

An Analysis of New Communications Media Use in Public Relations: Results of a Five-Year Trend Study

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This article provides the fifth annual report about an international, longitudinal trend study examination of the social media and other aspects of the new technologies are having on public relations practice. Results strongly suggest the new communications media are having a dramatic impact on public relations. As has been the case with each year of this trend study, results show considerably more agreement in some areas than was the case in previous years. This year's study reports that 85 percent of the public relations practitioners surveyed believe new communications media have changed the way organizations communicate. Findings continue to suggest these changes are more prominent in external than internal communications. Most (99%) of this year's respondents claim to spend part of their typical day working with some aspects of new communications new media. Results continue to show that traditional news media receive higher scores than blogs and social media in terms of accuracy, credibility, telling the truth and being ethical. Although there was very strong agreement (greater than 90%) that public relations practitioners should research and measure the impact new communications media are having on public relations campaigns, only a small number (38% in 2010) actually are conducting this kind of research.

On February 19, 2010, Tiger Woods held a unique and unusual press conference. The world's most famous golfer and a professional athlete who has earned more than \$1 Billion in prize money and endorsements went on television to address and apologize for his highly publicized marital infidelity that had been a major source of news during the previous few months.

This press conference was unique and unusual for several reasons. Even though Woods totally controlled the event by making sure only his close friends and associates were invited and refusing to answer questions, all of the major television and cable news network's covered the gathering live and many of them called in their highest profile news anchors to moderate the coverage.

The control that Woods placed on this event facilitated another unique and unusual reality by making it one of the few recent major news stories to be covered via

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traditional news outlets before anything about what happened at the press conference could be communicated via micro-blogging web sites such as Twitter, social networking web sites such as Facebook or any other of the new and non-traditional media.

News stories about this press conference didn't stop with the live coverage. All of the major television networks featured the story during their evening news broadcasts later that day and stories about Woods and the press conference were prominent on the front pages and sports pages in the next morning's editions of most of the country's major daily newspapers.

Another unique and different aspect about this press conference and coverage about it is the reality this is one of the few major news stories within the past few years where audiences received their first information about the event from traditional news media instead from micro-blogs and social media. In so many other news situations over the past few years, audiences learned the news from micro-blogs or social media first and well before television and other traditional news providers reported what was happening.

As we have pointed out previously (Wright & Hinson, 2009e & 2009f), information about most of the world's major news stories today is first told via micro-blogs or social media and then reported in the traditional news media. This certainly was the case with the terrible earthquake that rocked the Sichuan province in China on May 12, 2008 that killed 70,000 people, wounded 350,000 and left five million people homeless. As Shirky (2009) has pointed out, the first reports about this earthquake came from Sichuan residents who sent messages on QQ, China's largest social network, and on Twitter, the world's most popular micro-blogging service.

Twitter also has been recognized for being first to report news about US Airways Flight 1549 landing safely in the Hudson River in New York City on January 15, 2009 with all 155 people on board being safe and accounted for. This micro-blog also has been cited as the first medium to provide news seekers with information about the November 26, 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India, and as the first medium to provide most of the initial reports about the transition and re-branding of Kinko's into FedEx Office following the FedEx acquisition of Kinko's.

While he was the Editor of *PR Week*, Keith O'Brien (2009) said that Twitter was having a dramatic impact on the practice of public relations. Mike Elgan (2009), a technology writer and former Editor of *Windows* magazine, believes social media has replaced television as the main news source for Americans. Since first appearing about six years ago, social media networking sites have become increasingly popular each year. Bill Tancer (2008), the general manager of global research at Hitwise, the world's leading online competitive service, claims social media overtook pornography as the number one use of the internet two years ago.

In our previous research (Wright & Hinson, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d, 2008e, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e & 2009f) examining

the impact new technologies are having on public relations, we found the phenomenon of blogging and other aspects of the social media already are bringing dramatic changes to many aspects of public relations. We have found the development of various new technologies has significantly empowered a wide variety of strategic publics by giving them dynamic new media many are using to communicate effectively with a variety of internal and external audiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It's an understatement to suggest that social media have had a staggering impact on the practice of public relations since the first weblogs, or blogs, appeared more than a dozen years ago. This has continued and increased as social media have developed into a number of different forms including text, images, audio and video through the development of forums, message boards, photo sharing, podcasts RSS (really simple syndication), search engine marketing, video sharing, Wikis, social networks, professional networks and micro-blogging sites. Many considered it significant two years ago when social media overtook pornography as the number one use of the Internet (Tancer, 2008). According to the International Association of Business Communicators (Young, 2009) more than half of all Internet users have joined a social network, social networks have become the number one platform for creating and sharing content and more than 75 percent of all Internet users have read a blog.

Even though social media are changing how people and organizations communicate, it still is difficult to define exactly what social media are. In some circles what most people call social media are referred to by others as "consumer-generated media" or as "user-generated content." The Pew Research Center (2008) for the first time in 2008 noted more people were getting their news online than from traditional mass media. However, most blend online and traditional sources and the Pew study also pointed out that more young people than ever before are reading online versions of traditional news media.

