiatives.
- Understand and apply a framework for determining if, when, and how to take stances on controversial sociopolitical issues.

Connection to PR Theory or Practice

This course syllabus and reference list of academic and industry articles offer a direct connection to both public relations theory and practice. This elective course bridges the gap between academic scholarship and theory and the public relations industry. Students applied PR theory to real-world cases of corporate social advocacy (CSA) in addition to forming professional connections with leading communications professionals to bring practical insights and approaches to their individual case studies.

Evidence of student learning outcomes or assessment of student learning

This elective course was initially offered in the fall of 2020 and again in the following summer, 2021 after receiving positive student evaluations and department feedback. Students expressed how they were exposed to a relatively new concept (CSA) and the emergent role of public relations, which better prepared them for their next steps in academics or industry. Nearly all students discussed how they were unfamiliar with the role public relations now play in corporate engagement in divisive and politicized social issues, traditionally avoided by companies. Students also developed new relationships with top communications professionals, which will aid their future career goals. By the end of the semester, students were able to apply public relations concepts and theories to a case study relating to an example of CSA.

SYLLABUS (REDUCED)
PUR 4932: Special Study
Corporate Social Advocacy (3 credits)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In the age of consumer activism, there is a growing shift in societal expectations from government to business to incite social change by taking public stances on some of the most important social issues facing society today. Today, corporations are increasingly responding to stakeholder calls to action, posing new challenges for public relations professionals learning to navigate the complexities surrounding various social and political issues. This course focuses on the role of public relations and the emergent concept of corporate social advocacy (CSA) – when companies and/or their CEOs engage in controversial social-political issues.

Throughout this course, we will explore how communicators strategically manage controversial sociopolitical issues in a heightened political climate. Specifically, we will examine examples of CSA on diverse social issues and distinguish the concept from other tools commonly used in public relations (e.g., CSR, CSV, and corporate purpose). Students will learn emerging insights about CSA and CEO activism, the risks and rewards resulting from companies choosing to speak out or remain silent on sociopolitical issues, and the impact of social issue stances on different stakeholder groups. Students will also hear from top communications professionals who will be attending classes as guest speakers on their approaches to engaging in hot-button social and political issues during unprecedented times.

INCLUSION

I deeply value a learning environment that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives and experiences, and honors and celebrates your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.) Please share any ways I can help enable a more inclusive virtual classroom experience for you.

COURSE EVALUATION

The evaluation of coursework will be based on the student's performance in four major areas, each of which constitutes a proportion of the final grade. These include weekly assignments and active participation in individual and group activities and quizzes/assignments, one individual analysis of a CSA case, one group experiential learning project, and one final group case study and presentation. The area and allocations for each are as follows:

Assignments and Active Participation (25%): Throughout this course, participation in a variety of activities and exercises is expected. Although attendance is not graded separately, active participation in each class is mandatory and graded. Students will be expected to participate in various interactive exercises and to be fully engaged – with live video always activated – unless cleared in advance with the professor. This will not only count toward your grade but will also provide you with experience working in teams as is typical in the profession. In-class activities must be turned in prior to the end of class to be eligible for full class credit. If you are missing, you are responsible for getting the assignment from one of your peers or me, and you will have until the next class to submit for a maximum of ½

credit. Requirements for make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies.

Mini Individual Case Study (25%): Halfway through the semester, you will submit a mini version of a case study focusing on one example of CSA using a company that is not already selected for your group case study and must be approved in advance by the professor. Through individual work, you will demonstrate your critical thinking and writing skills apart from the group. Details will be distributed separately at the beginning of the semester.

Industry Group Project (25%): Over the semester, you will work in teams to inform the class about an assigned industry and any related corporate social advocacy efforts. Once a week, teams will present one specific example of CSA related to their designated industry. You will be graded based on the frequency of your updates and on the degree to which you present well-reasoned information about your industry related to CSA. Details and team assignments will be distributed separately at the beginning of the semester.

Final Group Case Study (25%): One of the best ways to learn about CSA is by studying what other corporations have done. This assignment requires you to critically analyze a company's CSA initiatives by creating and presenting a case study in a team format. For the final assessment, student teams will identify one company engaged in a controversial social-political issue (that must be approved in advance by the professor) and analyze its stance and actions related to that issue, followed by a team Zoom presentation on the case. Details and team assignments will be distributed separately at the beginning of the semester.

