The Impact of Public Relations on Organizations and Society
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Dear Friends and Colleagues,

For this year’s theme, we took our cue from an allied discipline – mass communication/mass media – that has a stream of “media effects” theories dating back at least to the 1980s assessing the various dimensions of mass media effects on individuals, organizations (including families), and society. We feel that our field has not adequately addressed this aspect of our existence, which has led to reputational issues such as public relations being construed mostly as “spin doctoring” on behalf of corporate or similar interests. The Bell Pottinger debacle is a case in point. Our field will benefit from reflection including an assessment of the varied purposes for which public relations has been, and can be, used. Examples are public information campaigns to build societies and nations engaged by NGOs and IGOs (intergovernmental organizations).

COVID-19 has provided us with a global case study of THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS ON ORGANIZATIONS AND THE SOCIETY. We are living an experiment whose communication angle we will be discussing and analyzing for years to come.

BledCom 2020 was digital and free for all, and so for the 27th year we continued to share our knowledge and learn from each other despite travel restrictions.

We hope you and your loved ones are safe and well.

Thank you! Lep pozdrav! Namaste!
Dejan Verčič  *University of Ljubljana and Herman & partners (Slovenia)*

Dejan Verčič is Professor, Head of Department of Communication and Head of Centre for Marketing and Public Relations at the University of Ljubljana, and Partner in strategic consulting and communication company Herman & partnerji d.o.o., Slovenia. He received his PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK. A Fulbright scholar, recipient of the Pathfinder Award, the highest academic honour bestowed by the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) in New York, and named a Distinguished Public Relations Scholar by the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA). In 1991 he was the founding director of Slovenian national news agency (STA). Organizing the annual International Public Relations Research Symposium – BledCom since 1994.

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**Banu Bıçakçı** *İzmir University of Economics (Turkey)* • A. Banu Bıçakçı (PhD) is an Associate Professor of Public Relations. Currently she is a part-time lecturer at İzmir University of Economics and a Communication Consultant for the Association of Organic Agriculture Associations (ETO Derneği). She has published international articles and book chapters, particularly on Turkish PR history, sustainability and CSR. She is a member of EUPRERA, ECREA and IAMCR. She has been conducting research in EUPRERA PR History network for seven years; she has also been acting as a reviewer for the special PR history issues of Public Relations Review and The Journal of PR Research.

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Liz Bridgen *Sheffield Hallam University (UK)* • Liz Bridgen is Principal Lecturer in Public Relations at Sheffield Hallam University, UK. She is co-editor with Dejan Verčič of *Experiencing Public Relations: International Voices* and recently contributed a chapter, ‘The impact of diversity initiatives on practitioners and practice’ to *Platinum: Celebrating the CIPR and its members at 70*. Her research explores on the lived experience of public relations practitioners with a focus on gender and technology and is currently developing a project on the marginalisation of public relations and its attempt to sanitise and be seen as a respectable occupation.

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assumes that female public relations leaders find themselves in a position of targets and/or shields of modernized patriarchal domination. The Rubber Bullet theory importantly challenges progressive premises of female career trajectories, explores the dynamics of power inequality and deterioration of women in leadership and explains the reproduction of the patriarchal gender relations.

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2020 PAPER ABSTRACTS
Examining national identity building from a semantic network analysis perspective: the cognitive structure of Kemalist journal Ülkü

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Introduction and purpose
This study focuses on Ülkü, the official journal of the People’s Houses, which was designed to create an ideology for the modern Turkish state as opposed to Ottomanism. It is aimed to examine the cognitive structure of Ülkü version of Kemalist modernism through a semantic network analysis.

Literature review
The collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War in 1918 was a traumatic experience for both the elite and society. National Independence War (1919-1922) successfully led by the western educated middle class intellectuals and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey as a modern state in 1923 marked the beginning of a new era.

The 1920s and 1930s were crucial in the consolidation of the nation state in the new republic. The republican elite sought to implement a series of reforms to modernise or westernise Turkey. These reforms crucially involved modernisation of the populations in order to shape a new type of citizen: a republican citizen loyal to the republic’s secular western values. However, top-down modernisation project of the elite challenged by a largely conservative peasant society (Tunçay, 2010: 49-55).

The republican elite then launched an ambitious project of establishing the People’s Houses across Turkey, even in the remotest corners of the country, to spread the secular, western ideas among the population. The People’s Houses were opened in fourteen cities in 1932, by 1950 the number of houses reached to 478 (Çeçen, 1990: 10-20).

75 periodicals were published by these People’s Houses. Ülkü was published by Ankara People’s House, the capital city of Turkey. Ülkü demonstrates an exceptional effort on the part of the elite to create a modern-western identity. It was printed between 1933 and 1950, for 17 years, 272 issues in total. The founding father of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself named the Journal Ülkü, meaning Ideal. The journal assumed the task of educating the masses based on western ideas, habits and tastes.

The quest for how communication can serve for
national identity and unity has been an ongoing research emphasis in political science. However, the function of communication is highlighted as only a channel or network. Public relations offers a vast potential since it offers “an elaborate model communication that focuses on how meanings are socially constructed” (Taylor and Kent, 2006 :303). Accordingly, the assumption that people are ignorant and need to be educated is an one way approach (Toledano and McKie, 2013) against public relations engagement perspective.

**Methodology**

This study employs semantic network analysis; it uses network analytic techniques - with words of written text as vertices - for revealing cognitive structure of Ülkü. The period from February 1933 to August 1936 is selected for data analysis as “Ülkü elite, is dominant during this particular period” (Aydın, 2004: 64). The unit of analysis is editorial in each Pajek, the program for analysis and visualization of networks is utilized for data analysis.

**Findings**

The results are not yet complete as the analysis is in progress. The researchers made no changes to the text of editorials but only deleted function words such as determiners and conjunctions from dataset. At the end, the most salient associations will be identified by calculating the importance of each vertex (word) within graph via centrality measures.

**Implications**

Unveiling collective structure of Ülkü from a network perspective can have important consequences for public relations literature in terms of building national identity.

The study will also demonstrate the utility and contribution of semantic network analysis for understanding the structure of Ülkü, as a vehicle for replacing the traditional even ‘archaic’ Ottoman-Muslim identity with the new modern-western identity. The initial findings of qualitative research have demonstrated embedded ideological meanings related to the modern national identity (i.e., Aydin, 2004), this study will further the understanding by revealing latent meaning in the text. Accordingly, the findings will provide insights regarding identity building communication practices which might be also valid in other cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** cognitive structure, national identity, public relations, semantic network analysis, Kemalism.

**References**


Purpose

This study examines social media use during the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfires disaster in Alberta, Canada, through the lens of McMillan and Chavis’s 1986 sense of community framework. Specifically, it asks and answers questions like: Why does an individual located geographically distant from a disaster area, choose to demonstrate support through social media? Do these individuals feel close in some way to the more proximate disaster victims? For individuals more proximate to the disaster, does creating, sustaining, or enhancing a sense of community act as a motivator to participate in the use of social media? Finally, the study asks if the characteristics that represent a sense of community are a consideration for disaster communicators using social media on behalf of organizations.

Literature Review

The review of literature shows a large body of research regarding crisis communication and social media use that focuses on form, source, the crafting of the social media message, and the public’s acceptance of that message. While there are common threads in organizational crisis communication and disaster communication, the differences are enough to warrant separate and distinct study of each concept. Within the distinct body of research focused on disaster communication, there is currently an underdeveloped exploration of the reasons that individuals use social media during disaster situations, with conflicting results. Social media has been lauded for its ability to coalesce information and create connection over distances; indeed the body of research suggests that information seeking is a strong motivator for social media use in disaster situations. Yet the body of research shows mixed negative and positive psychological results of its use in disasters. There is no known study that directly applies McMillan and Chavis’s 1986 sense of community framework to the use of social media in disaster situations.

Methodology

This study used a multi-method design to acquire both qualitative and quantitative data. Two populations of individuals who had utilized social media about and during the Fort McMurray fires completed an 18 question online survey: those residing within Fort McMurray (n=137), and those residing in other parts of Canada outside of Fort McMurray (n=101). In addition, disaster communicators associated with the Fort McMurray fires were interviewed (n=6) via phone by the researcher. All research was conducted within a three-week period.
Results and Conclusions

The study found that, though sense of community was not a specifically stated consideration in disaster communication planning, these dynamics played a role in the both the public’s and communicators’ use of social media during the Fort McMurray wildfire disaster. Further, a sense of community was a motivating factor in sustained social media connection for individuals after the disaster was over. Geographic proximity to the disaster was found to mediate an individual’s desire to be connected with others via social media during a disaster, even though populations across Canada seemed to experience the wildfire disaster in similar ways.

Limitations

A research study of this size and nature does not allow for other research methods, which may have been helpful in uncovering underlying motivations within a new and complicated framework. Further, surveys and interviews were conducted one year following the 2016 Fort McMurray fires. It is unclear how much individuals are able to understand, remember, or express about their underlying motivations.

Practical and Social Implications

Social media remains a tool for connection. This research strongly points to a shared experience being the number one driver for individuals to feel a sense of community, and that the feelings of a shared online experience can re-enforce feelings of a sense of community. While disaster communicators do not currently plan their communication activities or messaging around enabling a sense of community in audiences, they are utilizing social media in ways that include some components of sense of community. This study answers the call for more research into social media use during disaster, and has implications for emergency planning within Canadian municipalities. Disaster communicators have a responsibility to include sense of community tenets in their disaster planning, and have a viable tool in social media with which to fulfill this.

Keywords: Disaster communication, Fort McMurray fires, Sense of community, Social media
The scoring economy: Reputation management in the age of algorithms

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Introduction and purpose of the study

We live in an algorithmic age, an age where algorithms influence our smallest, most miniscule choices to our largest, most life-defining decisions. By surveilling and recording our online activity, algorithms are able to “construct a rich portrait of a digital identity that we cannot control” (Beck, 2015, p. 127). Myriad authors, researchers, and professionals dedicate their research to exposing the reality behind the biased, and subjective nature of these algorithms. The proliferation of algorithms and mounting public concern present challenges for not only individuals, but also organizations. In fact, algorithms have rapidly become commonplace in stakeholder interactions. Thus, communication practitioners will increasingly be tasked with “managing reputational [and trust] concerns [created by] algorithms” (Buhmann, 2019, para. 4). The purpose of this study is to understand how and to what extent algorithms are impacting corporate reputation management. Simply, this study explores how algorithms, like search engine and automated journalism algorithms, are changing how organizations build and maintain their reputations - both on and offline.

Methodology

To understand how algorithms impact organizational reputation, this study explores three main research questions. The first research question (RQ1) is concerned with how search engine algorithms impact customer trust and perception of an organization. The data collection method that will be used for this research question is an online survey deployed through Amazon’s MTurk with a sample size of at least 100 participants. The second research question explores how and to what extent search engine algorithms impact how organizations build trust with their stakeholders and manage their reputation. The data collection method used for this research question involved telephone interviews with ten Canadian senior communications professionals. The final research question explores how and to what extent automated journalism impacts customer trust and perceived credibility of organizations. The data collection method that was used for this research question was an online experiment deployed on Amazon’s MTurk with a sample size of 100 participants.
Results and conclusions

Given this paper is still in progress, the results are still to be determined. However, some limitations do exist. A clear limitation of this study is its small sample size, mainly due to the researcher’s limited time and financial resources – the sample is not representative of the Canadian communications industry and should only be referenced within the study’s parameters. Secondly, the researcher used the platform, Amazon MTurk, for data collection – namely in the online experiment and online survey data collection methodologies; the limitation of this platform is that there is no way to be sure the participants were honest in their responses, as they were compensated for their participation. This limitation could skew the accuracy and replicability results. Thirdly, participants in the telephone surveys could have exaggerated or provided inaccurate responses to the questions posed, creating a potential limitation. Fourthly, the literature assessed was limited to the researcher’s knowledge on the topic and access to information – potentially limiting the breath of literature included. Future studies in this field of research are encouraged to expand the scope of the study to more of a global scale to understand whether similar experiences exist in other jurisdictions outside of Canada. Another direction of study could focus on a specific organization to understand how various algorithms, like search, impact the organization’s reputation over time.

Practical and social implications

The practical and social implications of this study are both educational and directional for both communications practitioners and society in general. The results of this research have the potential to alter the practice of reputation management altogether. The practical intent of this study is to provide communicators with a guide of how to mitigate and manage reputational issues that might arise from our new scoring economy.

Keywords: reputation management; search engine algorithms; automated journalism; algorithmic transparency

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Inter-organizational Relationship Elaboration Function of PR to Foster CSOs Online Participation and co-creation in Advocacy Networks: ‘No Pesticides on my Plate’ campaign

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have distinctive goals, motivations, organizational cultures, activism levels, professional communication abilities and capacities; even they are acting in the same field. When they become members of an advocacy network, all those variations may lead to discrepant communicative behavior. Thus, encouraging member organizations to collaborate and co-create messages towards an advocacy goal is a major challenge in PR. CSOs as members of an advocacy network are neither external, nor internal publics and yet, they are both. This exclusive status is an opportunity and threat from the PR perspective; when considered thoroughly, it might help inter-organizational relationship elaboration function of PR. Bearing this in mind, relationship management approach provides a useful framework to study the quality of relationship within an advocacy network.

Social media instruments have become an integral part of the advocacy strategies of CSOs and many of them utilize these platforms to mobilize their audience and involve them to support their work, change a behavior, take part in activism, or increase awareness of an issue. So, this research takes social media outcomes of the network members into consideration, as well.

The main purpose of this study is to examine the quality of relationship between a leading CSO and network member CSOs as a potential indicator of members’ online communication performances. The study reviews an EU funded campaign, led by Buğday Association and named ‘No pesticides on my plate’. Accordingly, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1. What are the PR tactics employed by Buğday to encourage the member CSOs to support campaign objectives?

RQ 2. What is the quality of the relationship between Buğday and the member CSOs?

RQ 3. Do the member CSOs have the necessary technical capacity and human resources to manage their social media accounts?

RQ 4. Are the member CSOs participating the communication process and co-creating the campaign messages in the social media?

Consequently the following hypothesis is constructed:
H1: The quality of relationship between the leading CSO and the member CSOs in an advocacy network will predict the frequency of the members’ relevant social media messages.

Literature review

Civil society is an important social location for PR (Moloney, 2006). According to Taylor and Kent (2017, p.18) public relations as an inter-organizational relationship building function, can help organizations coordinate action, reduce uncertainty, build trust and sustain networks of organizations in civil society.

Among the theories such as Resource Dependence, Social Network, Collective Action and Community Ecology, Sommerfeldt and Kent (2015) asserted that Relationship Management Theory is beneficial in understanding the quality of relationships in a network.

“Communicative driven relationships with publics in NGOs can be studied from both relational processes and outcomes […], outcomes in terms of the communication goals of these relationships” (Oliveira, 2017 p.117). CSOs develop their presence in social media platforms and advance their advocacy strategy. These platforms are used to set the agenda according to CSOs interests and objectives (Duberry, 2019)

Methodology

The research depends on case study method; the chosen campaign is ‘No pesticides on my plate’ of an advocacy network, composed of a leading CSO, ‘Buğday Association’ and 100 member CSOs including cooperatives, food communities, associations, ecology networks, collectives, platforms and chambers. Their goal is to contribute to increasing food safety, health and protection of environment in Turkey through decreasing the use of pesticides. These organizations form the population of this study.

Considering the first research question, the study relies on data collected through interviews with the campaign’s senior communication practitioner via telephone and e-mail. The information is backed with textual analysis of secondary sources.

The quality of relationship between Buğday and the member CSOs is measured by a survey sent to the CSOs. It is based on a scale adapted by Sommerfeldt and Kent (2015). Control mutuality, trust, commitment and satisfaction are the items measured on a 5 point Likert scale, as indicators of relationship quality. The survey also includes descriptive items in order to depict the social media usage of the CSOs, which was the third research question. The descriptive data enabled us to identify the active and constantly updated accounts. These accounts are the subjects for the following question, for which content analysis method is employed. The contents of the member CSOs’ pre-determined social media accounts are scanned between December 2019-April 2020, and the frequency of relevant posts is detected quantitatively. Subsequently, the hypothesis is tested statistically.