For five years, we have conducted an annual, global trend study examining the impact of social media on public relations and have found they are bringing dramatic changes to many aspects of the field (Wright & Hinson, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d, 2008e, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e & 2009f). This research also has found that the development of various new technologies has significantly empowered a wide variety of strategic publics by giving them dynamic new media many are using to communicate effectively with a variety of internal and external audiences.

Our work also has examined the impact blogs and other forms of social media are having on the science that is the communication process, and have found that blogs and other social media are in the process of impacting the state of several traditional communication models and theories especially two-step flow theory, the conceptual model, agenda setting theory, spiral of silence theory and excellence theory.

A number of others have explored how blogs, social media and other new technologies are changing the way organizations communicate with strategic publics such as employees, customers, stockholders, communities, governments and other stakeholders. Weber (2007) suggests the communications world is dramatically moving in a digital direction and those who understand this transformation will communicate much more effectively than those who do not. Scoble and Israel (2006) provide a road-map showing how blogs are changing the way organizations communicate with important publics, especially customers. Reich and Solomon (2008) offer tips and suggestions for companies and individuals to master the new technology in a way that will connect with and keep audiences. Scott (2008a) believes, "one of the coolest things about the Web is that when an idea takes off it can propel a brand or a company to seemingly instant fame and fortune" (p. 8). Scott also points out that although communicating via the Web usually is free – as opposed to purchasing space through traditional advertising – only a small number of public relations practitioners are effectively using blogs and other social media when communicating with their strategic publics

Gillin (2009) says social media not only have ended the age of one-way messaging but also put pressure on businesses to engage constituents in unprecedented ways. Breakenridge (2009) believes powerful new social media tools offer unprecedented new opportunities in a day when most traditional methods of communication will not reach many audiences; much less convince them to do anything.

Social media are being utilized on an ever-increasing basis by corporations and other organizations. McCorkindale (2009) reports more than two-thirds (69%) of the current *Fortune* 2000 companies are using social networking sites. Ruh and Magallon (2009) indicate the U.S. military currently is involved in studying the potential of using social media for some of its internal communication campaigns. Paine (2009a, 2009b, 2009c) points out many organizations now are trying to measure the effectiveness of their social media communication efforts.

Recent research by the large public relations firm Burson-Marsteller (2010) reported that more than three-quarters (79%) of the *Fortune* Global 100 companies use at least one of the most popular social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and corporate blogs) to actively engage with stakeholders. This study also found that only 20 percent of the world's major international companies were utilizing all four of these platforms to engage with stakeholders. Additional findings indicated the average *Fortune* Global 100 company has 4.2 Twitter accounts, 2.1 Facebook fan pages, 1.6 YouTube channels and 4.2 corporate blogs. Companies with active accounts send 27 tweets per week, 3.6 Facebook posts per week, 10 YouTube videos per month and seven blog posts per month.

When technology first started playing a more significant role in public relations four or five years ago, Key (2005) wrote, "Public relations in the digital age requires understanding how your key constituents are gathering and sharing information and

then influencing them at key points. Doing so requires strategies that embrace the digital age” (p. 19). About this same time, Edelman and Intelliseek (2005) described blogs as being “easily published, personal web sites that serve as sources of commentary, opinion and uncensored, unfiltered sources of information on a variety of topics.” (p. 4). Key (2005) suggests that many weblogs began sporadically as vanity publishing because “anyone with an opinion about anything could create, in a matter of minutes, his or her own web site for publishing news, opinion, commentary and links to other sites” (p. 18). Bunz (2010) claims some young men are so hooked on the internet that 38 percent of them have surfed the web while in bed with their partner.

Two years ago Technorati (2008) said that in the US alone there were 23 million bloggers and 94 million blog readers. Current figures suggest 77 percent of active internet users read blogs, 133 million blogs have been indexed since 2002 and 900,000 blog posts are generated every 24 hours (Future Buzz, 2010). Technorati (2008) claims that more than 50,000 blogs mention typical news events every day and on some days that figure is greater than 100,000. Technorati (2009) has indexed 133 Million blogs since 2002. Future Buzz (2009) claims 346 Million people throughout the world now read blogs and that there are 900,000 blog posts made in a typical 24-hour period. Furthermore, Facebook currently has 200 million active users, half of whom log onto that service at least once each day and there have been more than one billion tweets sent on Twitter to date (Future Buzz, 2010).

Steve Rubel (2009), Senior Vice President and Director of Insights at Edelman Digital, claims that although the economy currently is slowing the emphasis on digital communication continues to operate at a brisk pace. He lists public engagement, search and social networking as three themes currently driving major trends in terms of public relations and new media. Self proclaimed “technology evangelist” Matt Dickman (2009) says we are moving towards a time when all media will be social. He points to situations such as the Facebook partnership with CNN during the inauguration of President Barack Obama that offered participants the unique experience of being able to “chat” with their Facebook “friends” online while watching the inauguration ceremonies.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media deliver web-based information created by people with the intention of facilitating communication and now represent one of the world’s major sources of social interaction as people share stories and experiences with each other.