The grading scale for the course is as follows:

A 92-100%	C 72-77%
A- 90-91%	C- 70-71%
B+ 88-89%	D+ 68-69%
B 82-87%	D 62-67%
B- 80-81%	D- 60-61%
C+ 78-79%	E below 60%

Course Schedule and Readings (Summer B Semester)

Week	Date	Topics & Deadlines	Readings & Other Resources
Week 1	June 28 – July 2	<p style="text-align: center;">Course Overview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to CSA • Edelman Trust Barometer • CSA v CSR v CSV • Consumer activism • Group assignments in class 	<p>Required:</p> <p>- Dodd, M. D., & Supa, D. W. (2014). Conceptualizing and measuring “corporate social advocacy” communication: Examining the impact on corporate financial performance. <i>Public Relations Journal</i>, 8(3), 2-23.</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign up for PRWeek, PProvoke, & IPR Research Letter in class (free) 	<p>- In 2019 businesses must drive social change: consumers demand it (PRWeek, 2019)</p> <p>- MLB's decision to drop Atlanta highlights the economic power companies can wield over lawmakers – when they choose to (The Conversation, 2021)</p> <p>- Battle of the wallets: The changing landscape of consumer activism (Weber Shandwick, 2018)</p> <p>- Corporate America's Evolution on L.G.B.T. Rights (The New Yorker, 2015)</p> <p>Recommended:</p> <p>- Dodd, M. (2018). Globalization, pluralization, and erosion: The impact of shifting societal expectations for advocacy and public good. <i>The Journal of Public Interest Communications</i>, 2(2), 221-221.</p>
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Week 2	July 5 – 9	<p>Commitment to all Stakeholders, Not Just Shareholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate purpose • The Fortune Most Admired Companies • Corporate Equality Index • Business Roundtable <p>(Guest Speaker)</p>	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Business Imperative for Social Justice Today (Porter Novelli Purpose Tracker, 2020) • Call it “Purpose Plus” (Korn Ferry, 2020) • Shareholder Value Is No Longer Everything, Top C.E.O.s Say (NYTimes, 2019) • HBR: How Do Consumers Feel When Companies Get Political? (2020) <p>Recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tsai, W. H. S., & Men, L. R. (2017). Social CEOs: The effects of CEOs' communication styles and parasocial interaction on social networking sites.
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			<p><i>New Media & Society</i>, 19(11), 1848-1867.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Men, R., & Tsai, W. H. S. (2016) Public engagement with CEOs on social media: Motivations and relational outcomes. <i>Public Relations Review</i>, 42(5) 932-942.
Week 3	July 12 – 16	<p>The New Role of CEOs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO activism Coalition building <p>(Guest Speaker)</p> <p>*Mini Individual CSA Case Study Due*</p>	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HBR: Starbucks’ “Race Together” Campaign and the Upside of CEO Activism (2015) HBR: What CEO Activism Looks Like in the Trump Era (Leslie Gaines-Ross, 2017) HBR: The New CEO Activists (Chatterji & Toffel, 2017) The Dawn of CEO Activism (Weber Shandwick & KRC Research, 2016)
			<p>- 3 Takeaways From Patagonia's 'Time to Vote' Campaign- The famously political company's advice for encouraging employees to vote (Inc., 2020)</p>
Week 4	July 19 – 23	<p>Risks & Rewards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cost of staying silent Woke-washing <p>(Guest Speaker)</p>	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delta and Coca-Cola Reverse Course on Georgia Voting Law, Stating ‘Crystal Clear’ Opposition (NYTimes, 2021) In N.R.A. Fight, Delta Finds There Is No Neutral Ground (NYTimes, 2018) The Complexity of Brands Taking a Stand at This Time (PRNews, 2020)