Limitations

The results of this research are limited with the data gathered from a limited number of CSOs. Because of the comparatively small size of population and thus, survey data, the results are not generalizable. Another limitation is associated with the content analysis of social media accounts, whereas the posts on only two mostly preferred sites were taken into consideration and the temporary ‘stories’ are excluded from the analysis, because of the technical inconvenience.

Practical and social implications

This study contributes to our understanding of the role and significance of PR in civil society.
**Keywords:** Inter-organizational communication, Relationship management, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Advocacy networks, social media

**References**


Using Public Relations to drive fundraising success: A case study on relationship building in not-for-profits

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Introduction

This research aims to discover if the principles of public relations, through the work of Hon and Grunig’s, Guidelines for Measuring Relationships in Public Relations (1999), could be applied to the not-for-profit sector. And if so, could their measurement formula (1999) be used to build a scoring system that predicts an individual’s likelihood of giving to a charity, using statistical analysis through a case study.

Literature Review

In Hon and Grunig’s (1999) research, they looked at control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relationship, communal relationship, as markers for an organization’s relationship within different audience types. They concluded that “when perceptions of relationships are measured from both sides, one can begin to measure gaps in the way management and publics perceive the relationship” (p. 5). This model seems comparable to the work that is done in the fundraising sector, and furthers the importance of relationship.

Kelly (2001) explains, that in order for fundraising to be successful, it should be redefined as a specialization of public relations, as it manages communication between the organization and donors. Heath (2001) went on to discuss the elements of fostering a relationship, that is a part of an organization’s strategy, which are reciprocity, responsibility, reporting, and relationship nurturing, which were also discussed in Hon and Grunig’s (1999) work as symmetrical strategies that could be used to foster growth within an organization.

Methodology

For this study, a not-for-profit in Canada was selected, as it is in a system that is facing a significant challenges and changes in the sector, similar to that of many other not-for-profits. It operates with a database, similar to others, that allows fundraisers to keep records those they have relationship with. From this database, a random segment of individuals was chosen, with a total number of 5470 individuals being emailed a survey, following the design established by Hon and Grunig (1999). The results were then used to guide a score for an individual’s likelihood to give, based on their responses using a Likert scale, and applying a T-test.

Results and Conclusions

This research showed that the Hon and Grunig (1999) principles could be applied to understanding the donor relationship that donors. Those who knew more about the not-for-profit organization do not necessarily feel connected, but when the scales of Hon and Grunig (1999) are applied with a T-test, the impact that com-
Communications can have on their willingness to donate was discovered.

For example, similar to Hon and Grunig (1999), respondents answered questions related to control mutuality. Based on the Likert scale, the mean response for those that said yes or no for the potential of future giving in the next twelve months showed a statistical difference in their response. This would indicate that those who said they will potentially give in the next 12 months, were more likely at a 95% significance level to give a higher rating to the statements of control mutuality than those who did not intend to give. An important consideration for public relations professionals in the sector, working to build relationships of trust with their donors.

The responses were gathered with no identifying factors for respondents, meaning that the responses could not be returned to the database for an individual, for retesting at future intervals. This impacts the ability to use these scores as a marker for program success over time, but in future, research could be adjusted to allow for identifiers, to mark how communications campaigns change responses. This would be a significant opportunity for future research, and would be beneficial for public relations moving forward.

**Practical Implications**

This research provides a basis of understanding for the value that the Hon and Grunig (1999), offer beyond public relations. The principles of their work (1999) study can be applied to fundraising and can provide insight for understanding alumni and their relationship with charities and not-for-profits around the world. Moving forward, organizations should adjust their organizational structure to allow for public relations professionals to become relationship managers, while applying principles for improving relationship and connection with donors.

**Keywords:** Not-for-Profit, Fundraising, Relationship measurement, Case study, Stewardship

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What difference does it make? A study of UK initiatives designed to improve representation of women at senior levels in public relations

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Introduction and purpose

The last five years has seen many professional associations, public relations leaders, industry magazines, blogs and websites highlight the gender gap in public relations and actively campaign to ensure that women better represented in the workplace at senior level through a variety of initiatives and thought leadership.

In 2015 I carried out a review which explored *why* women resigned from senior roles in the public relations industry. Prior to this study there had been numerous attempts to explain the reason for women’s under-representation in senior public relations roles but little attention had been given to the factors which caused women to abandon a career.

The 2015 study found that the overriding reasons for women leaving public relations were because they felt excluded from ‘meaningful’ public relations work as childcare restrictions meant that they were not considered (or felt unable to take up) the ‘exciting’ projects. Interviewees believed that they were pushed, rather than pulled, into leaving public relations due to being side-lined into non-career roles, passed over for promotion due to their gender, or felt that they were unable to take part in a full range of occupational activities, thus removing them from relevant and career-enhancing power networks.

The last five years have seen an appetite among UK public relations leaders to reduce the gender gap in public relations and my 2020 study reviews and categorises the many initiatives from the past five years in the UK and reviews their potential impact.

Literature review

Globally, women outnumber men in junior and middle management public relations roles across most of the western world – but are in the minority in senior management.

The focus of writing on gender is shifting to a more mixed approach which sees oppression of women due to gender as inseparable from discussions around class, sexual orientation, disability, race, and age.

Women outnumber men in junior and mid-level public relations roles across most of the world - for instance in the UK (e.g. Chartered Institute of Public Relations, 2019; the USA (e.g. Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Sha, Tindall and Dozier, 2010), Germany (e.g. Fröhlich & Peters, 2007) and Russia (e.g. Tsetsura, 2012). However, in senior positions (above the role of account director/head of communications), women are in
the minority in public relations roles.

**Methodology**

A literature review which explored UK-based initiatives which were published by the following:

- Blogs featured in Vuelio’s ‘top 20’ PR bloggers list
- PR magazines
- leading PR websites
- PR professional associations

**Results and conclusions**

This study suggests that while a drive to improve the representation of women at senior levels in public relations has remained a strong focus in the public relations industry over the past five years, none have suggested that structural or societal change is needed. Principally the studies have focused on the following areas:

**Promotion of flexible working**

**Promotion of homeworking**

**Awareness-raising campaigns**

**Calls for salary transparency**

**Valorising successful women**

This study observes that despite the visibility of these initiatives, industry surveys such as the CIPR’s *State of the Profession* report (2019) suggest that the situation is becoming worse for women, not better. There are now increased gender discrepancies at senior levels in public relations and the occupation is becoming less diverse in terms of class, age, disability, and race.

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ABSTRACTS

Social Media, are the lines between professional and personal use blurring?

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Introduction and purpose of the study

A key aspect of understanding communications in a global environment is understanding social media usage. With the recent dramatic increase in social media usage of the past decade, the incorporation of social media and online platforms into communication strategies of organizations has been intensively discussed and researched. This study investigates social media usage across the different countries at a global steelmaker to understand how it is being used for business purposes. Are personal and professional lines blurring with social media use?

Literature review

With the increased use of social media in the workplace, our professional and personal lives are increasingly becoming intertwined. The literature suggests that social media interaction and managing the boundaries is more difficult online than offline. Social media is where the lines are blurred between our professional and private lives. It is where we share our music, movies, pictures, purchases, politics and morning lattes on display for the entire world to see.

In the article “Blurred Boundaries: Social Media privacy and the Twenty-First century employee” this dilemma is examined. Even though social media has become pervasive in the lives of employees, their use in the workplace remains legally ungoverned and unsettled. Employees bring to the shared workplace diverse and often paradoxical attitudes toward social media.

In the Arthur W. Page Society Report, The CEO View: The Impact of Communications on Corporate Character in a 24x7 Digital World the Social Media is now mature. CEO’s no longer perceive Twitter, the blogosphere or any other social media as emerging technologies, as experimental or as anything less than full-fledged communications channels that must be monitored, measured and interpreted in the same manner as the traditional ones (Page Society, 2013).

Leading in the Age of Super-Transparency, Austin states that thanks to social media and an increasing flood of data, the capacity to generate causes and controversies almost instantly has become the new norm in today’s “super-transparent society. “Most business leaders have not yet come to grips with the new reality — and what it means for their organizations (Austin, 2016).

Methodology

A population of 19 professionals was interviewed from 7 different countries working at different hierarchical levels in Communication and in other areas such as IT, Human Resources, Legal, and Marketing. Content Analysis, a quantitative method of research was also used as a tool to gain further insights into each of the questions.
Results and Conclusions

Both the interview research and content analysis demonstrate that personal and professional boundaries are blurring and that policy guidelines are important.

While this report offers some insight into communication strategies in a global company and how social media tools are used, it also serves as an incentive to begin more research in this area. Expanding on this research from participants in the global manufacturing sector and broadening the scope of a traditional commodity industry, could lead to more conclusions on effective global communications.

Practical and Social implications

We can acknowledge there can be no escaping the rise of the use of social media tools in successful global communications and business interactions. Most social media platforms are not even 10 years old, but they are fundamentally woven into the fabric of everyday communications across the globe. These changes in communication are unprecedented. The established more senior executive must come to terms with communication channels that are culturally diverse, fast paced and abundant. In the past business relationships for the most part were face-to-face, today they exist virtually on an incredibly diverse number of platforms. This fundamental shift in human behavior has taken place at such a speed that are human resource policies and legal framework is left still catching up. What started as social digital platforms in our personal lives, are now business tools with significant ramifications if used incorrectly, both personally and professionally. The 2016 World Economic Report outlook and call to action states that after a “wild childhood”, it is now time for digital media’s “coming of age”. Industry, the public sector, and the individual must assume responsibility for fostering the opportunities offered by digital media, while helping to mitigate the negative effects on individuals, organizations and society.

Keywords: social media, digital, global, communication professional, strategy.

Bibliography


Bringing back joy to leftover women. The Impact of SK-II Marriage Market Takeover Campaign on the perception of women in China and PR practice.

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Introduction and purpose of the study

In China, single women over the age of 25 often face huge pressure to get married. They have endured being called ‘剩女 sheng nu (leftover women)’ by families, media and the society. In popular discourse, women of that age are often described as selfish, picky, and favour of rich men (Ji, 2015). In 2016, a Procter & Gamble-owned Japanese skincare brand SK-II launched a video-based PR campaign called ‘Marriage Market Takeover’ (MMT) and stepped forward trying to change the way the unmarried women are seen by the society and break the negative stigma. The campaign led to doubling the SKII sales YoY, which have contributed to making 2016 the most successful year in the brand’s history in China (Troedsson, 2017). Despite its marketing recognition, the contribution of the campaign to the enhancement of societal dialogue has never been explored in full.

Literature Review

Following argument presented Ihlen and Verhoeven (2012), as well as Edwards (2012, 2018), understanding Public Relations role ‘in’, and contribution ‘to’ the society seems one of the discipline’s critical aims. Yet, for some PR scholars, any of brands’ promotional activities tackling social issues (e.g. migration crisis, women empowerment, LGBTQR awareness) can only be classified as Marketing Public Relations (MPR, Harris, 1993), IMC (e.g. Schultz, 2003) or brand activism (du Toit 2017; Sarkar and Kotler, 2018), and thus discredited as not fitting into the framework of ‘pure’ PR. Although several related concepts tackle the intercept of PR and society (e.g. social marketing, social advertising, or CSR) none of them seems to clearly identify what are the obligations of promotional PR to society.

With the ostensible discrepancy between calls for understanding PR’s role in the society and reluctance to acknowledge promotional PR contributions to the development of socially sustainable marketing communication, it appeared interesting to examine SKII campaign’s impact on the perception of women in China and PR practice.

Aims

Firstly, the project aimed at understanding to what extent the SKII campaign has changed the perception of women over the age 25 in China.

The second goal was to explore the impact of the SK-II MMT campaign on communication
industry practice. In particular, it focused on PR, marketing and communication professionals’ perception and evaluation of the campaign.

Methodology

Two studies were conducted to answer research questions of the project.

In study 1, 1127 posts from Chinese biggest social communication media platform ‘Sina Weibo’ including comments on leftover women were analysed. Mixed-method approach was adopted. Qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis followed by pair-wise t-test analyses were employed.

In Study 2, twelve professionals recruited from academia and communication industry in China were asked about the perception, feelings and potential impact of the campaign on the communication industry using in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Results

The findings of Study 1 showed that the negative (DV1) and neutral discourse (DV2) about leftover women changed after the SK-II Marriage Market Takeover campaign. Compared to 2016, negative perception of others toward ‘leftover women’ decreased from 23% to 10% while negative self-perception decreased from 42% to 30%. On the other hand, neutral self-perception increased significantly from 2.9% to 29.8%.

Results of the Study 2 revealed that SK-II campaign influenced communication professionals to emulate it through using similar communication approaches, as well as to recognise the value of education as one of promotional strategies. At the same time, most of the participants also indicated that the campaign was a result of actual changes in the social environment.

Conclusion

By revealing the conflict between modern and traditional value, the SK-II Marriage Market Takeover campaign has illustrated the connections and tensions between society, in this context, the public relations profession could be regarded as social agents (Edwards & Hodges, 2011). Finding also echo with the work of Molleda (2001, Molleda and Moreno, 2006; Molleda et al., 2003), and Sriramesh (Sriramesh, 1992, 1999, 2002; Sriramesh and Vercic, 1995), who have argued that the cultural context of society will influence the ways in which PR practitioners carry out their tasks (Edward, 2012).

The study is not free from limitations. It cannot be directly determined whether the observed changes in the discourse about women over the age of 25 can be attributed solely to the SKII PR campaign as a number of influential global social movements (e.g. #MeToo) has contributed to increasing awareness of issues connected to women portrayal and perception, as well weakening the impact of traditional women gender stereotypes on people’s attitudes.
Electronic Word-of-Mouth Marketing on Amazon: Exploring how and to what extent Amazon reviews affect sales

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Abstract
Consumers today base many of their decisions on peer referrals and online reviews. With the omnipresence of social media and online reviews, electronic word-of-mouth marketing (eWOM) has become a priority for many companies for both business growth and reputational management. This research project examines the growth of two start-ups, Kickstarter A and Kickstarter B, who sell their products, Product A and Product B, on Amazon. Product A is a children’s science craft kit and Product B is a reflective vest for athletes. Company identities and product information have been stripped from this research to maintain business confidentiality. The objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of eWOM and its impact on sales. This study also seeks to help organizational leaders understand the significance of eWOM and its role in effective consumer and stakeholder relations, and in overall brand management. This research study focuses on two areas, the effectiveness of Amazon reviews and the value of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) marketing on sales. The objective of the research is to discern the following hypothesis: A company that sells its products on Amazon and primarily relies on word-of-mouth. The researchers of this project explored eWOM by examining Amazon reviews from two different Kickstarter companies to determine which elements of online reviews impact product sales. By overlaying Amazon review data and sales figures from each Kickstarter company, researchers were able to determine the review factors that companies should focus on to increase their sales and grow their brands.

Some of the limitations encountered throughout the study included the limited amount of reviews for Product A and Product B. The reviews that the researchers extracted did not capture the entire universe of Kickstarter companies, making the research sample limited in scope. Secondly, the researchers only analyzed two retailers, Kickstarter A and Kickstarter B; thus, the findings could be a coincidence as there are many other potential factors that the researchers might not have explored due to limited time and scope of the study. Lastly, the researchers of this study were only able to obtain the first 20 months of sales data from Kickstarter A and Kickstarter B. For a deeper analysis, the researchers recommend that future studies include more financial data. With a more robust financial data set, researchers will be able to establish concrete trends and correlations. The consideration for potential bias should be considered when reviewing this study. Additionally, bias may surface within the study if the researchers did not present enough
contrary evidence. This can lead to confirmation bias where researchers use filtered information to justify their hypotheses. A lack of contrary evidence and diverse perspectives can limit a holistic viewpoint and increase the bias in the findings. The practical implications of this study’s results show that products with a high volume of positive reviews made by verified purchasers positively correlate to product sales; ultimately, this study helps organizations manage their reputation (and sales) better online.