Traffikd (2009), a blog about social media, claims there currently are more than 400 social media web sites and these have been classified into the following categories: arts, books, cars, connecting with friends, consumer reviews, cooking and food, cultures and foreign languages, dating, education, event planning, family, fashion, finance, games, general networking, health and medical, kids, Internet marketing, microblogging, movies, news, pets, photo sharing, politics, pop culture, professional, real estate, religious, shopping, social action, sports, technology, teen, travel, video sharing, women and miscellaneous.

Social media can be classified into these categories: Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures and video. Since social media represent a young and emerging set of technologies there are many different thoughts and opinions when it comes to categorization. With the availability of so many social media sites, obviously some receive much more web traffic than others. For example, popular social networking sites such as Facebook (www.facebook.com) and MySpace (www.myspace.com) and popular video sharing site YouTube (www.youtube.com) all are ranked by web information service Alexa (2009) on the list of the world's most accessed websites.

AN OVERVIEW OF OUR PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Since this is our fifth annual study examining how new technologies are impacting public relations practice, it makes sense to provide a review of what we discovered in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009.

Five years ago we claimed the rise of the blogosphere was significantly empowering employees and had provided a dynamic new medium many were using to communicate with a variety of internal and external audiences. That study also found employee blogging had become a common occurrence and that employees who blog were writing both positive and negative things about their organizations. Although we discovered most agreed it was ethical to discipline employees who write negative things about their organizations on blogs and most also believed it was ethical for organizations to monitor information their employees write on blogs, we found that only a limited amount of this research is being conducted. We also reported there was little, if anything, in the literature discussing the impact the emergence of blogs and other aspects of new technologies are having on the science that is the communication process.

Building off of our 2006 research and using those results as a benchmark, our 2007 and 2008 studies asked a number of the same questions, permitting a comparison of the thinking during those years against what people formerly thought. Findings reported significant increases between all three of those years in the number of public relations practitioners who were aware of situations where employees of their organization (or a client's organization) had openly communicated on blogs.

Although we found that blogging employees were writing both positive and negative things about their organizations, the positive outweighed the negative. We also reported more positive things were being written in 2008 than was the case in 2007, and in that year compared with 2006. There also was a noticeable shift in responses between 2006, 2007 and 2008 on the question asking whether or not it is ethical for employees to write and post on a blog negative statements about the organizations they work for. This shift went in a negative direction with 49 percent saying this was ethical in 2006 with approval dropping to 29 percent in 2007 and 25 percent in 2008.

Given the growth, development and changes in social media during the first three years of our research (2006 through 2008) we decided to dramatically change the

questions we asked in the 2009 trend study and we continued to discover and reinforce the reality that new media and technology was dramatically changing public relations and the way it was practiced. Our 2009 results showed considerable more agreement in some areas than was the case in previous years. This especially was the case with responses to questions measuring if the emergence of blogs and social media had changed the way organizations communicate. Scores in our 2009 study also were higher when subjects were asked if they believed that social media complement traditional news media, if blogs and social media influence coverage in traditional news media and if blogs and social media have made communications more instantaneous because they encourage organizations to respond more quickly to criticism.

Since research is such an integral part of the public relations process, each year since 2008 we have asked questions specifically related to measurement and employee blogs. One of these sought opinions as to whether or not it was ethical for an organization to conduct research that focused on information employees were writing on blogs. Results showed that a very large majority (89% in 2006, 73% in 2007 and 63% in 2008) believed it was ethical to take such measures. However, in spite of those results, only a very small number of organizations conduct such research or measurement and few predicted we're likely to see changes in this in the immediate future.

Other findings from previous years suggested the emergence of blogs was changing how people communicate. More than half (53% in 2007, 69% in 2008 and 61% in 2009) said blogs have changed how their companies handle external communications while another fairly solid number (40% in 2007 and 45% in both 2008 and 2009) suggested this also was the case with internal communications. Although there was some ambivalence in terms of whether or not organizations should let their employees blog during regular working hours, more than one-third agreed this should happen. At the same time, nearly two-thirds said employees should ask their organizations for permission to communicate on blogs before doing so during the regular work day. Many respondents to our previous studies said their organizations had no formal policy on employee blogging.

The reality that there were few changes in the most popular micro-blogging and social media services between early 2009 and early 2010 (when our studies went into the field) permitted us to ask many of the same questions during both years. Indeed, this might change in the future with the introduction in February 2010 of Google Buzz a social media service for sharing thoughts, multimedia and other messages. Since Google has linked Google Buzz to Gmail's millions of users the potential for this new service to grow in popularity is massive (Mashable, 2010). In the first few weeks of its operation, Google Buzz was reporting stellar service numbers including more than nine million posts in its first 56 hours along with more than 200 mobile check-ins per minute or nearly 300,000 per day (Mashable, 2010).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Although our first two annual trend studies in the area of blogs and social media concentrated mainly on how employees communicate via blogs and ethical aspects of this communication, our 2008, 2009 and 2010 studies have taken a more broad perspective. Although some of the questions we asked in 2008 and 2009 are similar to measures explored in our 2006 and 2007 studies, a number of new questions were added in each of the past two years. While we still are able to compare current thinking against some of our earlier benchmarks this year's research also provides the opportunity to analyze important new ground.