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nike's Colin Kaepernick ad campaign gets more yeas than nays (The Washington Post, 2018) • Black Lives Matter: Do companies really support the cause? (BBC, 2020) • Silence is NOT an Option (Ben & Jerry's, 2020) • HBR: "Woke-Washing" Your Company Won't Cut It (Dowell & Jackson, 2020)
Week 5	July 26 – 30	The Power of Activist Consumers - Boycotts & buycotts (Guest Speaker)	Required: -People are destroying their Nike shoes and socks to protest Nike's Colin Kaepernick ad campaign (Business Insider, 2018) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why 'buycotts' could overtake boycotts among consumer activists (The Washington Post, 2018) • More Than 1,000 Companies Boycotted Facebook. Did It Work? (NYTimes, 2020) • The Dark Side of Brand Boycotts (Forbes, 2020) • Endres & Panagopoulos. (2017). Boycotts, buycotts, and political consumerism in America. <i>Research & Politics</i>, 4(4), 2053168017738632.
Week 6	Aug. 2 – 6	Final Group Case Study Presentations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer evaluations • Final Case Study Due 	

Quantitative Content Analysis of Persuasive Messages in Media: Equipping Students to Succeed in Digital Public Relations and Content Marketing

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Description of Teaching Idea

Rationale for Assignment

Practicing public relations in the digital age requires many important new skills, and content marketing is undoubtedly one such skill. Content marketing involves good storytelling so that organizations develop interesting, engaging and valuable media content, such as narrative stories, videos, photos, memes, blogs, statistics or infographics, to attract and interact with publics (Kelleher, 2021). The idea of content marketing, as well as brand journalism, is to create content that will “inform, entertain, and educate consumers about a product or a brand by emphasizing storytelling instead of making a promotional pitch” (Wilcox, Cameron, & Reber, 2015, p. 414). The growth of digital media impels organizations to publish and distribute their own content fastly and constantly; hence, equipping PR practitioners with strong writing and storytelling skills has become more important than ever. This assignment is designed to help students improve their skills.

This assignment titled *Persuasion Case Study Research Paper* is a major assignment in the *Persuasion Theory and Practice* course – a course required for all communication majors, including public relations students, in the Communication program. This assignment incorporates two common challenges that students face, which I have observed during my teaching and advising in the strategic marketing communication field over the years. The first challenge pertains to deeply understanding and using theories. Generally, students understand definitions of individual concepts of a theory. However, they have three difficulties: (a) not understanding a theory as a compound of interrelated concepts; (b) not knowing how to apply theories correctly to real-world PR practices; and (c) not differentiating between theories. For instance, a theory about persuasive message content was wrongfully used by a student to explain audience’s responses to the content; and a theory about the attitudes of the public was wrongfully used by another student to explain the persuader’s strategies. The second challenge pertains to quantitative reasoning ability and numerical literacy. Paulos (1988) defined innumeracy as “an inability to deal comfortably with the fundamental notions of number and chance” (p. 3).

Persuasion provides one of the most important theoretical foundations for public relations, and empirical investigation is the defining feature of persuasion approach. Wilcox et al. (2015) asserted that “the dominant view of public relations, in fact, is one of persuasive communication actions performed on behalf of clients” (p. 232) and that “no public relations professional can succeed without mastering the art of persuasion” (p. 233). According to Perloff (2021), “contemporary scholars approach persuasion from a social science point of view” (p. 60), and “from a historical perspective, the distinctive element of the persuasion approach that began in the mid-twentieth century and continues today is its empirical foundation” (p. 59). In sum, persuasion theories and quantitative research are built into this assignment with the goal of preparing students to become effective storytellers and content marketers when practicing PR in the digital age.

Assignment Overview

This assignment requires students to find a persuasion theory that interests them from the textbook and apply it in a real-world persuasive communication context. This can be an iterative process, in which students start with a phenomenon and search for an appropriate theory or select a theory and fit it into a phenomenon. The goal of this assignment is for students to understand their chosen theory, become acquainted with the quantitative research process, inspect potential applications of the theory, and be familiar with research studies related to the theory. Students need to base their analysis upon scholarly literature and quantitative content analysis of at least five mass-mediated messages (data points) to help them make their case. The purpose of this investigation is to suggest a direction to better understand and contemplate the case. Examples of topics include public relations campaigns, advertising campaigns, brand marketing, persuasion in social movements, persuasion in business communication, political debates, famous persuasive speeches from present or past and any use of media (paid, earned, shared, and owned) for persuasion.