**Keywords:** electronic word-of-mouth marketing, Amazon, online reviews, Kickstarter, sales, reputational management, brand reputation, online reputation management
Adaptation and reliability and validity of game immersion scale in Turkish

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The developments in communication technologies lead to human computer interaction. The researchers focus on two main streams, persuasive technologies and gamification in public relations and marketing communications. Although the terminal goal of the both is the same, behavioral change, their approach is different. In this study, gamification, one of the popular research areas in persuasion research, is studied. Although gamification practices are widely used in mobile application and web page designs, literature lacks measuring gameful experience. Game immersion scale is developed for measuring users game experience (Jennett et al., 2008). Game immersion is measured by the Turkish researchers, however there is no available Turkish version of game immersion scale, which is the justification of this study, Thus, the aim of the study is to adapt game immersion scale into Turkish and test for validity and reliability within Turkish context.

Literature review

Gamification refers to the use of game mechanics in non-game contexts. It has become popular over the past decade due to the potential to convince people, motivate them for action and trigger desired behaviors. Researchers focused on measuring game experience developed valid and reliable scale to measure the gaming experience (Brockmyer et al., 2009; Eppmann, Bekk, & Klein, 2018; Högberg, Hamari, & Wästlund, 2019; Jennett et al., 2008). Available scales for measuring game experience are game flow scale, game immersion scale, GAMEX (Gameful Experience Scale), GAMEFULQUEST (Gameful Experience Questionnaire). Immersion in gameful experience is the common dimension in most of the scales.

Methodology

The purpose of the study is to test adapted Turkish version of game immersion scale for reliability and validity. An online data collection setting is used where participants are first shown a gamified marketing application video. A total of 415 participants participated in the study, remaining 402 usable questionnaires after missing values. Invitations are sent to the participants through emails and social media accounts, thus convenience sampling method is used. The data collection tool consists of demographics and Turkish version of the game immersion scale. The structural equation modeling approach is operationalized with AMOS v24. Proposed game immersion scale factor structure is tested with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Composite (or Construct) Reliability (CR) value is calculated for reliability measure, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value is calculated for convergent validity measure, and Fornell and Larcker (1981) discriminant criteria is operationalized for discriminant validity. A new method for assessing discriminant validity in partial least squares structural equation modeling the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) is
also calculated as AVE is a strict criterion for discriminant validity.

**Results and conclusions**

The original game immersion scale is composed of three dimension and 7 sub dimensions. The current study test game immersion scale in Turkish culture context. Results suggests that Turkish version of game immersion scale is reliable and valid. However, Fornell and Larcker (1981) criteria violations are evident, and HTMT values suggest discriminant validity is ensured at the minimum acceptable cutoff values. Further analysis and recommendations is suggested in the study.

**Practical and social implications**

Gamification is widely used in mobile applications and web pages for education, business management, marketing, employee education and motivation, sustainability, health, public relations etc. In this study, Turkish version of game immersion scale is tested for validity and reliability and offered for Turkish researchers’ use.

**Keywords**: Game Immersion, Validity, Reliability, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, HTMT.

**References**


Exploring the cumulative 25-year impact of BledCom as a network of influence and action

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Background

BledCom is an institution that re-creates and regenerates itself every year. It has constantly evolved (and revolved) around a common core of relationships centred on BledCom’s founding group who continue to organise it. BledCom is a very strong node of productive influence within the strongly inter-connected network of academic public relations. Over more than two decades, it has enabled a great many academics and practitioners to meet, share their work and to collaborate on new productive ventures. It is this third aspect, collaboration and the creation and realisation of new opportunities, that interests me.

My own very minor experience serves as an illustration. In 2011, I was invited to take part in BledCom for the first time. I was struck by both the breadth and quality of discussion and by the richness of the contacts I was able to make, to the extent of returning several times as a delegate during the years since then. The insights gained and the connections made stay in the memory and I continue to value them.

Three instances underline the collaborative power of BledCom. The first of these was that in Bled in 2011 I met my proposed project partner, Lavinia Cinca, who was looking to create a communication association in Romania. That BledCom meeting led to a sustained period of dialogue, with subsequent meetings in London, Coventry, Brussels and at Bledcom again in 2012. FEIEA’s help was forthcoming and an internal communication seminar duly took place in Bucharest. Lavinia and I began a further commercial collaboration in 2016 connected with the European robotics agency, euRobotics. That collaboration has continued in each subsequent year and will continue in 2020.

The second instance was that I met Caron Jones, head of a Public Relations Masters programme at the UK University of Greenwich. As a direct consequence of this encounter, Caron invited me to bring my practitioner’s perspective to the PR MA programme and I was therefore able to develop my teaching interests as a guest lecturer over several subsequent years.

The third instance is that I met Kevin Ruck, of whom I had known but never met before BledCom 2011. Through informal discussions at BledCom, we discovered several shared perspectives on the development of internal communication as an emerging professional practice. This resulted in small-scale collaborative activities between our two respective professional organisations, CIPR and IoIC.

These are personal, modest and perhaps even banal examples of how connections made at Bled-
Com can be fruitful. Nonetheless, they illustrate how four individual BledCom 2011 participants were able to realise opportunities that may not otherwise have arisen without the beneficial influence of an institution that manifests itself early each summer on the shores of Lake Bled.

Our premise is that over 20 years, BledCom will have generated a wide, diverse and numerous range of productive collaborations leading to the creation of research projects and papers, articles, books and events, work opportunities, the formation of new teams, and no doubt the spawning of countless other social relationships. Therefore, capturing, recording and presenting the totality of these many and various ‘products’ of BledCom will provide a qualitative and detailed measure of the impact of BledCom over 20 years, seen through the lens of BledCom’s collaborative power.

With the consent of the BledCom organisers and as a personal contribution to an institution we hold in very high regard, Lavinia and I propose to research and construct a network map of influence to examine and establish the power, extent and productivity of what I choose to call BledCombinations. The BledCom organisers will be familiar with BledCombinations, following a previous ‘proof of concept’ presentation and then a proposal submission for the 2015 BledCom which we were unable to pursue at that time. Circumstances this year are now favourable and we would therefore like to fulfil a commitment we made several years ago by completing our project and presenting our findings at BledCom 2020.

Method

The BledCom organising team has previously made available to us the contact details for past BledCom participants. We would hope to obtain an updated data set from the 2020 organising team, with all due regard to the provisions for data protection of GDPR. Using a standard set of questions, via correspondence and some face-to-face contact where possible, we will ask BledCom participants to describe, enumerate and evaluate the collaborative activities in which they have been involved as a direct or indirect consequence of their personal participation in BledCom. We will examine the resulting data, identify patterns and present the results, drawing on insights where appropriate from pertinent academic theory concerning the formation, activity and power of networks.

Timetable

Subject to the support of the BledCom organisers, the initial research carried out during the weeks to Easter 2020. Findings will be written up and presented both textually and graphically (the intention at this time is to produce a visually rich network map) in time for BledCom 2020 in July.

If, as hoped, the BledCombinations project is well-received and it provides added insights into the contribution that BledCom has made since its inception, the data, report and graphic representations could be further updated following future BledComs. Since the volume of data that may be generated by the research is unknown, future iterations may also be fruitful for as long as it was perceived to retain some explanatory power. However, within the scope of the present project, it is our intention that this year we will finally bring the BledCombinations concept to fruition.

Participants

I would propose to lead the project, supported by Lavinia, with active participation from the BledCom organisers where required to facilitate contact with past and present BledCom participants.
Next steps

We look forward to the decision of the Bled-Com organisers regarding this proposal. Subject to a positive response, we would then develop a more detailed project plan and scope and proceed quickly to the research field phase.
Who are these Envoys—Managing Communications Behind Seven Questions and Answers that Paint a Picture of Capitol Hill’s Press Secretaries’ Congressional Walls!?

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study/Research Question

Most United States citizens and many scholars across the social sciences do not realize each Member of the United States Congress employs at least one individual—loosely termed a “public relations professional”—traditionally referred to as a “press secretary”—increasingly called a “communications director”—who manages external communications about, and thus the image of, that politician.

This paper is about these little-studied communication management professionals. It builds on a presentation at the 2019 BledCom conference titled, “A Most Heroic Effort . . . in a Most Unique Political Climate: Capitol Hill’s Press Secretaries’ Attempts to Enhance and Protect Reputations of Members of the United States Congress” (Downes 2019). Doing so it addresses the research question: “What inquiries—and answers to those inquiries—have emerged to help us to understand broadly the practices of press secretaries serving Members of the United States Congress?”

The Literature

Considering the nexus where “communication management,” “political communication” and “congressional messages” intersect this paper draws from a wide-ranging literature review. Doing so it discusses why the world “relationship” is often alluded in the literature and describes the “encoder/decoder” partnership so essential to this relationship (Sha 2017); shares what public relations/mass communication theory might tell us about the press secretaries’ worlds (Van Ruler 2016); and comments on the influence of online venues that speak to the press secretaries’ work in today’s social media environment (Tam & Kim 2019; Wright & Hinson 2017). To date only three published studies have used Congress’ press secretaries as units of analysis (Downes, 2008; Hess 1991; Cook, 1989).

Methodology

The paper is built on roughly 18 data sets the author collected from surveys of, interviews with, a focus group among, and ethnographic observations of, Congress’ press secretaries. The first, in 1997, was gathered through unstructured phone interviews with practicing press secretaries. The most recent, in 2019, via in-person interviews
on Capitol Hill with today’s Congressional press secretaries. The result, over 22 years, has been a growing, often seamless, in-depth exploration of the press secretaries’ roles, goals and impetuses built by a series of questions refined, then addressed, from progressive data collections.

Results and Conclusions

This paper poses and answers the following seven questions that emerged from the aforementioned data sets:

Who Are the Press Secretaries? provides an overview of the press secretaries’ motivations, personality characteristics, and highs and lows of their days. It also discusses similarities and differences Congressional press secretaries have with traditional public relations professionals.

What Do the Press Secretaries Think of their Bosses? reflects on the press secretaries’ views toward their “boss”—i.e., the Member of Congress they unconditionally defend, promote, and faithfully serve.

What do the Press Secretaries Do? introduces the multiple tasks press secretaries perform and the “public relations tools” they use. It describes balls they juggle each day—including those thrown at them from constantly emerging social, political, cultural and economic events nationally and worldwide.

How do Press Secretaries Work with Traditional Media? reminds readers press secretaries work with two types of “reporters.” The first, journalists working for traditional media outlets, are discussed.

How Do Press Secretaries work with New Media? addresses how social (“new,” “digital,” “emerging”) media have dramatically changed the press secretaries lives. Doing so it discusses the second type of “reporters”—i.e. nontraditional ones, particularly “citizen journalists.”

How Do Press Secretaries Decide Issues on Which to Focus? describes the “Wave Model” explaining how Congress’ press secretaries decide which issues (i.e. which “waves”)—among several dozen available—on which to focus, and how and where these “waves” develop.

What Power Do the Press Secretaries Have? speaks to the realization, heightened over time, congressional staff members such as press secretaries can acquire significant power—unrecognized by much of the citizenry.

Practical and Social Implications

The paper is prelude to the author’s forthcoming book with the working title, Press Secretary: The Story of Capitol Hill’s Image Makers. It revisits a central inquiry posed in both the book and in the aforementioned 2019 Bled Conference paper asking if “the press secretaries’ work as unabashed advocates promoting Members of Congress is good for the United States democracy.” It responds: “if press secretaries and reporters do their jobs well, messages shared with the citizenry have verity, the nation is well served, and democracy’s best outcomes are enhanced.” What is unique about this paper’s answer to this question is significant commentary on how today’s press secretaries respond to tweets and other messages from President Donald Trump—i.e. a world leader whose communication style, oftentimes unorthodox and unprecedented, has the potential each day to impact United States’ and global societies.

Keywords: Congressional communication management, press secretary, global society
Just plain Public Relations (PR)

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Introduction and purpose of the study

This paper has as its main purpose to defend, upon a theoretical reflection and departing from an empirical exploratory study, that what we do is “just plain PR” and advocate for a broader understanding and defence of the concept. During at least the last 40 years, scholars and practitioners have worked with an understanding of PR practitioners as bridge builders, sometimes for better organizational and societal outcomes, others at the service of not so good or democratic or equatitarian goals. But we seem to forget that there have always been good and bad uses of science and technology, the law has been misused and that there are still some news that are not fake news. What has really impacted the authors is that we seem to have not only thrown out the baby with the bathwater but, moreover, we have kept the untidy bathwater while losing the baby.

As we are now facing an era where the responsibility of striving towards higher levels of enterprises engagement with people, the planet and prosperity - to use the words of the United Nations Secretary General, António Guterres (2019), might be seen as the great challenge for the organizations, and especially enterprises, the authors dare to say that the time might have come to get the baby back in the bathtub if we’ll manage not only to reshape the way society sees the PR discipline but also how the discipline sees itself.

Literature review

Coombs and Holladay (2007, 2014) entitled their book “It’s not just PR - Public Relations in Society” a parody of the most heard phrase concerning the theme of press relations, in American movies, “It’s just PR”. Even if the main issues discussed are not new and they depart from some articles and ideas developed by White and Mazur (1995), L'Etang (2007) or even Grunig, Hunt, Dozier, Repper, Simões in the early nineties, as well as from the Bled Manifesto (van Ruler and Vercic, 2002) PR practitioners and scholars seem to have always felt the need to explain what they do and, moreover, to offer some kind of definition of PR that has always been in a very unstable balance between a more market oriented or a more society oriented perspective. Between what has been called the dominant paradigm - Grunig’s Symmetrical Approach (1992) - and what we may in a lack of a better word call the critical paradigm the last 30 years haven’t seemed to be able to offer a coherent identity to PR.

In this paper the expression “just PR” will be taken at its face value, that is, we assume it as meaning exactly what it says. The point being that whenever you call it PR, communication, strategic communications, corporate or institutional communications, issues management, corporate public affairs, governmental communication, public information or even health or developmental communication we are always in a certain sense speaking about a certain kind of
PR area or function (Lesley, 19; Cutlip, Center and Broom 19; Lee, 2008; Lee et al, 2011; Leerbinger, 2006; Broom and Sha 2013; Wilcox, Cameron, Xifra, 2012; Falconi, 2004; Wilcox, Cameron, Reber, Shin, 2012; L’Etang, 2008).

Methodology

To recollect the data authors used the answers already offered to two open ended questions that were part of 4 different online surveys that were sent to different organizations and enterprises in the last three years. These answers constitute what one may consider as a convenience sample covering different enterprises, from SMEs to international corporations operating in Portugal, from non for profit organizations or sports federations to public sector institutions.

Content analyses was the method chosen to organise and present the data. Main categories included aspects concerning the relevance of “public relations” strategies, tactics and actions to the overall achievements of the organization both in its institutional, political, and commercial endeavours as well as those aspects that were referred as being practised or felt as needed for a better development of the enterprises under other designations from the area of human resources to public affairs, or from media relations to what has been called “social media managers” or “web developers”. Questions about the importance of the practitioners for a better management of conflict, as banners spanning both for the organizations and the society development, or as trust builders were also addressed.

Results and conclusions

It was a common idea in the eighties of the last century that all organizations had the PR function: good, bad or indifferent. Essentially from the theoretical aspects of the reflection this paper acknowledges, it can be said that it seems many of the endeavours taken by PR that wouldn’t need any societal doubts of their importance, interest or need seem to have been forgotten, misunderstood or not taken as relevant especially by those that have accepted the dominant paradigm in PR. In reality they have been called by many designations or names from governmental and public information, health communication, C4D, or more recently public diplomacy. Theoretical the relevance of these areas as belonging to the PR realm, don’t seem to have been fully acknowledge except by some few authors as for instance L’Etang (2008), Wilcox, Cameron, and Xifra (2012), Curtin and Graicer (2007), Simões (1992), White and Mazur (1992). Independent of these aspects we might also need to recover some ideas developed by Heath (2001, 2005, 2006) that had to do with more political aspects of the function and especially with what has been called the capacity PR seems to give to organizations to have their ideas discussed out there in the market-place of ideas.