METHOD

As we have done in previous years, a sample of public relations practitioners from various parts of the world took part in the fifth annual version of this research. Invitations to participate in the study were extended via e-mail messages to random samples collected from organizations such as the Arthur W. Page Society and the International Public Relations Association (IPRA); and from donor, task-force and commission membership lists of the Institute for Public Relations. A major change during 2010 was the enthusiastic cooperation, support and participation we received from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) which sent e-mail invitations to participate in this research to a large, random sample of members. This year's measuring instrument contained 42 closed-ended and three open-ended questions.

Respondents came from many different parts of the world and represented a good cross-section of a wide variety of segments of the public relations industry. More (24%) worked with small agencies or consultancies than any other area but corporations (19%) and educational institutions (15%) also were well represented. The not-for-profit area accounted for 12 percent of the respondents with nine percent working in governmental public relations positions, six percent employed in health care communications, five percent working with large agencies, two percent coming from the research provider category and nine percent responding "other" when asked what kind of organization they worked for.

Although we have had a fairly even split between female and male respondents in the four previous years of this trend survey, that changed this year with 68 percent of the respondents female and 38 percent male. A very large majority (90%) were based in North America with eight percent of the responses coming from Europe, and one percent each from Asia/Australia, Africa, South America and "other." Responses were nicely distributed across various age categories with 27 percent being younger than 30, 25 percent were between 30 and 39, 23 percent were aged 40 to 49, 21 percent were 50 to 59 and four percent were 60 or older. The analysis reported on in this paper includes 557 usable responses.

RESULTS

In our four previous research studies about the impact of new technologies on public relations, we have reported findings that clearly indicated public relations practitioners believed the emergence of blogs, social media and other aspects of the new technologies have changed the way their organizations (or their client organizations) communicate. Our 2010 study not only confers with these previous results but also takes this agreement to a higher level.

Although the initial intent for these annual trend surveys was to use the same questionnaire year after year, the reality of the situation is the new technologies have changed dramatically since we initiated this research project five years ago. Consequently, it became necessary to make considerable updates to our measuring instrument in each of the first four years of this annual trend study. Ironically, however, with the exception of greater use by more people, changes in the availability of the major new media opportunities remained relatively unchanged between 2009 and 2010. For example, in both of these years Facebook clearly has been the most used social networking site and Twitter stands alone as the most popular Micro-Blogging service. This permitted us to ask many of the same questions in 2009 and 2010, the first time we have been able to make so few changes in our questionnaire in the five-year history of this research project. As reported earlier, the debut of the new Google Buzz social media service in February 2010 might change our ability to do this again next year.

As Table 1 indicates 83 percent of this year's respondents agree blogs and social media have changed the way organizations communicate, up from 73 percent agreement in 2009, 61 percent agreement in 2008 and 58 percent agreement in 2007, the first year we asked this question. A better measure of the growth of new media impact is the change in mean scores on this item during the four-year period that we have asked this question. These means grew from 3.38 in 2007 to 3.44 in 2008 to 3.81 in 2009 to 4.02 in 2010, all based on a five-point scale where "1" represents "strongly disagree" and "5" indicates "strongly agree." Consequently, the higher the mean score the greater the agreement.

Agreement increases also were found on questions specifically asking about external and internal communications. This year 81 percent felt the emergence of social media (including blogs) has changed the way their organization handles external communications compared with 68 percent agreement in 2009, 59 percent agreement in 2008 and 53 percent agreement in 2007. Agreement on whether or not social media has impacted internal communications remained constant at 38 percent in both 2009 and 2010.

Table 1

Responses to the question: “Please tell us whether you agree or disagree that the emergence of social media (including blogs) has changed the way your organization (or your client organizations)”:

2010						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Communicates?	1%	8%	6%	54%	29%	4.02
Handles external communications?	2%	8%	9%	53%	28%	3.97
Handles internal communications?	5%	30%	27%	31%	7%	3.05

2009						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Communicates?	3%	13%	10%	46%	27%	3.81
Handles external communications?	3%	15%	14%	47%	21%	3.69
Handles internal communications?	5%	24%	26%	33%	12%	3.22

2008						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Communicates?	6%	19%	13%	47%	14%	3.44
Handles external communications?	6%	17%	18%	48%	11%	3.40
Handles internal communications?	10%	24%	28%	27%	11%	3.06

2007						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Communicates?	5%	21%	15%	46%	12%	3.38
Handles external communications?	6%	17%	24%	42%	11%	3.35
Handles internal communications?	6%	28%	28%	32%	6%	3.06

Note: (a) Percentage scores might not always total 100% due to rounding. (b) Mean scores throughout this report are based on responses to five-point Likert-type scales where “1” = “Strongly Disagree” and “5” = “Strongly Agree.” Consequently, the higher the mean score the greater the agreement.

A growth in agreement also was found between 2008 and 2010 when respondents were asked if they thought social media (including blogs) compliment mainstream traditional media or were in conflict with them. Results in Table 2 show 88 percent believe they complement each other in 2010 compared with 85 percent in 2009 and 75 percent in 2008, the first year we asked the question. At the same time, those who agree that social media and traditional media are in conflict with each other decreased. There was 29 percent agreement on this item in 2008 compared with 26 percent agreement in 2009 and 20 percent agreement in 2010. Mean scores reported in Table 2 clearly reflect this trend.