Student Learning Goals

- Critical thinking competency: Critically evaluate various persuasion theories and models and apply them to real-world situations
- Quantitative reasoning competency: Perform quantitative content analysis, generate statistics, and justify use of the theory as appropriate for better understanding the situation based on data analysis results
- Diversity competency: Understand and support justice, equity, diversity and inclusion efforts in public relations

Connection to Public Relations Theory and Practice

This assignment connects to many important theories that are useful for PR practitioners, including balance theory, social judgment theory, attitude accessibility theory, functional theories of attitude, the reasoned action approach, accessibility theory, inoculation theory, Elaboration Likelihood Model, one-sided versus two-sided messages, Extended Parallel Process Model, cognitive dissonance theory, diffusion theory and the knowledge gap hypothesis. The assignment is especially applicable to writing and distributing public relations messages in various online media contexts. Additionally, students will produce a writing sample that can demonstrate their quantitative competency for their employment portfolios.

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Assessment is done using a set of grading criteria. A sample rubric is attached to this document.

Assignment Details

Assignment Instructions

Students complete this assignment through the following steps: (1) Find a notable example of persuasion in an area of communication that seems interesting; (2) describe the case, including the issue, persuaders, persuadees, key messages and effects or potential effects; (3) analyze the persuasive situation by applying a theoretical model discussed in this course; (4)

conduct a quantitative content analysis of media content about the case; (5) justify use of the model as appropriate to the situation based on data analysis results and explain whether the persuasion was effective and why/why not; and (6) suggest scholarly conclusions about the overall persuasion effort. Students use APA style for this assignment, which includes a title page, an abstract, introduction, literature review, research questions/hypotheses, method, results, discussion/conclusion and references.

Assignment Examples

Cal State East Bay has an ethnically diverse student population: 16.3% White, 8.9% African American, 35% Hispanic, 22.8% Asian, 0.1% Native American, 1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 7.3% international, 4.7% multiracial in the fall of 2021 (California State University, East Bay, n.d.). Thus, many students choose to study cases pertaining to diversity. Depending on the chosen theory and case, students may quantitatively analyze online media content, such as commercials, public service announcements, videos on the campaign websites, news reports, social media posts, viewers' comments on YouTube videos, visual images, speeches, corporate websites, TED talks, influential blogs, and the like. Some students analyze a specific social marketing campaign, social movement, political issue, commercial campaign or public information campaign, whereas others investigate a specific category of product or service across different organizations or brands. Examples are as follows: Nike's Dream Crazy ad campaign, the Lean In initiative, Truth anti-tobacco campaign, the #MeToo Movement, the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, Wildfire Prevention Campaign-Smokey Bear, Wear A Mask campaign, the Black Lives Matter movement, Always #LikeAGirl campaign and the Meth Project's Meth: Not Even Once campaign. I will make a poster that will contain images of extracts from excellent student work (e.g., essays, tables, photos) to demonstrate the scope of student achievement in the completion of this assignment.

Sample Grading Rubric

Persuasion Case Study Research

Paper Name _____

Category	Points Earned/ Points Possible
Students will do the following:	
Content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates the value or contribution of the study • Demonstrates logical reasoning • Fits the purpose of this assignment overall • Includes a thesis statement • Applies a persuasion theory to a significant persuasive situation • Cites at least four legitimate, high-quality sources • Uses statistics to explain key findings for research questions/hypotheses • Connects the theory with the data analysis results • Suggests scholarly conclusions about the overall persuasion effort 	_____/30
Research Method <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounds conceptualization and operationalization of variables thoroughly in theories • Demonstrates quality of the sample • Uses a coding scheme (a measurement instrument) • Demonstrates rigor in data coding and analysis 	_____/25
Paper Format <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes the nine components of a quantitative research paper (a title page, an abstract, introduction, literature review, research questions/hypotheses, method, results, discussion/conclusion and references) • Uses APA style guide; places particular emphasis on in-text citations, reference pages, line spacing, quotations, and conventions of page enumeration 	_____/15
Writing Style <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization • Grammar • Mechanics (capitalization, punctuation, spelling) 	_____/10
Oral Presentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes an 8-minute brief oral presentation (use PowerPoint slides) on the assigned date 	_____/20
TOTAL	_____/100