From an empirical perspective this study is just an exploratory one that tries to understand the complexity of the misunderstandings involving the profession and the ignorance of what the PR function might cover.

The main conclusion is that it’s time to forget the american history of PR, the “spin doctor” era, or so many other names that have kept a certain folk PR theory and embrace a more global approach under the idea as Moss, Powell and DeSanto (2010) have put it of “modern PR” or just get reed of the concept and embrace some other one that enables a coherent, unified and is really representative of so many functions developed in as many different kinds of organizations, in the prosecution of a better understanding between organizations, institutions, enterprises and their stakeholders’s nets, understood as main and important actors in themselves, and not only in their relationships with organizations.
Practical and social implications

None of these questions are new. We’ve been struggling with them for the last 40 years, but now we are facing new challenges those that have transformed our communitarian relationships nets in virtual, global, and every day faster ones that go by the name of “www”, the internet or social networks, virtual or amplified reality, global trade, or intercultural (a)communication. Never as today questions as incommunication or acommunitation are a reality, and never as today concepts as understanding as negotiation seem to have so much importance not only for organizations and institutions (from local to global enterprises, from local to supra-governmental CSOs, form local public administration offices to UN) but for societal development and peace. The case for a broader definition of the PR concept and the need to make society acknowledge it will be made. Moreover, it will be defended that even though as Public Relations practitioners we can’t expect to increase human knowledge, we can and must accomplish our mission: to promote human understanding. That applies only if we truly believe that we only communicate if we are able to understand.

Keywords: Public Relations, Communication, Negotiation, Understanding, Just PR
Public Relations in Turkey: Career Experiences of Turkish female PR practitioners “being a woman in a male-dominated world”

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

In past thirty years public relations become an attractive profession for women. 1980’s in USA literature “gender switch” term highlights the quantitative change in women and men practitioners in public relations field. In 1960’s one of ten practitioner was women, but now women practitioners in USA is %70 and it can be said the percentage is similar as well in Turkey. However, as the participants state in their interviews the dominance in numbers and being general managers of agencies does not mean that women hold the power, they faced with problems of “being a woman in a male-dominated world”.

The aim of this study is, to analyse the development of public relations profession in Turkey through the experiences of women public relations practitioners working in agencies as agency owners and medium-level practitioners. In this respect, at first to gain an understanding of being a women public relations professional, how they define the profession and then to discuss the impacts of feminization and gender on the profession. Since the numbers clearly show that female practitioners in public relations is higher than male practitioners.

Literature Review

In USA literature the concept of feminization is considered with the increasing number of women in public relations. The assumptions of feminization in public relations can be categorised under four headings: (1) Public relations as a management function, (2) Public relations and roles theory, (3) Public relations as a profession and (4) Gender.

Concept of feminization roots in two paths of research Excellence Theory and Roles Studies. Excellence Theory (1992), which explains public relations as a management function, may contribute to overall organizational effectiveness (Grunig et al, 2002). Glen M. Broom is the pioneer of roles research of public relations and these researches define the daily routines of public relations practitioners (Broom, 1982; Broom and Smith, 1978, 1979).

In generalizing the concept of public relations, it is important to realize that the two important aspects of public relations are, communication and dialogue. Relationship building is shaped by the status and the experiences of an individual and developed by the culture, and provides each individual for one’s to communicate with their own values and assumptions. Thus, although the basic concepts are stable, public relations activi-
ties may vary according to the cultural and historical development in a particular area (Hodges, 2006). Practice of public relations is shaped by the “life world” of the professionals, moreover both the experiences of the professionals and societal changes shape the profession in a particular area (Hodges, 2006).

Methodology

Since this is an ongoing research and till now, interviewed with thirteen women practitioners whom are the agency owners and managers in Istanbul. Moreover, interviewed with four medium-level PR practitioners. This study tries to find out through the experiences of women PR practitioners how they define the profession and to be a woman in public relations. Currently, there are seventeen interviews, however planning to interview with two more managers and eleven more medium level PR practitioners.

Results and Conclusions

After the interviews, first findings are grouped under four headings; “public relations profession”, “being a woman professional in public relations”, “the image of public relations and women” and “reputation problem of public relations”.

Women practitioners define “public relations” as a strategic communication and highlight the importance of public relations in crisis communication. Practitioners define public relations basis in understanding culture and the period, and analysing these and attributing these data to a scientific ground. Moreover, some of practitioners define public relations as a profession, some of them define as a semi-profession and the others define as a sector rather than a profession.

Practitioners define “being a woman in public relations”, via the advantages and/or disadvantages of being a woman. Some practitioners think that being a woman can be both advantageous and disadvantageous, however, the others think that neither advantageous nor disadvantageous.

Under the heading of “the image of public relations and woman”, woman practitioners believe that public relations still do not find its value because of some reasons; the pioneers of the sector of women, in the past believed that practitioners should be presentable, sector get late to the developments of public relations in the world and lastly Turkey’s economic, political and social impacts on the profession.

Practitioners states that the reasons of “reputation problem of public relations” as capital problems of sector, cultural and social effects, abstract results of public relations, which cannot be measurable and dishonest trading.

Since this is an ongoing project, those results above are the experiences of twelve women practitioner whom are the agency owners and managers in Istanbul. However, planning to interview with the PR professionals in these agencies who are working as medium level managers. In order to deepen the understanding of the profession in Turkey and also it makes possible to see the generation differences and/or similarities.

Practical and Social Implications

This particular paper discusses the past and now of the profession through the experiences of PR practitioners, moreover, the effects of feminization and gender on the profession in Turkey.

Keywords: Public relations, public relations professionals, gender, feminization.

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Shields or targets: A rubber bullet theory of women leadership in public relations

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Literature review

Gender is one of the major axes of structural inequality that has impacted the professional field of public relations since its inception. Despite the equality laws, women in public relations face persistent disadvantages compared to men in almost all aspect of their professional lives, including employment, salary differentials, career progression, harassment, emotional abuse and exclusion from the circles of power, leading scholars to label public relations as a “pink-ghetto” work environment (Edwards, 2018). Even though public relations has undergone a process of feminization, it is well documented that women are still largely absent from leadership and senior management positions in the US and the UK with up to 80%-20% ratio in favor of men (Fitzpatrick, 2013; CIPR, 2019). On the contrary, Slovenia – the country with the lowest gender inequality in Europe – portrays a very different picture. In the government owned companies, for example, 113 women lead public relations departments, while only 39 are led by men. However, these statistics obscure gender challenges and obstacles that female leaders face in their everyday practice in the context of Slovenian culture, where everyday sexism, exclusion from ruling apparatus, gender hierarchies, gendered performativity in leadership positions and cultural norms of holding women responsible for men’s behavior are omnipresent and often remain unchallenged. Patriarchal culture underpinning institutional values and male-dominated organizational management structures still reinforces male-privilege and accord men power over women.

Purpose and theory

Based on lived experience in Slovenian public relations practice, we develop rubber bullet theory as a new feminist theory of public relations. Drawing on radical feminist premises that patriarchy devalues women and work associated with them and that female collective experiences in public relations are underpinned by injustices, oppression, silencing and symbolic violence against women (Rakow and Nastasia, 2019), rubber bullet theory assumes that female public relations leaders find themselves in a position of targets and/or shields of modernized patriarchal domination. Leadership positions are normatively associated with male traits of rationality, logic and expertise. Perpetuating gender bias stereotypes women as lacking these traits; they are expected to perform caring, nurturing and supportive roles instead. As such, they are either promoted to leadership positions to fail while preserving male-dominated circles of power (i.e. a shield) or to be held responsible for individual or organisational actions, even when they are excluded from the decision-making (i.e. a target). Rubber bullets in form of critiques, insults, humiliations, hate speech, bullying and harassment...
are “fired” at them from different actors, including the publics, the media and their superiors. They are not lethal for their career, but they bruise their reputation, integrity, position, credibility, expertise and potentially lead to emotional trauma, burnout and deteriorating mental health. Some women leaders find themselves under protection of powerful men (“godfathers”), but only as long as they do not break their predefined relationship agreement. Underpinning the logic of this experience is that women in leadership are often systematically undermined, held to higher standards and considered as intruders who need to be removed from a powerful position back to their “rightful place” (Beard, 2017). The impact of these gendered regimes of injustice on organizations and public relations occupation alike is immense. It ranges from jeopardizing realization of female leadership potential to hemorrhaging female talent by women either being removed from/leaving the industry or shying away from public relations leadership positions in the first place.

Methodology

Rubber bullet theory is verified through in-depth interviews with senior women and men in leading positions in public relations in Slovenia to explore and compare their narratives of lived experience, occupational and workplace inequities, gendered performativity, institutionalized gendered meanings, stereotypes and expectations, and how they negotiate the power relations of gender in their everyday practice.

Conclusions and implications

Rubber bullet theory importantly challenges progressive premises of female career trajectory, explores dynamics of power inequality and deterioration of women in leadership and explains reproduction of the patriarchal gender relations. It importantly answers the calls for greater feminist theorizations of public relations through in-depth qualitative investigation as well as contributes to knowledge around largely under-researched gendered regimes of power, structural inequalities and social relations in Slovenia. Despite its focus on experience of women leaders in Slovenian public relations, the theory’s central premises bear relevance to other (feminized) professional fields in different cultures and contexts.

Keywords: public relations leadership, women, rubber bullet theory, radical feminism

References


Mongolia: The Missing Part of the Global Public Relations Map

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Introduction and purpose of the study.

Public relations (PR) has developed to a multi-billion-dollar global industry. It has grown deep roots in the business and social institutions of society. Emerging as one-way, instructional communication, PR has matured to a sophisticated form of communication. Despite the fact that globalisation has pushed the scholarship and practice horizon of PR across physical, economic and cultural boundaries there are still uncharted parts of the world. Mongolia is a missing part of the global PR map.

The purpose of the research was to explore the state of PR development in Mongolia from a professional’s perspective to fill a gap in the scholarship of global public relations. Two rationales motivated this scientific discovery. First, it was the lack of scientific research on public relations in Mongolia. Second, the transformations Mongolia goes through, which require proactive dialogue for reaching mutual understanding in times of change. The research was guided by the overarching research question

What is the state of development of PR in Mongolia viewed through the theoretical framework for global public relations?

Literature review

The Western scholarship (American and British) continues to be the dominating conceptual lens through which PR is globally defined which has opened a “chasm that needs to be bridged” (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009, p. xxxii). However, progress has been made. Comprehensive global public relations scholarship explored theoretical and cross-cultural complexities and trends from various angles. Sriramesh & Verčič, (2020) focused on changes in the global communication landscape and PR industry worldwide, blending research-based theory with practice. Curtin & Gaither (2007) provided a cultural-economic theoretical model of PR together with a practice matrix of PR strategies and tactics employed in a variety of political, and cultural contexts. Russ & Falls (2005) studied successful PR techniques employed in major markets around the world. Tilson and Alozie, (2004) researched PR in emerging democracies. However, Hague (2004) was the only scholar to mention Mongolia as the nation, part of North Asia, which was not part of the former Soviet Union and “most Mongolians were followers of Lamaism” (p. 349).

The larger part of the existing scientific literature on the communication industry in Mongolia focused on social media marketing (Borker, 2014; Hootsuite & We Are Social (2019), advertising (Chen, Su & Yen, 2014), branding within the tourism industry of Mongolia (Ochirkhuyag, 2018), and the media landscape (Myagmar & Nielsen, 2001).
Methodology

The research followed the pragmatism paradigm. It reflected the need for flexibility in this first scientific inquiry, which opened public relations in Mongolia for further research. “Pragmatism never considers knowledge as final, universal, or absolute” (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019, p. 10). It also allowed addressing the limitations of the research: lack of funding and language challenges. The study employed a comprehensive literature review on global PR, a document analysis to build up the context of Mongolian PR, and an emailed in-depth interview, which provided insights for the state of PR. A sample of 15 Mongolian PR experts, out of 140, took part in the interview. LinkedIn was used for finding and reaching to them.

Results and conclusions

Some of the key findings inform that two-way asymmetrical communication is dominating amongst PR practitioners. The Mongolian PR sector is developing but compared to advertising it was defined as a “cottage industry”. One of the reasons might be that it remains a grey area with many low-qualified or unqualified “experts” offering PR services. Mining, Financial, Telecommunications, and Entertainment are the leading industries actively employing public relations in their communications. The top management has public relations on its radar with media relations as the leading activity. Unfortunately, media relations is very close to paid media coverage. One problem distilled, namely the narrow understanding of news journalists have. Anything containing the name of a brand, company, or product is classified as advertising. With relation to this, professional relations are built exclusively on providing valuable news information. Although, the personal approach with a gift or lunch with an expectation of positive or neutral coverage in return was also indicated. Politics and the media exert the strongest influence on public relations in Mongolia.

Practical and social implications

The current study is significant because it put Mongolia on the global public relations map. Second, it shed light on the key sectors, which implement PR. It also helps practitioners to understand how to work with the media and what content they should provide.

Keywords: Public relations in Mongolia, framework for global public relations, international public relations
Intervention in Attention: How Can Mindfulness Help in Interpersonal Communication

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Mindfulness (focused awareness) is defined as non-judgmental awareness in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), or it can be described as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (El Morr et al., 2019).

Literature review

What makes mindfulness recognizable in practice is our focused activities that distinguish our mindful actions from automatic behaviour. “Mindfulness in the field of communication has mainly been considered in terms of how consciously people plan their approach to a communication exchange or the extent to which they identify and respond to relevant or irrelevant information in a given situation” (Seneviratne, 2018). When we mindfully look at the world around us, especially when we are mindfully communicating, we work on a holistic approach to humanity, and we consciously engage all the senses and decide to be involved in the present moment. This understanding of one’s actions is crucial in interpersonal communication, the process of message transaction between people who work toward creating and sustaining shared meaning (Turner & West, 2006: 6).

Methodology

Workshops called “Be Mindful” are organized by the Edward Bernays University College (henceforth: Bernays) and are offered by the Office for Student Counselling. Students who were interested in extracurricular activities registered for the workshop, forming groups of up to 15 students / participants. The “Be Mindful” workshop consists of four sessions, with one taking place each month, through four months overall. Participants are Bernays students, with 10 to 15 students in each group, in which they practice mindfulness techniques with two trainers, one psychologist and one public relations expert. While providing them with the theoretical basics of mindfulness, we mostly focused on practicing mindfulness techniques through guided exercises and explaining homework assignments. Students receive homework assignments / exercises after the workshops, which they practice until the next session. Students in the group also had the opportunity to practice mindful interpersonal communication, that is, they had the opportunity to apply the learned techniques directly under the supervision of the two trainers. Two cycles of the workshop (with two different
groups of students) have been conducted so far, and the third cycle, with a new student group, is currently underway.

**Results and conclusions**

Our findings are based on anonymous surveys that students complete after each session. The surveys provide feedback on how participants experience benefits from the workshop, and they state their ideas and wishes for the next workshops, as well as small self-reports on whether they practice mindfulness at home with the provided materials, and how much it helps or distracts them in their daily lives, which assignments are difficult for them to practice, and which are easy.

Our goal is to introduce young people to techniques that will help them cope with the stresses of life, while using additional techniques to improve interpersonal communication. This paper describes the techniques, which students learn and practice in mindfulness workshops, as part of extracurricular activities, and how young people can relate the experience from the workshops to interpersonal communication in their everyday lives.

**Practical and social implications**

While the effects of mindfulness training are mostly presented through mental health benefits, our aim is also to explore how mindfulness could improve interpersonal communication and whether it could lead to better interpersonal relations. Therefore, we decided to bring mindfulness techniques closer to students through workshops.