Table 2

Responses to the question: “Do you agree or disagree that social media (including blogs) and mainstream traditional media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television)”:

2010						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Compliment each other?	1%	4%	7%	61%	27%	4.11
Are in conflict with each other?	13%	50%	17%	16%	4%	2.47

2009						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Compliment each other?	0%	6%	7%	59%	26%	4.06
Are in conflict with each other?	16%	48%	11%	24%	2%	2.47

2008						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Compliment each other?	3%	13%	12%	52%	20%	3.74
Are in conflict with each other?	12%	42%	17%	24%	5%	2.68

Results also show there is considerable agreement suggesting blogs and social media have enhanced public relations practice. Table 3 shows that an increasingly large majority (81 percent in 2010) of the study’s respondents believe social media have enhanced public relations. This is up considerably from 72 percent in 2009 and 66 percent in 2008, the first year questions reported about in Table 3 were asked. Furthermore, 70 percent feel the same way about blogs in 2010, up from 65 percent last year and 60 percent in 2008. This table also reports most (92% in both 2010 and 2009 and 89% in 2008) of those surveyed think blogs and social media influence news coverage in the traditional media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television) while 77 percent say the reverse also is true (up from 76 percent in 2009 and 72 percent in 2008). In both 2008 and 2009 we discovered extremely solid agreement that blogs and social media were making communications more instantaneous because they force organizations to respond more quickly to criticism. In light of this strong agreement we eliminated this question in 2010.

Table 3

Responses in 2010 to these questions: “Do you agree or disagree that . . .”

2010						
Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Social media have enhanced the practice of public relations?	1%	4%	14%	47%	34%	4.09
Blogs have enhanced the practice of public relations?	1%	7%	22%	50%	20%	3.80
Social media (including blogs) influence the traditional mainstream media?		3%	5%	60%	32%	4.21
Traditional mainstream media influence social media (including blogs)?		7%	14%	56%	21%	3.91

Note: A question asking “Since social media (including blogs) have made communications more instantaneous they have forced organizations to respond more quickly to criticism?” was not asked after 2009 because by then it was generally accepted that this was a reality.

Responses in 2009 to these questions: “Do you agree or disagree that . . .”

2009						
Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Social media have enhanced the practice of public relations?	1%	6%	20%	43%	30%	3.94
Blogs have enhanced the practice of public relations?	2%	8%	24%	43%	23%	3.77
Social media (including blogs) influence the traditional mainstream media?		2%	6%	63%	30%	4.20
Traditional mainstream media influence social media (including blogs)?	1%	4%	18%	54%	22%	3.92
Since social media (including blogs) have made communications more instantaneous they have forced organizations to respond more quickly to criticism?		2%	10%	44%	43%	4.29

Responses in 2008 to these questions: “Do you agree or disagree that . . .”

2008						
Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Social media have enhanced the practice of public relations?	1%	15%	18%	46%	20%	3.69
Blogs have enhanced the practice of public relations?	2%	16%	23%	45%	15%	3.55
Social media (including blogs) influence the traditional mainstream media?		5%	6%	60%	28%	4.11
Traditional mainstream media influence social media (including blogs)?	1%	9%	17%	55%	18%	3.79
Since social media (including blogs) have made communications more instantaneous they have forced organizations to respond more quickly to criticism?		8%	7%	46%	38%	4.14

Each year since 2008, subjects in this annual trend study have been asked a variety of questions about how social media compare with traditional news media in terms of accuracy, credibility, truth, ethics and so forth. Results displayed in Table 4, continue to show that respondents think blogs and social media have a long distance to go before they will be equal to traditional media in these categories. This table also shows respondents do not give blogs and social media very high scores in terms of truth telling or advocating transparent and ethical cultures. However, respondents give social media high marks for offering organizations low-cost ways to develop relationships with members of various strategic publics (80% agreement in 2008, 84% agreement in 2009 and 92% agreement in 2010), serving as a watchdog for traditional mainstream media (61% agreement in 2008, 71% agreement in 2009 and 65% agreement in 2010) and impacting corporate and organizational transparency (76% agreement in 2008, 82% agreement in 2009 and 81% agreement in 2010).

Table 4

Responses in 2010 to these questions: “Do you agree or disagree that social media (including blogs) . . .”

2010						
Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Are more accurate than traditional mainstream media?	11%	51%	31%	7%	1%	2.35
Are more credible than traditional mainstream media?	12%	50%	29%	9%	1%	2.38
Are a more trusted information source than traditional mainstream media?	8%	43%	34%	14%	1%	2.58
Tell the truth?	5%	20%	57%	18%		2.89
Advocate a transparent and ethical culture?	7%	16%	38%	34%	5%	3.16
Offer organizations a low-cost way to develop relationships with members of various strategic publics?	1%	4%	4%	57%	35%	4.20
Serve as a watch-dog for traditional mainstream media?	2%	10%	24%	23%	12%	3.65
Are impacting corporate and organizational transparency.		3%	16%	15%	26%	4.05

Table 4 (continued)

Responses in 2009 to these questions: “Do you agree or disagree that social media (including blogs) . . .”