References

- California State University, East Bay. (n.d.). *Representing 58+ ethnicities at East Bay*. <https://www.csueastbay.edu/ir/files/docs/ethnicity-groups.pdf>
- Kelleher, T. (2021). *Public relations* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Paulos, J. A. (1988). *Innumeracy: Mathematical illiteracy and its consequences*. Hill and Wang.
- Perloff, R. M. (2021). *The dynamics of persuasion: Communication and attitudes in the 21st century* (7th ed.). Taylor & Francis.
- Wilcox, D. L., Cameron, G. T., & Reber, B. H. (2015). *Public relations: Strategies and tactics* (11th ed.). Pearson.

Ten years later: Revisiting A capstone client—How to promote the ‘best museum’ that doesn’t exist yet?

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DESCRIPTION:

In 2012, a Graduate Public Communication Class worked with the National Museum of the American People Coalition to help promote a museum that does not exist. The idea of this museum came from the former Communications’ Director of the Holocaust Museum. Sam Eskenazi was walking home one day overlooking the Washington Mall and thought it would be a great idea to have another museum. Thus, the idea came. In 2012, graduate students worked with Eskenazi to help get the word out about the Museum. Ten years later, the Museum is still a dream, but closer to a reality. In 2022, a team of PR Portfolio Students worked with Eskenazi to continue promoting the Museum. How was the project the same, how was it different, and what was the impact?

THEN: 2012

Graduate students in this class, Public Communication Practicum, worked with a coalition called the National Museum of the American People (www.nmap2015.com) in the spring of 2012. Sam Eskenazi, the former Director of Public Information for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, approached a faculty member about having students work on outreach for a museum that does not yet exist. Eskenazi believed that there should be a museum in our nation’s capital that welcomes and honors all nationalities and ethnicities. Eskenazi reached out to Congressman Jim Moran and thirteen other cosponsors in the hope that a “bipartisan” study on the creation of such a museum” would occur...and make the museum a reality. The goal is that the museum would be built in the later part of 2015.

NOW: 2022

A team of six students in the undergraduate PR Portfolio/Campaigns class had the opportunity to work with Eskenazi again. Needless to say, because of the political climate, and the challenges in our country, the goal for the museum to be built by 2015, did not happen. Also, Eskenazi does not have a staff. He is working on this on his own with support of volunteers and occasional interns. The hope is that this Museum will be surrounded by other museums and will tell the stories “related to immigration and migration in the United States.”

The Museum will tell how immigrants became Americans, and what they contributed and how they transformed our nation. **Objective:** Support communication efforts for Sam Eskenazi, the museum project director, to encourage President Biden to establish a Bipartisan Presidential Commission to study the feasibility of the museum.

RATIONALE FOR ASSIGNMENT:

The PR Portfolio class is also a community-based learning class. These CB classes are very important and the criteria is to help students understand what it is like to have community partners. These partners can be global, national, and local. The rationale for the class is to always work with a nonprofit or organization that does extraordinary work promoting a critical issue or an organization in need of support to help their community. At the time of this class, the Afghanistan Refugees were coming into the country following the US withdrawal. And prior to

this, the world was seeing more families separated because of the former government’s policies. This Museum is to tell the story of so many immigrants-- from so **many countries who came to the United States to seek a new future. It will also include the new immigrants and their stories.**

Student Learning Goals

(Syllabus states:)

- o Develop your writing skills and help you master the basic PR techniques
- o Help you think more creatively and strategically—by working for a client
- o Improve your understanding of the 8 STEPS in the PR Plan Process
- o Further improve your Portfolio to show to prospective employers by producing samples
- o Provide the opportunity for you to collaborate and work as a “team player” and understand how to contribute your talents/ skills
- o Help you learn how to structure YOUR OWN TIME and accomplish weekly goals
- o And as part of our community-based designation, **reflect** and analyze what you have learned, how you have helped the organization, what strategy and direction will you provide them once the assignment is over

Note: Part of the community-based learning class is to help students reflect when the semester slowly ends and they showcase their work. This reflection is crucial because it allows the student to understand the impact they had on their community-partner, what they have given, but at the same time, understand how important their work and contributions are and making a difference. Often times a student, at the end of the semester, will send an email stating how this project/class was one of the most impactful of their college career.