**Keywords:** mindfulness; interpersonal communication; workshops; students; counselling

**References**


The swing effect of CSR between society and company

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Introduction and purpose of the study/research question

Society demands sustainability and companies react. For this they will be rewarded with a better reputation. How the sustainability reputation can be measured and managed using social listening is in the center of this study. It is based on an analysis of the sustainability reputation of the 5,000 largest companies in Germany.

Corporate reputation, defined by Fombrun (1996, p. 72) as “a perceptual representation of a company’s past actions and future prospects that describes the firm’s overall appeal to all of its key constituents when compared with other leading rivals” is built-up and maintained through the convergence of multiple influences. Harris Poll (2018, p. 4) identifies six major dimensions having a crucial impact on the overall reputation; social responsibility is among these crucial dimensions.

The past actions of a firm combined with beliefs regarding the way it will behave in the future, whether or not substantiated, impact on the firms’ reputations (Mishina/Block/Mannor 2012, p. 459). Therefore monitoring the perceptions of audiences is an essential part of reputation management. Social listening, i.e. analysing conversations in social media, can be applied to assess reputation and may be particularly useful in assessing the audience’s perceptions of the sustainability dimension, as sustainability issues are in the center of the public discussion today. Therefore the research question for the present study is “To what extent can sustainability reputation be measured by analysing social media conversations?”

Literature Review

The utilisation of social media to assesses audience opinion and gather feedback is already established; social media has been used for the co-creation of products as well gathering of competitive intelligence (Engel/Kaandorp/Elf ring 2017), while Blevins and Ragozzino (2019, p. 219) and Aula & Heinonen (2016, p. 164) directly recognise that it has an important role in managing and monitoring reputation. Holsapple et al. (2014, p. 5) also advocate for social listening or the gathering of social media analytics as part of a reputation management strategy. However, neither has social listening, based on large amounts of, been applied to sustainability topics in the context of reputation management.

Methodology

The gathering of social media data is realized by the crawling of the social media platforms with the specific aim of identifying statements made regarding the topic of the research; in this
case, the sustainability dimensions associated with companies reputations. The technological ability for this approach is advanced and builds on existing capabilities; search engines already utilise crawling technology and artificial intelligence (AI) is able to identify and categorise the linguistic content of written statements. The researchers have developed a bespoke algorithm that will facilitate the collection and analysis of data which can be applied to an assessment of the sustainability dimension.

**Results and conclusions**

The sustainability reputation of companies can be measured based on an adapted approach to Fombrun’s reputation measurement. This shows that the sustainability reputation does not have a singular effect on people’s perception of a company, but that the reputation dimensions correlate with each other. This leads to the interaction of the different reputation dimensions. For example, the sustainability reputation also has an impact on the reputation of management or the reputation of products.

**Practical an social implications**

Measuring reputation based on social listening enables companies to react promptly to their perception by their stakeholders.

**Limitations of the study/future research**

A major limitation of the study is that the data is not representative for all stakeholders of the selected companies. Furthermore, the results can be distorted as indifferent people may not express themselves in social media about companies and their activities, but only fans and “haters”. Future research should deal with a specification of the model, e.g. differentiating between topics.

**Keywords:** sustainability reputation, reputation management, social listening, big data

**References**


A Road Map for Influencer Relations Best Practices

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Research Question

In the influencer-communicator relationship, is there a division of responsibility and deliverables with regards to sponsored content?

Introduction

Influencer relations as evolved rapidly over the last decade. SNSs democratized the sharing of information from peer-to-peer within social and professional networks. It has created unique opportunities for the rise of paid e word-of-mouth marketing (eWOMM). Since 2017, the scale and professionalism required of influencer campaigns has exploded. However, “how it happens” appears to still a mystery to many communication practitioners. In 2016 to 2017 there was a 325% increase in searches for the term ‘influencer marketing’ (Connick, 2018, p.112). Within communication departments, the role or responsibility of managing the relationships with this influencers is known as influencer relations. It is defined as; “The liaison between a company and those considered to be influencers within the social media community” (Boone, Kurtz, Mackenzie, & Snow, 2016, p.112).

Social media influencers build relationships not just with their audiences but also with brands. Smith (2010) identified three phases of the evolution of bloggers (forerunner to influencers): introduction, community membership, and autonomy (2010, p.176). A recent report on influencer relations found “62% of brands compensate influencers as brand ambassadors or partners rather than one-time contractors” (Connick, 2018, p.10).

Methodology

This study used in-depth participant interviews as the primary data collection technique. N=10 interviews took place between February 12 – March 30, 2019. This study employed multiple case design looking at N=5 pre-existing relationships between influencer and communicators. Participant were recruitment using a snowball sample method. Influencers nominated commu-
nicians and vice-versa after being told that the person they nominate must be “exceptional at influencer relations” (in influencers case) or “at working with influencer specialists” (in communicators case).

The sample was 100% Canadian, 10% male (n=1) and 90% female (n=9). The influencer industry is female dominated, a 2019 study found 77% of influencers are women (Gesenhues, 2019). All participants agreed to be identified to help lend context and credibility to the results.

**Results and Conclusions**

The results of this study are a snapshot of where the relationship between influencers and communicators is, as of 2019. To find out how influencer relations works; participants were asked what their typical deal-to-delivery looked like from their vantage point. They were also asked to outline the respective responsibilities of the influencer and their partner. The findings feature both quantitative and qualitative analysis of their individual responses that revealed a workflow pattern made up of 12 distinct phases.

This study proposes a model called The 12 Phase of Effective Influencer Relations. The 12 phases are: (1) Influencer Program, (2) Influencer Roster, (3) Influencer Outreach, (4) Influencer Proposal, (5) Proposal Approval, (6) Statement of Work, (7) Content Creation, (8) Content Approval, (9) Posting Content, (10) Content Interaction, (11) Post Reporting, and (12) Payment.

The findings of this research outline who is involved at each stage, the action items, and best practices in action using examples of real influencer campaigns. Through the voices of the participants this research tells the story of how harmonious relationships between influencer and brands are created.

**References**


**Keywords:** Influencer Relations, eWOMM, Influencers, Branded Content, Influencer Marketing
Strategic Communication of At-Risk Youth Nonprofits in Israel: Is Budgeting Indeed the Main Issue

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Over the past several decades, the number of nonprofits (NPOs) has increased worldwide and accordingly received growing attention within public relations research. The present research study provides an analysis of PR of at-risk youth nonprofits in Israel, investigating the practice within the context of the connections (or their lack) between the strategic and the tactical levels. The research question addressed is: What are the PR strategies and tactics applied by at-risk youth NPOs in Israel and what are the rationales that these methods are based on?

Literature review

Whereas some studies in public relations (PR) focus on strategic elements of nonprofits, most of this research generally deals with tactical aspects (Cho & Schweickart, 2015; Goldkind, 2015; Guidry et al., 2015). Overall, there is a palpable dearth of research that holistically combines analysis of strategy and tactics in synergistic fashion. This leads to a situation in which core issues of strategic communication or fascinating professional dilemmas in NPOs are not properly addressed.

Methodology

This study’s central approach is Multiple Case Study Analysis. The sample included eleven nonprofit organizations. The study is based on qualitative and quantitative content analysis of a broad database: multiple cases, media content, Facebook posts, websites (n=954), and 15 in-depth interviews with CEOs and spokespeople of the NPOs. The study distinguishes between three NPO sizes (small, medium, large). This parameter was included in order to explore whether budgetary limitation was the only (or main) factor for the NPOs’ public relations choice.

Results and conclusions

The findings indicate that most of the NPOs used traditional as well as new media, but lacked broad, strategic planning – usually operating only on an ad hoc basis. Interestingly, the interviews shed light on a set of reasons aside from limited budget that hindered these organizations from applying broader and more sophisticated PR tools. One of the study’s fascinating insights is the interviewees’ statements that they found it very difficult to tailor the NPOs’ messages to the public without harming their professional social objectives. For instance, several interviewees pointed to the fact that they frequently had to juggle between choosing messages that would clearly have an emotional impact on many but at
the price that youth might be exposed to messages depicting them as weak, vulnerable and dependent. This would obviously undercut the social workers’ efforts to empower these young people and convince them that they are strong and capable of leaving the at-risk cycle. In other words, there is more to nonprofit PR limitations than budgetary restrictions. Material resource obviously plays an important role; however, the study shows this to be only one part of the larger picture.

This is also evident when differences in the NPOs’ public relations according to their size were found uncorrelated. Rather, the public relations applied were mainly shaped by the core attitude of the CEOs and their perceptions regarding the necessity to treat the challenge of public relations seriously. This was true for large, “wealthy” NPOs and for small NPOs that were extremely constrained in terms of budget. The deciding factor for both types was not “budget” but rather positive awareness and understanding of the importance of public relations as a necessary condition from the start, along with a deeper understanding of their respective organizations’ complexity.

**Practical and social implications**

This study serves as the basis for identifying strengths and weaknesses in the PR process, thus enhancing communication capabilities in public relations and creating bridges between the social work of the organization and media activity.

A wider interdisciplinary approach is needed, including such disciplines as social work, political science and education. New media are dynamic and alter rapidly. Similarly, NPOs too are not static and commonly undergo structural changes.

The findings of this study may serve as an interesting case study. However, in order to drive broader conclusions and generalizations there is a need to add more layers of knowledge using comparative analysis (studying other types of NPOs, exploring cross cultural and cross national similarities and differences, etc.) and to conduct ongoing research in order to detect the dynamics on a lengthier timeline.

**Keywords:** Nonprofit, Public Relations, New Media

**References**


The nature of activism in Turkey

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Information technologies have recently changed the nature of activism. In particular web 2.0 tools, social networking sites, microblogging services, and content-sharing sites have introduced the opportunity for wide-scale, online social participation for activist publics by enhancing public voice. Especially social media is regarded as a novel resource that can quickly foster communication and disseminate information, thus builds and strengthens ties among activists, and publicizes social movements. The speed, credibility, openness, transparency, and interactivity of social media have eclipsed the traditional mobilization techniques of activism. Social media provide informational and relational strategic resources for activists to force the government and corporations to pay attention to what they care about and demand. In this paper the nature of activism in digitalized world and activism orientation will be discussed in terms of public relations domain. Digital activism will be handled as a new form of activism which raises awareness in general public, thus, causes corporations to change their public relations strategies. The paper aims to find out activism style of publics among generations by ensuring the validity of the scale.

Literature review

 Corporations should change their strategic direction for sustainability (Bordia et al, 2004) in our continually changing organizational environment, from this point of view public relations have become a strategic driver for organizations in order to achieve their goals and legitimacy which can be ensured by societal and stakeholder expectations and values. Thus stakeholder relationships have become more important than ever as legitimacy occurs only when the organisation’s actions are parallel with the expectations of society (Sutton, 1993). So it can be suggested that organisations are dependent on society for legitimisation to gain favourable reputation and to be conceived as societally responsible. At this point activist publics can be regarded as the most critic publics in public relations.

Methodology

The purpose of the study is both to test the validity of activism orientation scale (AOS) in Turkish adaptation and to find out activism style of publics among generations. Research has been carried out with 400 participants in Antalya in Turkey including baby boomer generation, X, Y and Z generations using convenience sampling in order to find out their activism style. The questionnaire form consists of the activism orientation scale (Corning & Myers, 2002), the online social activism scale (Yankah et al. 2017) and demographics. While 35 item - activism orientation scale measures an individual’s orientation toward engaging in activism behaviour traditionally, 21 item online social activism scale measures an individual’s participation in online social networking behaviour specifically related to social and/or political views/issues. Firstly, in order to test validity of Turkish version of the AOS scale, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) are
conducted. In order to test the difference among generations one-way ANOVA test is conducted. Composite reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and HTMT values are calculated.

Results and conclusions

Although original activism orientation scale has two dimensions; conventional activism behaviours and high-risk activism behaviours, EFA results suggest that conventional activism behaviour dimension involves four-sub dimensions in Turkey context. These dimensions are labelled as influencer, participator, actor, and communicator. High risk behaviour dimension is found to be congruent with the original scale. This finding indicates that conventional activism has different levels and different reflections in Turkey. In order to find out the differences in the style of generations’ online social activism, one-way ANOVA is conducted and the test results suggest that there is a statistically significant \( F(3,399)=10.375; \ p<0.001 \) difference between generations. As expected, Post hoc test suggest that generation Z uses social media activism more than generation baby boomer, generation X and generation Y according to mean online social activism scores. There is also statistically significant difference among generations in terms of activism orientation scale sub-dimensions. The findings suggest that different generations prefer different activism styles. Generation Z is more participator, more actor, more communicator and more high risk activist, however, low influencers than the other generations. Also the effect of gender on participator, influencer, actor, communicator, high risk activism and online social activism is tested and results show that male participants have higher scores in influencer activism and online social activism. There is no statistically significant difference with other dimensions.

Practical and social implications

When the results of the study are evaluated in terms of publics in Turkey, it can be said that new generation, generation Z, is more active both in traditional and digital activism. It can be concluded that organisation in Turkey need to change their public relations strategies from campaign management to relationship management in time.

Keywords: Public Relations, Activism, Digital Activism
Discourse analysis of Instagram accounts of influencers in the sphere of fashion in Turkey

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The aim of our study is to find out how fashion and lifestyle influencers in Turkey represent the content provided by brands (there is a limitation to the research because in Turkey there is no legislature on disclosure of paid partnerships so every brand mention needs to be analysed), what public relations strategies and techniques they use in order to create and support their personal brands (self-branding) and finally what fashion discourse they create. The method we use is discourse analyses and as a test research we chose a sample of two Instagram accounts of fashion influencers: Ferhan Talib (@iconjane) and Billur Saatci (@billursaatci). They were one of the first fashion bloggers in Turkey hence the choice.

Main concepts. Digital communication channels opened new area for implementation of public relations efforts. Social media has become one of the significant channels where companies and individuals can share some moments from their lives and opinions on different topics. Social media are not only a channel themselves, but they also appear to be a group of individual channels. Whether some of these channels are strictly private others have become one of the most powerful media of nowadays. They are channels of influencers. Who are social media influencers?

Social media influencers can be defined as people “who have built a sizeable social network of people following them” and “they are seen as a regard for being trusted tastemaker in one or several niches” (Veirman et al., 2017). They create “highly credible electronic Word Of Mouth”.

It is possible to define social media influencers as a new type of independent third-party endorsers who take part in forming opinions, tastes and making different decisions. It is believed that conveying PR message through an independent source or trusted opinion leader help to increase its value. Traditionally third-party endosers notion has been used to define people like friends or other consumers who share their opinion about the product, service etc. and thereafter help to sell it or create certain usually positive reputation. With the appearance of Internet and especially social media the notion of friends has significantly changed, as there our friend can be literally anyone from celebrities to companies, from journalists to influencers. (Freberg et al., 2011)

Influencers, by posting in social media may become a part of a discourse or even create them. Public relations specialists also create discourses. Rose (2012) states that discourse is a collection of expressions related to a topic, field or event. This collection shows what is thought about this topic, field or event and affects the behaviour of people. As most of the social media consist not only from textual but also contains still and moving images discourse is created by both language and visual language. Ways of creating discourses, contents, management etc. of the latter
in social media is quite a large area and relatively new area of investigation.

Study of influencers marketing (Influencer Marketing, 2017) in Turkey shows that spheres where influencers are demanded the most are beauty, fashion, lifestyle and travelling. This research also shows that Instagram is the most preferred by PR and marketing departments and the most frequently used social media. These finding are not surprising considering the fact that existing culture is considered by many researches as visual (Mirzoeff, Rose, Sturken and Catwright, Lash, etc.). Fashion, lifestyle, beauty sectors cannot exist without visuals and Instagram is one of the most suitable platforms for them. Together with the opportunity to post still photos, videos and stories, Instagram allows to go live and to express ideas under the visual in the form of textual post or comment. Recently the social media also added the different functions making possible online shopping directly from Instagram.