2009						
Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Are more accurate than traditional mainstream media?	18%	48%	27%	5%	1%	2.23
Are more credible than traditional mainstream media?	12%	49%	29%	8%	1%	2.38
Are a more trusted information source than traditional mainstream media?	10%	40%	31%	18%	1%	2.59
Tell the truth?	8%	26%	54%	12%	1%	2.71
Advocate a transparent and ethical culture?	7%	23%	32%	32%	6%	3.08
Offer organizations a low-cost way to develop relationships with members of various strategic publics?	1%	6%	9%	58%	26%	4.01
Serve as a watch-dog for traditional mainstream media?	2%	10%	18%	55%	15%	3.73
Are impacting corporate and organizational transparency.	1%	3%	14%	57%	25%	4.04

Responses in 2008 to these questions: “Do you agree or disagree that social media (including blogs) . . .”

2008						
Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Are more accurate than traditional mainstream media?	25%	42%	26%	6%	1%	2.3
Are more credible than traditional mainstream media?	19%	45%	26%	9%	2%	2.3
Are a more trusted information source than traditional mainstream media?	16%	35%	29%	18%	2%	2.4
Tell the truth?	14%	24%	49%	13%		2.6
Advocate a transparent and ethical culture?	11%	21%	31%	30%	7%	3.0
Offer organizations a low-cost way to develop relationships with members of various strategic publics?	2%	7%	11%	62%	18%	3.8
Serve as a watch-dog for traditional mainstream media?	4%	10%	24%	46%	15%	3.6
Are impacting corporate and organizational transparency.	1%	3%	20%	58%	18%	3.8

We also investigated whether people have different expectations in terms of honesty, truth telling, ethics, etc., between social media and the more traditional media. Results are shown in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5

Responses to these questions: “Do you agree or disagree that people who receive information from mainstream media expect these news outlets to be honest, tell the truth and advocate a transparent and ethical culture?”

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
2008	2%	12%	11%	50%	25%	3.84
2009	1%	8%	11%	60%	20%	3.91
2010	1%	6%	7%	58%	28%	4.06

Table 5 shows most (75% in 2008, 80% in 2009 and 86% in 2010) expect traditional mainstream media to be honest, tell the truth and be ethical. Although, results displayed in Table 6 point-out that expectations in these areas were considerably less in both 2008 (44%) and 2009 (41%), it is interesting to note that this gap appears to be getting smaller in 2010 with half of the respondents (50%) indicating that they expect that blogs and social media be honest, tell the truth and advocate a transparent and ethical culture.

Table 6

Responses to these questions: “Do you agree or disagree that people who receive information from blogs and other social media expect these outlets to be honest, tell the truth and advocate a transparent and ethical culture?”

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
2008	3%	27%	26%	36%	8%	3.18
2009	3%	22%	35%	36%	5%	3.17
2010	1%	17%	31%	43%	7%	3.38

Given the reality that research is such an integral part of public relations, all five of our annual trend studies have contained questions specifically related to social media measurement. As reported in Table 7, even though public relations practitioners frequently say research, measurement and evaluation are important; few of the subjects in our annual studies have claimed to actually be conducting this research. We have measured this question in terms of internal communication over all five years of this

research. Although Table 7 shows only a very small number of organizations have commissioned or conducted such research or measurement focusing on information their employees are communicating on blogs or via social media, the percentage of those conducting such measurement has been increasing each year including a nine percent jump from 15 percent to 24 percent between 2008 and 2009. This number increased slightly to 26 percent in 2010.

Table 7

Responses to the question: “To the best of your knowledge, has your organization ever commissioned or conducted a research or measurement study that focused on information employees communicated on blogs or social media?”

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Yes	3%	11%	15%	24%	26%
No	77%	62%	55%	58%	59%
Uncertain/ Don't Know	20%	27%	30%	18%	15%

In an attempt to move the focus of this question from internal to strategic external audiences, the 2009 and 2010 surveys asked a question about research measuring what external publics have communicated about organizations via blogs or social media. Results reported on in Table 8 suggest there is more activity measuring external than internal audiences as 39 percent in 2009 and 38 percent in 2010 claimed their organizations were actively measuring this area as compared to the 2 percent (2009) and 26 percent (2010) who are measuring internally.

Table 8

Responses to the question: “To the best of your knowledge, has your organization ever conducted research measuring what members of other strategic publics have communicated about your organization via blogs or other social media?”

	2009	2010
Yes	39%	38%
No	42%	46%
Uncertain/ Don't Know	19%	16%

While expanding the number of questions we asked about measurement in both 2009 and 2010, we also decided to find out what kind of measurement subjects thought should be taking place.

Table 9 shows subjects in our studies strongly believe that a wide variety of research should be conducted in connection with blogs and social media. As the table reports, more than 90 percent of the respondents to this survey agree that this research should be taking place in 2009 with that number increasing to 94 percent and higher in

2010. This includes support for research that measures the amount of communication that is being disseminated about their organizations (or client organizations) through blogs and other social media (90% in 2009 and 94% in 2010); support for research studies that measure or analyze content of what's being communicated about their organizations (or their clients) in these new media (96% in 2009 and 97% in 2010); research measuring the impact information disseminated about their organizations (or their clients) through blogs and other social media has on influentials, opinion leaders and members of other strategic publics (94% in 2009 and 95 percent in 2010); and, support for research measuring the impact information disseminated about an organization (or its clients) through blogs and other social media has on the formation, change and reinforcement of attitudes, opinions and behavior (92% in 2009 and 95% in 2010).