Connection to PR Theory or Practice

Public Information Model

🔗 Purpose:	Spread Information
🔗 Communications:	1-Way, Complete Truth IS Important
🔗 Model:	Source ——— Receiver
🔗 Research:	Little
🔗 Example:	
🔗 Used Today:	Governments, Business and Non-Profits

For this campaign, the goal is to get the President to establish a Commission. So, the Public Information Model is the best means for the campaign.

Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes/Assessment of Student Learning

(Syllabus states:)

- o Define the relationship between you and your teammates and the goals you have accomplished

- Examine various aspects of our community—involving diversity, philanthropy, military service, civic duty, and volunteerism
- Understand all the theories you have learned in your classes and fully grasp how they apply to this actual client
- Synthesize all the elements of strategic communication and understand their impact in a campaign

From this project: Students were able to help Sam Eskenazi continue his dream of a Museum by reaching influencers, holding a virtual event (towards the end of the pandemic) with prominent educators, historians, and Eskenazi to discuss immigration, migration, and the challenges and how important it is to tell these stories. Students also had a social media campaign, but this time they had Instagram as well as LinkedIn. They were also able to help Eskenazi find interns to continue the work they did as a team. The team also helped re-design the website, the blog, and helped get the word out in various local publications. This continued visibility, noted Eskenazi, will help his message and mission as he works to get support on the Hill, and eventually, the President to appoint a commission.

EVALUATION

THEN: 2012

The National Museum of the American People was one of the most innovative projects assigned to students here at American University. When the museum becomes a reality, each student in the class can say that they played some small part in its creation—and that is truly a wonderful educational experience. Overall accomplishments by students:

○ Created a Change.org Petition to generate interest	343 signatures
○ Facebook --	333 Likes; Reached 4,396 Friends of fans: 193,786
○ Twitter --	189 Tweets 302 Following 127 Followers 49,477 accounts reached
○ Celebrity tweeted! (“E-Entertainment Host: Giuliana Rancic”) (Tweeted the same day she announced she and her husband Bill Rancic were having a baby...) Her tweet: “ I’m happy two support creation of this museum that will celebrate all cultures @nmap2015 Check it out! I’m a #ProudItalianAmerican! What r u? ”	2, 659,780 followers
○ YouTube	Views: 1495
○ Tout	Posted 9 videos
○ Blog ! 500 impressions	
○ Other Blogs (included City Girl Blogs; Social Media Club, etc.)	53,779
○ Op-Eds (Asian Pacific and Olean Times)	833,000 plus
○ Outreach to ethnic organizations, schools, etc.	several million
TOTAL:	13,631,633 impressions

O Fee if students had charged client—including
15 weeks x 10 hours per week...Rate: \$75 an hour \$247,500

NOW: 2022

O Panel 95 attendees, 97 Registered,
55 Views on YouTube, **252+**
People reached

O Facebook 623
O Twitter 941
O LinkedIn 9
O YouTube 77 views
O Instagram 238
O Media Placements, Her Campus, and University Campus 39 million unique visitors
University / page views
ninety-five

O Fee, if 6 students had charged client—including 15 weeks
X 12 hours per week...Rate: \$125 an hour \$135,000

Overview:

Both classes had an impact on the client. Though the impressions may have been greater ten years ago, the outreach this year, including Instagram, Influencers, the event and discussion about immigration and migration, and several prominent leaders signing a petition to support the Museum, were just as impactful. Secondly, the outreach for Eskenazi to find other internships to continue the team's work, was important and invaluable.

Teaching Strategic Communications Social Media & Web Ethics and Law Policies

Katie R. Place, Ph.D., APR, Quinnipiac University, Katie.place@quinnipiac.edu

Rationale: Because public relations professionals are often tasked with guiding ethical decisions (Bowen, 2008), enacting an ethical conscience role for their organizations (Neill & Drumwright, 2012), and carrying out an ethical responsibility to minimize harm and promote respect (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001), they commonly write and enforce organizational ethics policies. The purpose of this assignment is to enable students the opportunity to review organizational social media / web ethics policies *and* to apply public relations law and ethics concepts such as copyright, privacy, intellectual property, defamation, digital citizenship, and ethical dialogue via the writing of their own policies. This assignment is completed near the conclusion of the graduate-level Law & Ethics in Strategic Communication course, after students have learned core ethics principles and moral philosophies and after students have learned core legal principles (i.e. privacy, defamation, copyright, intellectual property, and DE&I considerations). This assignment truly puts knowledge concepts, skills, and abilities (KSAs) together.