Fashion and lifestyle influencers have become a part of everyday life of millions of people. First fashion bloggers in Turkey appear in 2008-2009. In the beginning, fashion blogging was done through blog itself but with the development of social media like Facebook and Instagram blog in its traditional form is used rarely. Yener Lutfu Mert (2018) held a small study in which he asked managers of three agency which work with influencers about the specifics of the process. These people said that Instagram is the most popular social media among clients due to the relatively low cost of the production of content and outcomes. It was also mentioned that it is important not to push influencer much with branding and other policies – they should have the liberty to show the content in their style.

Results and conclusions. It is an ongoing research which is planned to be finished in May, 2020.

**Keywords:** fashion influencers, Instagram, discourse, personal branding
The Tale of the Tape. The Most Frequently used methods and explanations of the impact of public relations used by PR professionals in a National PR Awards Competition

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Since the very beginning of the professionalization of public relations and its formation into a business field, there has always been a question from both the clients and the public: To what extent can and does public relations affect a society or business (Sriramesh and Vercic, 2019)? The clients simply want to know what PR professionals can do for them and how effective their work is, essentially trying to determine what they are paying for. And the public asks, who are the players and what are the motives which constitute their information sources. They might also ask who the “deus ex machina” is. The public relations field has long strived to, as Galileo said, “Measure what is measurable, and make measurable what is not,” (Trendkite, 2019).

Yet, even today it is not clear to what extent or even how we can measure the impact of public relations on businesses or society, despite many attempts to describe a global standardization (Gregory and Watson, 2008; Gregory and White, 2009; McNamara, 2014). The Barcelona Principles (2007) mark an important milestone of the PR industry’s objective to clarify the effectiveness of PR. The aim of this study is to contribute to this – still rather opaque – field of knowledge by simply asking, how do the PR professionals themselves describe the impact of public relations on organizations and society: not only what methods they use most often, but also what narratives they build when they want to tell the story of their “impact”. The conceptual question is, what are the strategies of legitimization used by public relations professionals to justify their own “licence to operate”, especially at a time when PR professionals are not trusted by the public (European Communication Monitor, 2019). How do the PR professionals constitute the sense-making of their own work? What methods do they use for evidence-based argumentation? What narratives do they use?

Research question: How do PR professionals themselves describe their “impact of public relations on organizations and society”? What methods and narratives do they use to define that “impact”?
Literature Review

This field has been extensively studied and analysed, from both a theoretical point of view (namely finding conceptual frameworks and analytical tools, e.g. Cutlip, Center and Broom's PII model, 1993, or MacNamara's pyramid model, 2005) and a business point of view (namely driven by the practical need of explaining the costs and benefits, e.g Lindenwann, 1993 and 1997; Hon, 1998). More detailed literature review will be provided in the full paper.

Methodology

We used a quantitative content analysis (Berger, 1993) to analyse the selected dataset of application forms, which were submitted to the Czech Public Relations Award. This award represents a “showcase” of the best practice cases and runs since 2006. The selected dataset consists of completed applications for Czech PR Award in four years, 2010, 2013, 2016 and 2019 and was further reduced only to the main categories: Business Communication, Corporate Social Responsibility and Philanthropy, Business-to-Business and Business-to-Consumer (N=255). Also, we used critical discourse analysis (Wodak and Meyer, 2015; van Dijk, 2005) to analyse the strategies of legitimization and sense-making, which are used by the public relations professionals to prove the impact and “raison d’être”.

Results and Conclusions

We can state that the inclusion of at least some form of “objective” measurement method is key for describing and justifying the PR professional’s outcome, and it has increased over time (84 % of applications included an objective metric in 2010 and 96 % in 2019). Most applications use measurement of more than 2 metrics, and again, this number has evolved over time. However, when it comes to the question of outputs vs. outcomes, the number of applications measuring outputs has increased from 51 % to 62 % from 2010-2019, while the measuring of outcomes has stayed stable measuring between 33-34%. In 2019, 60% of applications only used quantitative metrics for measurement, but only 36% include both quantitative and qualitative metrics. Only 16% of applications state clear goals, which can be objectively measured (91 % state goals without specifying how they will be measured). More detailed results and conclusions, including the results of the critical discourse analysis, will be provided in the full paper.

Practical and Social Implications

Despite the Barcelona Principles, it is clear that the PR professionals still stick to the “clippings” practice, using only more sophisticated metrics, but still focusing more on the outputs and not as much on the outcomes. The impact on return on investment (ROI), brand-awareness or reputation is still merely the PR professionals “talking” or self-legitimization narrative, as opposed to a measured quality. Also, the argumentation of the PR professionals, when explaining their own contribution to the business or the society, was essentially vague and not clearly stated.

Discussion

This study is based on a rather limited dataset of national PR award applications, and, therefore, it intentionally only includes the “best practice” case studies. Therefore, the question – and also the answer – cannot be “what represents the reality”, or “the whole field”, but it is “what do the PR professionals think is the best that represents their work”.

Keywords: public relations; document analysis; evaluation methods; strategies of legitimization; sensemaking; evidence-based argumentation
Earned Media in a Digital World: Relationships with Modern Journalists

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Journalism and public relations have an intertwined history, often marked by clashes born of a dearth of mutual respect and comprehension. Even today many reporters dismiss the “flack” as an obstacle to overcome on the way to information, and many public relations professionals are disdainful of the “muckraker” they expect will twist truth or sensationalize the trivial. While these counterproductive stereotypes persist, they are not ubiquitous. Examples of mutually beneficial cooperation between the professionals abound. After all, “both professions value information and serve the public interest” (Yang, Taylor & Saffer, 2016, p. 150). This study examines positive and negative experiences between journalists and public relations professionals through in-depth interviews with a variety of reporters and a variety of communicators who deal with the media.

The research question is how and to what extent can public relations professionals build trusting relationships with journalists?

Literature review

The acrimonious yet interdependent relationship between journalists and their public relations counterparts has been widely studied. Schonhagen and Meissner (2016) posit that the professions differ in terms of the interests they represent; PR in a particular interest and journalism in the interests of society in general, but the differences don’t necessarily conflict: “PR is providing vital input for the ongoing social discourse which is mediated by journalism” (p.754). Traditional sources of news are floundering in the digital era, almost without exception, while public relations continues to grow as a profession, but both professions are necessary to a fully functioning society; “without public communication and publicity there can be no democracy” (Vercic & Vercic, 2016, p. 497).

Grunig (1990) posited that “public relations should have an interactive, rather than a manipulative relationship with the media” (p. 18). Grunig (2006) also described the volatile nature of relationships, and the necessity of “trust, control mutuality, satisfaction and commitment” (p. 16).

Methodology

Data for this qualitative research study will be largely gleaned from in-depth interviews with an equal number of journalists and media relations practitioners; including at least twenty participants. Interview questions are based on the following research questions: (RQ1) How and to what extent do journalists and PR professionals have conflict and hold negative views of one another? (RQ2) How and to what extent do journalists and PR professionals fruitfully collaborate and hold positive views of one another? (RQ3) How and to what extent can journalists
and PR professionals trust one another?

This study is at the McMaster University Research Ethics Board approval stage. Interviews will be conducted later in February 2020. The research paper will be finalized and presented to academic supervisors by April 1, 2020.

**Results and Conclusions**

Some journalist participants will likely insist that there can be never be trust established between a public champion and a paid representative, and some PR participants may echo the sentiment. However, this study is expected to yield valuable insight into the experiences of journalists and public relations professionals. The results will include recommendations on how intolerances can be eased, on how cooperation can be increased, and on how trust can be fostered in media relationships.

**Practical and social implications**

Ideally, this study will inform better understanding and cooperation between journalism and public relations professionals, and lead to further research about how that cooperation can cultivate trust, control mutuality, satisfaction and commitment; in other words, or relationships. If journalists better understand ethical public relations, they may help alleviate the perpetual spin-doctor perception. If public relations professionals better understand the needs and goals of journalists, they could be helpful champions of the media at a time when help is most needed.

**Keywords:** journalism, media relations, relationships, trust

**References**


The influence of city public diplomacy on the fight against global climate change

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The city public diplomacy is the activity of international political communication that most has grown the most in the last decade, as a consequence of the new demographic structure, the transformation of political and economic power, the impact of climate change and citizen empowerment. City public diplomacy facilitates the consolidation of new spheres of power that use international communication to be reputed, influence or create the illusion of participating. Local government offers concrete, real and effective solutions, close to the citizen’s experience. These are not mediated experiences, but rather are led by the citizen.

In this research we are interested the city public diplomacy on the fight against global climate change. On one hand, this project attempts to understand the position and characteristics of the city as an actor within the political system and its international political communication strategies. On the other hand, it studies the leadership capacity expressed through the actions of the Mayor’s Office. From both, it results a methodological innovation in the study of international political communication actions designed to influence globalization that adds: direct pressure on national governments and mediated lobbying, typical of citizen activism that demands a change in public policies. This research aims to demonstrate that the Ibero-American mega-cities have become key actors in public diplomacy, using their soft power to influence the legislation of areas over which they do not have full competences but that affect them in a determinant, like the environment in a context of climate change.

Also through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) perspective and the 2030 Agenda, cities deem a greater role in achieving these objectives instead of states that leadered the Millennium Development Goals until 2015. Currently, there are international projects that measure the fulfillment of SDGs in the urban environment such as British Columbia 2030 or Baltimore Neighborhood Indicator Alliance (BNIA). Cities can become highly influential in the new global order by taking a lead in grey areas like climate change, where State capacity is less relevant in terms of public policy execution.

Literature review

Diplomacy is an activity that uses strategic communication in the process of building the international reality. Diplomatic actors intervene in international political communication with the aim of influencing through different informative, cultural and educational mechanisms. Public diplomacy is defined as the management of international political communication in accordance with action and foreign policy interests. Signitzer and Coombs (1995) have explored the relationship between public relations and public
diplomacy and have found a natural process of convergence with similar objectives and similar tools to reach them. Governments try to influence through strategic communication effort and public diplomacy to other nations and citizens. The value of public relations and strategic communication of public sector has increased (Canel, 2007). And also the impact of municipal policy on multilevel management and regulation is an issue on the global research agenda (Barber, 2013; Schragger, 2016).

**Methodology**

The research is carried out at two levels: quantitative, recording the presence or absence of 65 indicators that characterize the strategy of international public diplomacy of 30 cities (15 Ibero-American, 15 Spanish); qualitative, studying through semi-structured interviews the public environmental diplomacy of five Ibero-American megacities: Madrid, Barcelona, Mexico City, Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires.

**Results and Conclusions**

This investigation is part of a project that in the next two years will try to know the environmental policy network of each of the cities and the particularity of the public diplomacy of the cities and the strategies of international communication (lobby, advocacy, trust-confidence narratives, social media, personal branding, mayors’ leadership, place branding and events) that are designed in the process of political decision, having as object of study the climate change.

**Practical and Social Implications**

It is hoped to discover how cities use public relations and public diplomacy to influence environmental issues and fight against climate change.

**Keywords:** Public affairs, public relations, public diplomacy, climate change, SDG

**References**


Whom do we serve?

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Introduction and purpose

Today’s sharing economy demands societal engagement and authentic dialogue with organisations who in turn are expected to act in the best interest of the end-user (i.e. the stakeholder). Communicators act both as custodians of stakeholder relationships and the voice of the organisation they represent. This multi-faceted role raises an important question for the public relations function. Whom do we serve?

This paper presents a selection of findings from a doctoral study on the potential of public relations in the strategic thinking process called: Communication at the Core: Exploring decision-making when communication is at the heart of an organisation’s strategy development. The paper specifically examines the concept: Whom do we serve? which consistently appeared throughout the findings.

Literature Review

The literature review draws scholarship from studies of public relations, strategy, group dynamics and decision-making.

Greek in origin, strategy originally refers to the positioning of troops before battle. Organisations describe strategy as the ability to understand, predict and leverage stakeholder behaviour operating in an environment in which people and resources continually interact (Henderson, 1989, pp. 139–143). Strategy is also the product of history and learned experience (Schein, 2010). Understanding who, what, why, and how organisations and stakeholders have reached a particular point paves the way for strategic changes “allowed” by the existing culture (Darling, 2017, pp. 64–67) and creates “irreversible momentum” (Burt, 2010, p. 70).

Public relations is “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships [...] on whom success or failure depends” (Cutlip cited by Broom and Sha, 2013, p. 26). Value comes through relationships (Grunig and Grunig, 2010, p. 5) and “getting people to do what you want them to do” (Trolley, James L. cited by Grunig, 1992, p. 38). Relationships are based on one-way, two-way and omni-directional communication (van Ruler, 2018, p. 368) with “the flow of purposeful communication” and “continuous transactions” (Edwards, 2012, p. 21). Public relations professionals adopt highly co-operative behaviours which are underpinned by concern for others and perceived stakeholder needs. Behaviours change depending on the stakeholder and purpose of the interaction (Thomas and Kilmann, 1978, pp. 1143–1144; Thomas, 2016, p. 266).

Method, sample size and rationale

Public relations is “fluid and complex” (Gower, 2006, pp. 177–190) and benefits from a qualitative approach to highlight current experience and facilitate “ongoing dialogue” (Kane, 1995, p. 51; Creswell, 1998, p. 51; Moss, Vercic and Warnaby, 2000, pp. 7–48; Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 69). This was a mixed methods study incorporating meaning orientated meth-
odologies such as interviewing, active listening and participant observation and identification of emerging patterns and findings (phenomenological & grounded theory traditions). Thirty-four semi-structured interviews took place between 2018 and 2019. Participants worked in their respective organisations internationally at director or at board level in a leadership or communications function. Follow up included transcript reviews as well as documentary and archival analysis of the findings.

Findings

The research found that the sector is in perpetual flux, transitioning from a process-driven function into an organic, always on transactional flow. Secondly, capabilities such as sensemaking (Fiske, 1982) and identifying patterns & inter-relationships (Meighan and De Ruijter, 2016; Fuller et al., 2018, pp. 233–252) are emerging as basic requirements. Thirdly end-user needs rated ahead of the organisation as indicators shaping the direction of modern strategy and communication with priorities shifting from profit and shareholder value towards trust and doing the right thing profitably. This suggests that communication is moving towards cocreation with stakeholders built on trust and making a difference.

Communication was positioned as an authentic voice enabling genuine stakeholder discourse rather than simply communicating for advantage (Moloney, 2006, p. 165). Furthermore authenticity assumes that social relevance and adoption of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a given. Critical and consequential thinking, doing the right thing and accessing ones’ moral compass to guide decision-making emerged as essential capabilities opening further dialogue on Whom do we serve?

Further analysis suggests that credibility and reputation are directly linked with who communicators choose to serve first. Professionals working directly with the CEO were perceived as the mouthpiece of the organisation, politically motivated and followers or influencers. Those positioned as trouble-shooters or the conscience of the organisation team were thought leaders and change-makers acting in the best interest of everyone.

Results, conclusions and implications

Assessing the implications for communication professionals who curate and enable stakeholder & organisation dialogue warrants further examination. Are they appropriately skilled and resilient to adapt to constant change and clearly articulate who they serve and their motivation? Communicators are well positioned to leverage the opportunities this paradigm creates so that society thrives and authenticity driven indicators such as the SDGs are within reach. The question for the sector is: Exactly who do we serve? and in what context?

Keywords: public relations, strategy, societal impact, capabilities
Bringing Positive Impact to the Society: A Model of Authentic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Communication

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Public relations contributes to the society by helping organizations to be socially responsible and engage with stakeholders. CSR communication research in public relations has been focusing on how organizations communicate CSR initiatives (such as utilizing digital/social media, CSR reports, etc.), the outcomes of CSR communication (such as financial returns and consumer purchase intention), CSR communication being a strategic communication tool (e.g. using CSR in handling crises, engaging stakeholders), and strategic CSR communication (e.g. creating shared value (CSV) communication. Despite the positive results CSR and CSR communication have brought to organizations, not much research has been done on how organizations should practice CSR so as to be considered genuine and authentic, and to reduce the skepticism toward CSR among publics. Organizations need to be authentic in their CSR communicative behaviors. Therefore, the purpose of this theory paper is to develop a model of authentic CSR communication on how a corporation can substantially contribute to the society and not being viewed as “greenwash.”