Table 9

Responses in 2010 to the question: "Do you agree or disagree that public relations practitioners should measure:"

2010						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
"The amount of communication that is being disseminated about their organizations (or client organizations) through blogs and other social media."		3%	3%	58%	36%	4.26
"And/or analyze content of what's being communicated about their organizations (or their clients) in blogs and other social media."		1%	2%	58%	39%	4.36
"The impact information disseminated about their organizations (or their clients) through blogs and other social media has on influentials, opinion leaders and members of other strategic audiences."		1%	4%	60%	35%	4.28
"The impact information disseminated about their organizations (or their clients) through blogs and other social media has on the formation, change and reinforcement of attitudes, opinions and behavior."		1%	4%	60%	35%	4.28

Table 9 (continued)

Responses in 2009 to the question: “Do you agree or disagree that public relations practitioners should measure:”

2009						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
“The amount of communication that is being disseminated about their organizations (or client organizations) through blogs and other social media.”	1%	3%	7%	55%	35%	4.20
“And/or analyze content of what’s being communicated about their organizations (or their clients) in blogs and other social media.”			4%	55%	41%	4.37
“The impact information disseminated about their organizations (or their clients) through blogs and other social media has on influentials, opinion leaders and members of other strategic audiences.”		2%	4%	58%	36%	4.27
“The impact information disseminated about their organizations (or their clients) through blogs and other social media has on the formation, change and reinforcement of attitudes, opinions and behavior.”		1%	6%	58%	34%	4.25

Unfortunately, however, as Table 10 indicates, there is a considerable gap between the kinds of research and measurement this study’s subjects agree should be taking place and what’s actually going on. Furthermore, most of the research currently taking place represents output measures and not outcome research. For example, 45 percent of our 2009 respondents and 51 percent of the 2010 respondents claimed that their organizations (or their client’s organizations) were measuring the amount of communication that is being disseminated about it through blogs and other social media. Furthermore, 55 percent of our respondents in 2009 and 54 percent in 2010 said they were measuring and analyzing what was being communicated about their organizations in blogs and other social media. However, a much smaller number (26% in 2009 and 29% in 2010) were measuring the impact information being disseminated about their organizations through blogs and other social media was having on influentials, opinion leaders and members of other strategic audiences. Additionally, only 24 percent in 2009 and 28 percent in 2010 reported measuring the impact information disseminated about their organizations through blogs and other social media was having on the formation, change and reinforcement of attitudes, opinions and behavior.

Table 10

Responses in 2010 to the question: “To the best of your knowledge, has your organization (or a client organization) ever measured . . .”

2010			
	No	Yes	Uncertain/ Don't Know
“The amount of communication that is being disseminated about it through blogs and other social media.”	36%	51%	13%
“Or analyzed the content of what’s being communicated about it blogs and other social media.”	32%	54%	13%
“The impact information disseminated about it through blogs and other social media has on influentials, opinion leaders and members of other strategic audiences.”	51%	29%	20%
“The impact information disseminated about it through blogs and other social media has on the formation, change and reinforcement of attitudes, opinions and behavior.”	52%	28%	20%

Responses in 2009 to the question: “To the best of your knowledge, has your organization (or a client organization) ever measured . . .”

2009			
	No	Yes	Uncertain/ Don't Know
“The amount of communication that is being disseminated about it through blogs and other social media.”	38%	45%	17%
“Or analyzed the content of what’s being communicated about it blogs and other social media.”	29%	55%	16%
“The impact information disseminated about it through blogs and other social media has on influentials, opinion leaders and members of other strategic audiences.”	52%	26%	22%
“The impact information disseminated about it through blogs and other social media has on the formation, change and reinforcement of attitudes, opinions and behavior.”	53%	24%	23%

This research also asked several other questions. Table 11 shows responses to the question inquiring about what percentage of their workdays respondents spend with blogs and other social media. Findings indicate most (93% in 2009 and 96% in 2010) devote some of their work time to these new media. As seen in Table 11, the 2010 results show a significant increase over 2009 in the amount of working time public relations practitioners are spending with blogs and other social media.

Table 11

Responses to these questions: “On the average, approximately what percentage of your time working in public relations and communications is spent with blogs and other social media?”

	None	1% to 10%	11% to 25%	26% to 50%	More than 50%
2009	7%	48%	30%	11%	4%
2010	4%	38%	34%	17%	7%

Our study also asked which organizational function was responsible for monitoring and managing blog and social media communication in subject’s organizations. Results shown in Table 12 indicate that two-thirds (66%) of respondents answered communications or public relations in 2009 and that number has increased to 81 percent in 2010.

Table 12

Responses to the question: “Which of the following functions IS RESPONSIBLE for monitoring and managing blog and social media communication in your organization?”