Student Learning Goals: After completing this assignment, students will have: 1) Viewed and learned how organizations write and organization social media / web ethics policies, 2) Compared and contrasted social media / web ethics policies, 3) Engaged in reflection and dialogue with classmates about the ethics and law concepts reflected in the policies, and 4) Researched and written their own sample social media / web ethics policy. This assignment fulfills the university learning outcomes of critical thinking, effective communication, recognition of differences and equity, and creative thinking.

Connection to PR Theory or Practice: This assignment is appropriate for graduate or undergraduate public relations or strategic communications ethics and law courses. Students may find this assignment helpful after reviewing the PRSA Code of Ethics, completing course content about social media / web law and ethics practices, or learning about various moral philosophies that guide organizational communications efforts. Many codes of conduct and social media / web ethics policies, for example, are written from a deontological standpoint focusing on the ethicality of one's actions and one's duty to and respect for others.

Assessment & Evidence of Student Learning: This assignment has been successfully implemented for two years in a graduate-level strategic communications law and ethics course. It has successfully enabled students to review ethics and law theoretical and practical concepts learned in class – then put the concepts and practices into action via the policy writing assignment. Ethics and law can be a dry topic. However, this assignment has brought the topic to life for students – and left them feeling empowered that they can write their own policies, counsel others on organizational ethics / law concepts, and engage as ethical guardians (Bowen, 2008; Neill & Drumwright, 2012). Included is a screen shot of part of one student's policy.

Employee Web & Social Media Policy
 Voya Financial
 Last Updated March 6, 2022

Basic Ethics & Etiquette of Web & Social Media Usage

- Each employee's personal and/or professional activity on the internet is subject to these policies as those activities could potentially impact the business of the company, company employees, or one's work at the company (Windsor Legal, n.d.).
- Utilizing personal social media on company time or company devices is not permitted.
- In regards to web or social media related to Voya Financial, be respectful, avoid argumentative conversations, do not use derogatory terms or profanity, and when in doubt ask a senior manager (Windsor Legal USA, n.d.).

Communicating with Respect for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- Speak diplomatically: Voya Financial appreciates diversity and inclusivity. Our team members should reach the online community with positivity in regards to differences of race, color, sex, national origin, religion, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, marital status, creed, citizenship status, as well as perspective of thoughts, beliefs, education, background and experiences (Voya Financial, 2022).
- While all Voya Financial employees are entitled to personal expression, be sure to disclaim one's stance—on political or social matters—as strictly personal and unaffiliated with the stance of Voya Financial when using personal accounts (Hendrick, 2019).
- Personal expression is not to be included in the online presence and social media accounts of Voya Financial; permitted employees may only speak on diversity, equity, and inclusion with respect, in alignment with the company's brand.

Harassment, Discrimination, Bullying, or Violence

- Derogatory or disrespectful language, on the personal or professional online accounts of Voya Financial employees reflects poorly on the company. Harassing, discriminatory, or violent (threatening) behavior on social media platforms or the web will not be tolerated and may result in termination.
- Employees should refrain from any conduct that is harassing and/or includes such as derogatory memes or posts, unwelcome advances, and/or verbal abuse in all of their online practices (Jacobs, 2021).
- Verbal bullying including, but not limited to, harassing, ridiculing, humiliating, and threatening is unacceptable (Jacobs, 2021).

Corporate Speech, Regulation & Prohibited Speech

- If an employee of Voya Financial discusses permissible work-related matters online, they must be aware the promotional communication with customers is considered corporate speech and does not receive First Amendment protection (Meyers, 2016).
- The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) regulates corporate speech to protect the public from being misled and taken advantage of (Gower, 2018). At Voya Financial, we always tell the truth (Voya Financial, 2022).