Literature review

The literature of this research includes the topics of CSR skepticism, organizational values, leadership in CSR communication, dialogic communication, organizational listening (Macnamara, 2018), and authenticity.

The current CSR literature has been focusing on the economic benefits of addressing societal needs (Margolis & Walsh, 2003). The term strategic CSR also implies corporations’ choosing stakeholders’ issues that align best with the corporations’ needs (Porter & Kramer, 2006). As a result, this approach has caused extensive skepticism toward corporate CSR behaviors among the publics. CSR skepticism means “publics/ inclination to question, disbelieve, and distrust an organization’s CSR motives, management, and business, CSR outcomes, and the claim of socially responsible positions and actions” (Rim & Kim, 2016, p. 250).

CSR is defined as organizational activities designed to create a positive impact on the society (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2015). Therefore, CSR initiatives should focus on the actual positive impact such initiatives can bring to a society, instead of economic rewards. To that end, I adopted the concept of authentic CSR from the management literature (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2015) in articulating the focus on how a corporations’ core values drive its behaviors, a leadership with caring and genuine qualities, how public relations can help engage in dialogues and listen to publics’ concerns, and partnering with stakeholders in the process of the CSR initiatives. I also argue that, in evaluating the outcomes of
CSR initiatives and communication, the focus should be on the actual impact to the society, instead of benefits corporations obtain in this process.

Conclusion

A model on organization authentic CSR communication model is developed with the emphasis on co-creating with stakeholders on corporate CSR effort.

References


Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Authentic Communication, Society
The importance of reputation and legitimacy for financial supervisors

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Although reputation and legitimacy are intensely researched concepts, when it comes to the public sector, they remain in the blind spot of investigations. With the aim to diminish this gap, the paper investigates the importance of reputation and legitimacy for a specific kind of public authority – financial supervisors.

The hypothesis that the study explores is that strong positive reputation and legitimacy bring valuable benefits to supervisors, widen the room for manoeuvre, and ultimately, lead to the reduction of implementation costs of interventions.

Literature review

Given the elevated importance of the relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders, extensive research on the fields of organisational studies and communications aims to capture the essence and key processes of reputation and legitimacy.

The targeted review of the relevant literature – among which Bitektine (2011), Deephouse and Suchman (2008), King and Whetten (2008), and Tyler (2006) shall be highlighted – enabled the identification of key attributes of these concepts. Hence, reputation expresses ‘uniqueness’, refers to an ‘ideal standard’, and can be viewed as an ‘intangible asset’. As a complex, multidimensional phenomena, it is strongly related to credibility, results from stakeholder judgement, and is built overwhelmingly by ‘behaviour’. Whilst legitimacy – a complex, multidimensional concept established on a trust-based relationship – expresses ‘similarity’ and refers to a minimum standard of ‘acceptance’. Agencies are considered gatekeepers of (normative) legitimacy, but also exposed to social judgements, often based on inconsistent expectations.

Methodology

In the paper a descriptive, qualitative, phenomenological research approach is applied, following a ‘general-to-specific’ perspective. The targeted, systematised literature review covers relevant theories, stylised facts, and empirical results.

Results and conclusions

Organised around the research question, the analysis proves that – such as common understanding in the corporate world – legitimacy and reputation are sophisticated resources attributing important benefits to public agencies.

It is shown that the opportunity provided by legitimacy and reputation through a higher level of credibility, recognition, and trust translates into enhanced, voluntary deference and higher acceptance of the authority’s decisions. This behaviour leads to the widening of the room for manoeuvre and higher efficiency by reducing implementation costs of corrective measures and
that of new policies, providing prospect to pursue long-term objectives, and by creating protective buffer in turbulent times. Furthermore, both strong legitimacy and reputation contributes to safeguard political independence.

It also revealed, however, that reputation and legitimacy remain underused resources for financial supervisors. The main constraints can be linked to the difficulties in determining and expressing ‘uniqueness’, in gaining socio-political legitimacy amid low prominence, and to overcome measurement limitations caused by the lack of quantifiable policy variable. While the effective management of reputation and legitimacy would require overarching management and communications strategy, capacity constraints and the ‘lagging behind’ nature of the public sector pose further challenges.

**Limitations and suggestions for further research**

Since the study focuses solely on demonstrating the importance of reputation and legitimacy to financial supervisors, research on the use of ideal institutional communicational tools and optimal strategies would be a straightforward extension of the paper. Considering the substantial differences in the institutional setup into which agencies are embedded, the area also represents fertile ground for comparative analyses and case studies. Furthermore, the interplay of legitimacy and reputation with related fields – such as the specificities of the relationship with the media, the role of financial supervisors in agenda-setting, or specific areas of reputation, such as social responsibility – also offers promising opportunities for future investigations.

**Practical and social implications**

The mission of public entities is directly linked to social good and the benefits of adequate functioning are widespread among the members of the society. Proper interaction between author-ities and citizens may result in more tailored solutions provided by the state, moving towards a more effective, cooperative model. Despite the evidence that behaviour is the key influencer of reputation and legitimacy, it is evident that PR has a pivotal role in the management of the interaction with stakeholders and in the enhancement of visibility and prominence. As concluded by the study, procedural and cost efficiency of agencies – apart from the better achievement of their goals determined in terms of the public interest – contributes to the reduction of operating costs and that of interventions. Although the paper focuses on financial supervisors, its conclusions are adaptable to other kinds of public agencies.

**Keywords:** reputation; legitimacy; financial regulators; public sector

**References**


Role of Art in Facilitating Communication between Companies and Society: A Case Study of Benesse Art Site Naoshima

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Benesse is a company specializing in distance learning for children with an annual revenue of 439.4 billion yen. Benesse has spent 30 years building art facilities on Naoshima Island, Japan and creating site-specific art museums and works of contemporary art. In 2010, the first Setouchi Triennale was held on Naoshima and neighboring islands in the Seto Inland Sea area. In 2011, Naoshima was selected as one of the “Seven Wonders” by Conde Nast Traveler. Furthermore, in 2019, Setouchi topped the National Geographic Traveler’s “cool list.” These days, people from all over the world are visiting Naoshima.

However, why is a private company supporting the arts? Examining the case of Benesse and their support for the arts on Naoshima, this research seeks to clarify the role of corporate support for art in building relationships between companies and stakeholders such as art organizations and employees.

Literature review

Art support has received scholarly attention in multiple disciplines. In the advertising field, research on art sponsorship sees it as a form of promotion. In the field of art management, sponsorship and partnerships have been studied in the context of fundraising by art organizations. Such scholarship points out that partnership with art organizations provide long-term competitive advantages for companies, encouraging them to build long-term relationships with stakeholders. Can these examples be considered in the context of public relations (PR)? Therefore, this paper applies the stakeholder theory central to PR to examine the role of support for art plays in the communication between companies and stakeholders.

Methodology

This is a case study of Benesse Art Site Naoshima that relies on in-depth interviews with stakeholders to examine the role of art support on the island. Interviews were conducted with the founder of the art site, Fukutake Foundation manager, president of a facility management company, a person working for the Naoshima Tourism Association, a PR representative for a support company, and a local resident.

Results and conclusions

Our results demonstrate two significant roles of art support; one role is to communicate a message that can permeate the corporate philosophy. The art site was created owing to Benesse’s honorary advisor Soichiro Fukutake’s passion. His motivation was to resist the negative aspects of
hyper-modernization and urbanization. Naoshima became bald due to sulfur dioxide exposure at a smelting plant. Mr. Fukutake used the power of art to ask the question, “Is this really just society?”

The word Benesse means “to live well”; thus, Naoshima is a place to think about what it means to live well. Benesse utilizes this art venue in Naoshima to advocate a message to the society regarding what it means to live well. As Picasso created Guernica, Mr. Fukutake interrogates the social crisis through art projects. Additionally, the art site functions as a PR tool for the company to build good relationships with its stakeholders. This is not a one-way communication, but rather a two-way multi-directional communication.

The second role is to politely raise issues with the public by sending targeted messages through the medium of art. By utilizing high-quality art as a medium to raise awareness about certain important issues in modern society, it is possible to avoid appearing dictatorial, and instead provoke the public to come together in thinking about the challenges we face. Indeed, contemplating art provides a space for various stakeholders to think together. In particular, contemporary art tends to present new values, so it is an effective communication tool.

Practical and social implications

Benesse’s support for the arts provides diverse values to many stakeholders. For example, employees have been impressed by its corporate philosophy, thereby increasing their commitment to the company. Moreover, recognition from global media outlets has had a secondary effect; such recognition acknowledges not only the contributions of the key players, such as global investors and business partners, but also aids the understanding of the corporate philosophy. Having people visit from across the globe brings pride to the islanders.

Therefore, companies should not just fund the arts. It is crucial that they promote their own message and values through art support and that their quality and direction are consistent. For example, in media relations, PR representatives should not receive media exposure that does not match the quality or direction. Artists must engage in dialogue with companies concerning advocacy messages while maintaining their creative spirit. Local governments should also value corporate philosophies and facilitate dialogue with the community, rather than simply inviting companies to sponsor art facilities.

Reference


Keywords: art support, advocacy message, corporate philosophy, stakeholders, place to think together
Exploring Corporate Commitment to Organizational Purpose and its Outcomes

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Organizational purpose is a term that has been in the academic lexicon for decades (e.g., War- riner, 1965) but has recently been a centerpiece of several conversations in the world of public relations and corporate leadership. As Larry Fink, CEO and chairman of Blackrock stated, “Purpose is not a mere tagline or marketing campaign; it is a company’s fundamental reason for being – what it does every day to create value for its stakeholders.” However, few recent academic efforts have sought to understand what purpose means for organizations in general and for public relations specifically. The goal of this study therefore is to present a scale to measure a company’s commitment to organizational purpose, as well as its impact on internal corporate outcomes for public relations professionals, i.e., PR being valued in their organizations, and a corporate culture that is agile to the changing environment.

Literature review

Corporate purpose, defined as “a company’s expressed overriding reason for existing” (Ellsworth, 2002, p. ix), has been discussed extensively in management scholarship. Traditional outlooks of management consider corporate purpose in two broad ways: as maximizing shareholder wealth, or as optimizing customer value (Ellsworth, 2002). Recent moves from business leaders, however, have sought to position a company’s purpose not only for shareholders and customers, but for all stakeholders including the “communities in which we work” (“Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation,” 2019, para 7), putting stakeholder communication at the forefront. However, what constitutes a company’s commitment to purpose, as perceived by their employees who are the forefront of communicating this purpose remains a key question. In this study, we draw upon management and public relations literatures to propose and test a 6-point scale of commitment to organizational purpose. We posit corporate commitment to organizational purpose to consist of a clearly articulated and understood purpose, importance given to purpose, and purpose being tied to communication strategy, marketing strategy, and market capitalization. We also test its relationship with two internal corporate outcomes.

Methodology

The data for this study come from a broader collaboration between [university] and [industry partner] (blinded for peer review). Surveys were conducted among the members of [industry partner] as well as three other trade organizations to understand public relations and communication professionals’ perceptions about their employers’ commitment to purpose in their
own organizations, and the relationship between those perceptions and the extent to which their corporate cultures are agile and public relations is valued. Data were collected between April and June of 2019. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (EFA and CFA respectively) were conducted to develop a 6-point scale to measure commitment to organizational purpose, followed by structural equation modeling to test the hypotheses.

Results and conclusions

Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were found to support the 6-point scale to measure perceived commitment to organizational purpose within the organization (see Figure 1 for details of EFA and CFA). Such commitment was found to be positively associated with the extent to which respondents reported public relations being valued in the organization. Furthermore, perceived commitment to organizational purpose was also positively associated with an agile and adaptable corporate culture.

Practical and social implications

The purpose of this study was twofold: first we sought to propose and test a scale to measure companies’ commitment to organizational purpose perceived by their PR professionals, and second, we posited two outcomes of such corporate commitment to organizational culture as reported by public relations professionals. Our results not only validated the 6-point scale, thus providing scholars with a valid and reliable instrument to measure this multi-dimensional construct, but also provided two key insights. We found that organizations whose PR professionals perceived a strong focus on organizational purpose also reported public relations being valued in the organization, and a corporate culture that is agile to the demands of a dynamic environment. These results point to the important role played by a concerted corporate focus on purpose. Organizations that exert effort into ensuring that purpose is clearly articulated, understood, and incorporated across strategic decision-making may reap the benefits not only by their employees feeling more valued but also by encouraging a more agile corporate culture.

Keywords: agility, confirmatory factor analysis, purpose, structural equation modeling

References


Figure 1. Results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses.

![Exploratory Factor Analysis](image1)

- Bartlett test of sphericity: $X^2(15) = 2447.816, p < .001$
- Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy: $KMO = 0.866$
- Eigenvalue: $4.031; 67.19\%$

![Confirmatory Factor Analysis](image2)

- $X^2(8) = 78.89, p < .001$
- $CFI = .971$
- $SRMR = .032$

Figure 2. Results of structural equation modeling.

![Measurement Model](image3)

- $X^2(16) = 80.25, p < .001$
- $CFI = .975$
- $SRMR = .033$
- $RMSEA = .080$

![Structural Model](image4)

- $X^2(11) = 98.69, p < .001$
- $CFI = .968$
- $SRMR = .046$
The role of public relations models in universities communication. Case study of University North

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Due to the importance of education in society today, public relations are extremely important for the successful functioning of each educational institution. Almost all universities are faced with a number of problems, such as inadequate and uncertain financial support, student competition is fierce and expensive, state restrictions and regulations make it harder and more difficult to lead the university, academic freedom and the issue of persistent vocational qualifications affecting external stakeholders (Broom, 2010: 455). In addition to that, universities are also faced with public relations problems other than anything in the past. It takes a lot of time to manage reputation and strengthen the image of the university, which involves building trust with key audiences. The progress of communication technology requires universities to respond faster than ever before. In order to achieve the goals, public relations programs at universities generally focus on the following key public: students, teaching staff, rectors, faculty deans, administrative and expert councils, administrative staff and expert services, alumni, student families, student associations, cities and local self-government, media, other universities, government, community. In this regard, the purpose of the paper is to identify and describe the public relations models in promoting and strengthening the visibility and reputation of universities with an emphasis on public dialogue.

Literature review

The theoretical framework of this paper is based on Grunig and Hunt’s work Managing Public Relations (1984), which describes four public relations models: the model of a print agent, a model of public information, a two-way asymmetric model and a two-way symmetric model. Models explain the role of public relations in organizations and are described with the help of two concepts: the nature of communication (one-way vs. two-way) and the purpose of communication (persuasion vs. mutual understanding). While the media agent model is moderate to the creation of publicity, or to causing media attention (Wilcox et al., 2001: 43), a model of public information is used by “home journalists” to disseminate objective information through mass media and controlled media. Both models are one-way and their communication programs are not based on research and strategic planning. The two-way symmetric model uses two-way communication, but the flow of information between organizations and the public is still unbalanced (for the benefit of the organization). Feedback is used solely for manipulative purposes (Newsom et al., 2000: 18). According to Grunig and Hunt (1994: 8), the two-way symmetric model implies a mutually balanced communication aimed at understanding and using dialogue and negotiation between the organization and the public. Although, Grunig advocated the symmetric model as the only ideal
form of public relations, driven by criticism, he developed a new, general situational model of excellence in public relations. This model is a mix of asymmetry and symmetry that is used to make organizations and the public a win-win zone, an area where both sides are victorious.

Methodology

The case study method was applied in the research. The University North case study aims to identify and describe which existing offline public relations models are used in university communication and to explore and analyze the application of operational-technical and managerial-strategic roles of public relations (Broom & Dozier, 1984, Van Ruller & Vercic, 2002; Steyn & Bütschi, 2003). The main question of this research is: is there a significant difference in the use of an offline model of public relations between operational-technical and managerial and / or strategically oriented public relations services at the University North.