	Comm. or PR	Human Resources	Legal	Technology or IT	Don’t Know	Not Assigned	Other
2009	66%	4%	3%	5%	8%	20%	12%
2010	81%	1%	2%	6%	4%	8%	14%

Subjects also were asked which organizational function should be responsible for this activity. Results show that 88 percent of the study’s 2009 respondents answered communications or public relations in 2009 and that number has increased to 94 percent in 2010.

Table 13

Responses to the question: “In your opinion, which of the following functions SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE responsible for monitoring and managing blog and social media communication in your organization?”

	Comm. or PR	Human Resources	Legal	Technology or IT	Don’t Know	Not Assigned	Other
2009	88%	6%	8%	8%	3%	2%	12%
2010	94%	5%	6%	6%	1%	0%	11%

As was the case in previous years, the 2010 study included several open-ended questions. Highlights of this year's open-ended responses suggest blogs and social media have enhanced the practice of public relations. Respondents told us:

- “Blogs and social media provide an outlet to communicate directly with audiences without relying upon reporter interest at a newspaper, magazine, television station, etc.”
- “Blogs have made the news more timely and relevant. Key blog posts can lead to significant and near immediate effects.”
- “Social Media and blogs have given public relations professionals a better way of keeping their fingers on the pulse of their organization.”
- “We can now target our messages much more clearly for particular audiences.
- “It's faster now to get a handle on public opinion about key issues because of blogs.”
- “They have provided a more direct way to communicate with individuals, a feeling of less censorship and a direct channel to audiences, without a media filter.”
- “I believe social media provide unique opportunities for authentic, timely, two-way communication. More tools for my toolbox, but it takes staff time.”
- “It allows you another tool to communicate with your audiences through.”
- “It provides us and our clients with more opportunities to connect directly with consumers.”
- “Gives PR organizations a seat at the table with Marketing and connects us directly to consumers.”
- “Social Media provide another channel to tell our client's/organization's story. It often allows us to engage directly with the target audience.”
- “While not providing access to mass media as traditional outlets have in the past, social media does provide a low cost means of reaching narrow demographics with easily customizable messages.”
- “Blogs somewhat have allowed public relations communication to reach specific audiences, which improves outreach and posturing. Social media

has changed the game in reacting and proposing messaging. In a crisis, social media is a game changer - you can no longer sit around and take your time to develop message strategy. You also can't expect people to 'miss' your announcement of bad news or changes. The social media sphere requires new thinking about strategy and message control. PR ignores this channel and tactic at the risk of appearing out-of-touch or aloof. On the other hand, SM is another channel and should not be the only channel used by PR. It just allows PR to rapidly communicate and respond. It's a lot of customer service wrapped up in opinion with PR on top as the bow!"

- "They provide a direct outlet to reach our publics."
- "As a non-profit, it's a great way to connect with new audiences with a very small price-tag. We can also go to them, instead of expecting that they come to us."
- "From a resource stand point, social media provide additional information channels for PR practitioners. From a communications stand point, social media serve as an interactive platform to share and to gain opinions among PR professionals, journalists, reporters and more."
- "Allows you to get your story out, even without using traditional media outlets such as print or TV."
- "They provide another avenue to the consumer. Consumer perception research shows us that peer to peer recommendations have more influence than experts. Blogs and social media have a less formal tone that bring the PR pro one step closer to peer to peer communication with the consumer."
- "You can't do PR without taking them into consideration. Press releases are pretty much pointless now."
- "It's another opportunity to build relationships with the brand; and it's a medium to reach directly to the audience and often bypass media altogether."
- "Social media provide additional and alternate tools to use in sharing a message."

SUMMARY

Our fifth annual, international, trend study examination of public relations practitioners (n=557) on the impact blogs and other social media are having on public

relations practice once again finds these technologies are dramatically changing public relations and the way it is practiced. As has been the case with each year of this trend study, results of the 2010 survey show considerably more agreement in some areas than was the case in previous years.

In 2008 we reported that 61 percent of our respondents believed the emergence of blogs and social media had changed the way their organizations (or their client organizations) communicate. That figure increased to 73 percent in 2009 and to 85 percent in 2010. Findings continue to suggest these changes are more prominent in external than internal communications but numbers are up considerably there also. A large majority (99%) of the 2010 respondents spent part of their average workdays with some aspects of blogs and the social media, up from 93 percent one year ago.

Many (90% in 2010, 85% in 2009 and 72% in 2008) believe social media complement traditional news media.

Results continue to show that traditional news media receive higher scores than blogs and social media in terms of accuracy, credibility, telling the truth and being ethical. Findings also show most (75% this year, 80% last year and 75% in 2008) expect traditional news media to be honest, tell the truth and be ethical. Fewer than half (44% in 2010, 41% in 2009 and 44% in 2008) hold these same expectations for blogs and other social media.

Although there was very strong agreement (greater than 90% in both years) when respondents were asked if public relations practitioners should research and measure the impact blogs and social media are having on communication campaigns, only a small number (38% in 2009 and 38% in 2010) actually are conducting this kind of research.

Highlights of responses to the study's open-ended questions include a recurring suggestion that blogs and social media have had a huge impact moving public relations into the direction of facilitating more two-way communication by opening up direct channels of communications between organizations and their publics.

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