References:

- Bowen, S. A. (2008). A state of neglect: Public relations as 'corporate conscience' or ethics counsel. *Journal of public relations research*, 20(3), 271-296.
- Neill & Drumwright (2012) PR Professionals as Organizational Conscience, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 27:4, 220-234, DOI: [10.1080/08900523.2012.746108](https://doi.org/10.1080/08900523.2012.746108)
- Fitzpatrick, K., & Gauthier, C. (2001). Toward a professional responsibility theory of public relations ethics. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 16(2-3), 193-212.

ASSIGNMENT

**Employee Social Media & Web Policy Assignment
100 Points**

Purpose and Learning Outcomes: The purpose of this assignment is to enable you the opportunity to review and apply public relations law and ethics concepts and practices, including but not limited to, copyright, privacy, intellectual property, defamation, digital citizenship, and ethical dialogue. This assignment fulfills the university learning outcomes of critical thinking, effective communication, recognition of differences and equity, and creative thinking.

Directions: Please review the directions for the assignment below, organized in two parts.

Part 1: Review of Sample Social Media & Web Policies (40 points). First, you will review the social media and web policies listed below. Note the commonalities and differences among them. Note how they structured are written. Do they use a checklist format, a Q&A format, or a narrative format, or something else? What moral philosophies or legal concept from class do they draw upon? How do they emphasize the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion? Then, please write a one page (approximately 300 word) discussion board post addressing the following questions and describing your observations. Upload your post to the class discussion board by Friday at midnight. Be sure to comment on at least 2 of your classmates' posts, too!

- **Best Buy:** <https://forums.bestbuy.com/t5/Welcome-News/Best-Buy-Social-Media-Policy/td-p/20492>
- **Coca Cola:** <https://www.viralblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/TCCC-Online-Social-Media-Principles-12-2009.pdf>
- **Nordstrom:** <https://www.nordstrom.com/browse/customer-service/policy/social-networking-guidelines>
- **NPR:** <https://www.npr.org/about-npr/688418842/special-section-social-media#:~:text=If%20as%20part%20of%20our,pseudonyms%20when%20doing%20such%20work.>

Part 2: Social Media / Web Policy: After reviewing the above policies and observing some of their key qualities, you will now write an employee web and social media policy of your own! (60 points).

Please choose **one** of the following organizations and create one- to two-page social media and web policy, drawing upon the legal and ethical concepts we learned in class. Feel free to apply formatting approaches or content ideas from the samples you reviewed in Part 1.

1. New England Donor Services
2. New York University
3. Boston Children's Hospital
4. Voya Financial
5. General Dynamics / Electric Boat

Specifications & Tips:

1. Please ensure your social media / web policy includes at least 10 items on the policy
2. Give your policy a clear structure. The samples we reviewed above and in class often had subheads, a checklist, or a clear Q&A format.
3. Write in complete sentences. Write using clear language that all organizational employees could understand and then apply to their work.
4. I suggest you ensure that your policy offers guidance for the following general topic areas.
 - basics of web / social media etiquette
 - basics of ethical communication / use of social media
 - communicating with particular respect for diversity, equity & inclusion (DE&I)
 - avoiding communication that is harassment, discrimination, bullying, or violence
 - corporate speech and how such speech is regulated and what types of speech is not allowed
 - communicating opinion vs. fact
 - how to properly disclose affiliations, etc. / what not to disclose
 - copyright and trademark and/or fair use
 - proper use of logo, slogans, etc.
 - communicating with respect for privacy
 - communicating to avoid defamation

The assignment will be assessed for the following. Please use these as a checklist for reviewing your work before you turn it in!

- A) **Discussion Post (40 Points):** Does the discussion post adequately assess the policies and discuss relevant ethics or legal practices? Is the discussion post well developed and approximately 300 words in length?
- B) **Content of Your Policy (40 Points):** Are there at least 10 items in your policy that draw upon all that we learned regarding social media law & ethics, privacy, corporate / commercial speech, and diversity, equity & inclusion (DEI)?
- C) **Organization of Your Policy (10 Points):** Is the policy document organized in a manner that is logical and understandable? Did you use subheads, section breaks, or special format (list or Q&A)?
- D) **Mechanics of Your Policy (10 Points):** Is the policy written utilizing proper spelling, grammar, punctuation, and format?