Results and conclusion

The results of the conducted research have confirmed that public relations play a vital role and contribute to enhancing the visibility and reputation of the university. Moreover, it is evident that public relations are of the utmost importance in accomplishing objectives that universities set: develop two-way communication between universities and key publics, raise awareness of educational issues, strengthen and maintain the image and reputation of universities among the most targeted public. Also, the analysis of public relations modeling in the work process and the performance of public relations services at the University North showed that although the public relations model is applied in the communication environment, the public information model for one-way dissemination of information is still the most widely used.

Practical and social implication

The results serve as an indicator that universities, whether private or public, need to devote more attention to the role and importance of public relations model in the higher education system. In addition to that, the results serve as an indicator that public relations can contribute to maintaining two-way and transparent communication between universities and the public, and helping them achieve their goals.

Keywords: public relations models, universities, visibility, case study.
Reputation Management: Personal Reputations Versus Corporate Reputations

Farah Latif George Mason University (USA)

Introduction and purpose of the study

There is no paucity of literature in reputation management when it comes to corporate and organizational reputation; however, limited attention has been given to reputation management strategies of individuals. In socially networked societies, private individuals, just as celebrities, experience unrestricted exposure to niche networks and public scrutiny, thus, there is a more significant potential for reputation damage than experienced in the past. Also, the widespread use of social media has made individuals' reputations particularly vulnerable.

The purpose of the study is to draw attention to the study of personal reputations as a separate and distinct field of study from corporate reputations.

Literature review

The literature on corporate reputation management comes from various disciplines such as marketing, business, economics, and others, which inevitably allows multiple ways of theorizing and conceptualizing reputations (Lange et al. 2011). There is considerable corporate reputation literature that is pertinent to personal reputations. For example, Lange et al. (2011) operationalized reputation as familiarity (being known), future expectations, and perception of how others view an entity. Bromley (1993) theorized that reputations are culturally and socially constructed, established over time, and are advantageous to the entity. However, empirical evidence shows that individual reputations are not uniform; individuals may have good reputations in some communities, while simultaneously have negative reputations in others. Further, reputations are non-static and can intensify and deteriorate over time (Coombs & Holladay, 2006).

Reputations are known as intangible assets of an entity such as credibility, competitive advantage, fame, and esteem (Veh, Gobel, & Vogel, 2018). Because different stakeholders are concerned with different aspects of a corporation’s reputation, their views on what reputation means can vary based on the primary stakeholder’s main concern. For example, when communicating with stockholders, financial stability acts as a reputation while addressing critics, corporations often gauge reputation as corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Ertug, Yogev, Lee, & Hedstrom, 2016).

On the other hand, personal reputations are different in that these constitute individual identities and are primarily conceived by others, the public, based on their perceptions.

The study further elaborates on these differences and their significance with four premises; one, personal reputations are co-created with the
public; two, reputations are permanent; finally, reputations are made by comparison to a protagonist or an antagonist (Latif, 2020).

Methodology

This research comprises literature review and empirical evidence to support the hypothesis that reputations of individuals and corporations are similar but different on many social and sociological basis.

Results and conclusions

Paper provides recognition of the differences that lie in reputations of individuals and corporations. For example, the threats that personal reputations experience are often different from corporate reputations, such as character assassination attacks and gossip. Similarly, the motivations for reputation management in individuals and corporations are different, for example, profits and brand recognition may motivate corporations; whereas, individuals may be motivated by self-identity and saving face during reputation threats. The primary limitation of the research is that this is a theoretical paper, so the inferences drawn from empirical observations will require further quantitative and qualitative research.

Practical and social implications

The analysis draws attention to the growing need for more research in personal reputation and a better understanding of the motivations that are putting personal reputations at increased vulnerability. The social implications of these motivations may call for improved social media practices and policy regulations.

Further, public relations practitioners will find this research helpful in dealing with personal reputations crises as there are different social and psychological implications attached to personal reputation crises. For example, the social structures that are disrupted when the reputations of respected individuals are maligned.

Keywords: Public relations, corporate reputation management, personal reputation management, social identity, facework

References


Conspiratorial Publics in Digital Peril: Consumer Skepticism on Corporate Issues and Media Effects

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Introduction

Conspiracy theories permeate society. They play a two-sided role, encouraging rational skepticism but also undermining social trust. This new age of digital networking has seen a notable rise in conspiratorial thinking’s detrimental effects. Citizens and publics throw skeptical eyes toward the issues affecting their interests, developing negative attitude toward all parties involved, as well as toward politicians and other government policy makers. Consumers and customers treat corporations with suspicion and are quick to attribute any problem to a larger conspiracy. The situation only worsens as citizens and publics gain access to more information, which most use to reinforce their distrust. In most cases, this conspiratorial thinking weakens necessary social ties and processes that allow social institutions to optimally function.

Literature Review

Scholars have paid heed to the thriving misinformation that spreads though social media during the election campaign periods (e.g., 2016 US presidential election campaign) and warned of increasingly polarized publics (e.g., Sunstein, 2017). Changing communication settings and ICTs available to citizens and publics often deepen the personal and group entrapment into various conspiratorial beliefs. In fact, today’s diversified and hyperpartisan media choices are alleged to be one of the substantial factors of producing collectives who have low confidence in official facts. Misinformation and fake news are widespread and rarely scrutinized on online media platforms. Thus, media use has considerable impacts on the public’s engagement with conspiratorial beliefs.

Despite this, few studies have investigated the association between media use behavior and conspiratorial view. Radu and Schultz (2017) pointed out that conspiracy theories have not been a central topic of communication and media studies. Only a few have discussed the relationship between media effects and conspiracism; however they have found such a relationship notable. For example, news media literacy was reported as a crucial variable for the endorsement of conspiratorial thinking (Craft, Ashley & Maksil, 2017).

Research Questions and Methodology

We applied a new procedure for the identification of “conspiratorial publics” (Kim & Grunig, in press) and studied a conspiratorial public’s media use patterns and relationships with the rise/fall of conspiratorial thinking on corporate issues. We examined three research questions: 1) What types of media do conspiratorial publics use frequently for corporate issues? 2) Do con-
spiratorial publics show hostile media perception or projection bias (Gunther et al., 2001) toward corporate issues? 3) Does media use affect conspiratorial publics’ close-mindedness on corporate issues? We used survey data from customers of SK Telecom, the largest Korean wireless telecommunications operator (N=700), and examined the patterns of correlations and MANOVA analysis.

Results

The results indicate that those with higher conspiracy orientation (N=324) prefer Internet (Pearson-r coefficient: 0.251, p<.01) than mass media (0.101, p<.01) for their information seeking. That is, heavy users of news information tend to have greater conspiracism regardless of what type of media they use. Also, the conspiratorial publics with high conspiracy orientation who showed interest in the 2G service termination issue of SK Telecom (N=159) did not have hostile media perception but did have projection bias toward the issue. They perceived media and social opinions as similar to their own views about the issue (0.530, 0.699, p<.01) more prominently than the rest of the respondents (0.188, 0.610, p<.01). In the close-mindedness test, we ran MANOVA on the Internet and mass media user groups. Among the conspiratorial thinkers who are active toward the 2G issue, the heavy Internet user group showed more close-mindedness regarding information and solution searching than did the light users. Mass media use did not influence their close-mindedness.

Conclusion

These results suggest that methods of media use have a close relationship with lay publics’ conspiratorial thinking. Conspiratorial publics who consume media contents heavily and investigate issues with high interest also slow their searches for alternative explanations or opinions. They even perceive that the social climate is on their side, discouraging self-exposure to further information. Our study on conspiratorial publics, their media use, and subsequent perceptual biases identifies new research problems in public relations and need for managerial strategy for conspiratorial thinking among lay publics.

Keywords: Conspiracy theories, Conspiratorial Public, Consumer Skepticism, Media Effects
Belt and Road Sentiment Index

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The Chinese government has launched the Belt and Road Initiative (B&RI), targeting to establish a foreign policy scheme that facilitates infrastructure and economic development through cooperation and risk avoidance. To date, 123 countries have participated in the B&RI Initiative (Zhu, 2019). These countries, together, constitute two-thirds of world population and one-third of global GDP.

Since the implementation of B&RI, the public’s sentiment is mixed due to participating countries’ stakeholders are uncertain if unsure B&RI would benefit or disadvantage their own / countries’ interests. B&R partner countries and companies when faced with information uncertainties can retort to the use of a proposed Belt and Road Sentiment Index to achieve information symmetry.

This study aims at conceptualizing the B&R sentiment construct as well as a B&R Sentiment Index to improve the information symmetry about B&RI. With enhanced public awareness, it allows the fourth estate to access information and improves the public knowledge of the myths of B&RI.

Literature Review

2.1 International News Flow Theory

International News Flow Theory (INFT) (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Ostgaard, 1965) mentioned the 12 laws governing the structure of foreign news (Table 1). From a country-oriented perspective, INFT comprised of factors such as country size, perceived “elite-ness” of a country, and other factors including historical, geographical, economic size and cultural distances. Information flows include factors such as cultural exchanges, trade, migration and tourism between countries (Kim and Barnett, 1996; Segev, 2010, 2014, 2017; Shoemaker, 2006; Wu, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2007).

Galtung and Ruge advocate the additivity hypothesis (1965), whereby these 12 laws are required to act in tandem need to rather than independently to generate news worthiness. The additivity model is used to test the model of country salience by Grasland (2019), Segev (2010; 2014) and Wu (1998, 2000). Wallerstein’s (1974) further developed it into a World System Theory (WST), whereby news interactions between countries are categorized in three
spheres; core, semi periphery, and periphery. In WST theory, core countries such as United States are the key players who will dictate the direction flow of information (Segev, 2016). Research supports news flow from the affluent and strong political power countries to the rest of the world (Guo and Vargo, 2017). Views are formulated from information reported in core countries’ news media and social media platforms (Wanta, Golan and Lee, 2004).

2.2 Intermedia Agenda-setting Theory

In addition to INFT, McCombs and Shaw’s agenda-setting theory (1972) suggests that the news reported by the media will “transfer” to the public and hereby influence the formation of public opinion. Agenda-setting theory is further expanded in an intermedia agenda-setting setting, whereby “elite” or “credible” media agencies such as Associated Press will set the agenda for less elite media outlets and extend to other media outlets such as television and radio (Reese and Danielian, 1989; McCombs, 2014; Protess and McCombs, 1991). Recent students extended the model to examine cross-national intermedia agenda-setting on how the news agenda of one country transfers to another Guo and Vargo (2017).

Non-traditional media follow a non-egalitarian information flow structure (Golan and Himelboim, 2015). Spokespersons such as political or partisan online news sites are now considered to have a stronger influence over traditional media on agenda-setting influence (Meraz, 2011; Vargo & Guo 2016).

This paper aimed at outlining the theories in development of the B&R sentiment index (BSRI), a multivariate construct.

Methodology

This project proposes to use computer-assisted big data gathering techniques to crawl the information using computer-assisted analysis (Guo and Vargo, 2017) by combing an open source database, Global Data on Events, Location and Tone - GDELT Translingual (GDELT, 2019). GDELT provides real-time news monitoring in 65 languages with 98.4% of the daily non-English news translated into English (GDELT, 2019). To measure Galtung and Ruge (1965) twelve laws, a total score using multiple regression model (Grasland, 2019) will be used based on Peterson’s (1981) approach.

To determine whether news source are from core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral countries, studies by Babones (2005), Chase-Dunn, Kawana, and Brewer (2000), and Guo and Vargo (2017) list is adopted. The list would be updated by adding the B&R countries to form a comprehensive view of the definition of countries mentioned in international news flow literature. As we predict core countries set the agenda to semi-periphery and periphery countries, we use the Guo and Vargo’s (2017) media agenda-setting operationalization method by using the Granger causality test. The amount of issues a country caused another countries’ media agendas would be used to examine the country’s agenda-setting power.

Finally, to include emerging online news agenda-setting power in the BRI sentiment index (Meraz, 2011; Vargo and Guo, 2016), Vargo and Guo’s (2016) Granger causality test where ordinary least squares regression (OLS) model is used to regress between emerging online media and traditional media to determine the causality in intermedia agenda-setting relationships at different time-lags.

Results, conclusions, practical and social implications

The findings from this study aims at developing and operatizing the B&R sentiment index aims at developing a multidimensional multilevel construct to determine the sentiment level of
different types of stakeholders in B&R countries to improve information symmetry and increase cross-border cultural, trade, tourism flows between B&R participating countries.

**Keywords:** Belt & Road Sentiment Index, International News Flow Theory, Intermedia Agenda-setting Theory, Two-way symmetrical Model, GDELT

**References**


The effect of genuineness on public engagement - An exploratory study in the communication of Chinese social media influencers in Pediatrics

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Cindy S.B. Ngai  Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Hong Kong, China)

Introduction and purpose of the study

Chinese president Xi has put health at the center of the country’s policy-making agenda, following “the Healthy China 2030 Planning Outline”. This document is the first long-term strategic plan of health developed at the national level. One of the aims is to enhance children’s health by the construction of Pediatrics. Concerning this great emphasis, sustainable efforts have been put into relevant fields especially in online area. A growing need for public to acquire child health information with pediatricians through social media is witnessed in China. The effective communication between pediatricians and the public is essential given the influential role of pediatricians in facilitating children’s health. In the health-care field, genuineness was viewed as a contributing factor in effective medical communication and fundamental in the formation of a working alliance (Knight, 2009). However, scant study examined the relationship between genuineness and its effect on public engagement in Chinese social media discourse, especially in online pediatricians communication. Public engagement is important because it reflects the public’s attitude and further affects their trust and relationship with involved members. This paper explored the effect of genuineness on public engagement in the communication of Chinese social media influencers in Pediatrics (SMIP) to provide insights to pediatricians to engage the public online and contribute to the formation of high-quality health information.

Theoretical approach

The common definition of genuineness refers to honesty, transparency and authenticity of one’s mind and behavior, and concerns, understanding and support for other people. Owing to the absence of concrete operational dimension in studying genuineness, we developed a four-dimension framework for measuring genuineness in online discourse. The first two dimensions viz. self-disclosure and genuine response are built on prior researches in doctor-patient communication while the functional interactivity is developed from dialogic communication in public relations. Building on intercultural theory, the last dimension emphasizes the expression of genuineness in Chinese culture.
Methodology

Sample selection

We used the keywords of “Pediatrician” with the label of “V-users” to identify the verified doctors in Weibo. Weibo has been considered as one of the most influential platforms to spread health information with 462 million active online users in China. Then we employed a self-developed python program to identify the top 10 pediatricians based on their number of followers on March 1st, 2019. These online pediatricians were coined as “social media influencers in Pediatrics (SMIP)” in our study as they played an important role in informing public opinion and impacting the spread of information.

Data collection

We further scrutinized the number of posts published by these top 10 SMIP for six months (from Mar 1 to Aug 31, 2019) to ensure they were active communicators online. To harvest a sample size representing the target population, we employed the sample size calculator developed by the Australian Statistics Bureau to estimate a sample size of 300 with a confidence level of 95%, a confidence interval of 0.056 and standard error of 0.029. We randomly sampled 30 posts from each SMIP’s account for content analysis.

Coding scheme and procedure

Content analysis is employed to examine the four dimensions of genuineness adopted in the 300 posts of 10 SMIP. Coding schemes were developed based on the previous studies. For the evaluation of public engagement, the number of shares, likes, comments, and positive comments were identified as they were the most common and basic form of engagement indexes in social media (Men et al., 2018).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Brief elaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Self-disclosure                   | -Referring to being willing to intentionally reveal personal feelings, opinions, thoughts, feelings, experiences, facts, values, skills and knowledge (Yalom, 2002).  
-It was viewed as positive interventions of genuineness on the medical therapy (J. Geller, 2003). |
| Genuine response                  | -Involving with the physician’s reaction through emotional support, advice sharing and understanding for other individuals questions and comments (Bottorff et al., 1995).  
-It was identified as relevance with genuineness in medical communication (Van, Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2015). |
| Functional interactivity          | -Relating to dialogic internet principle from functional aspect (Men et al., 2018) in which "generation of return visits" "conservation of visitors" and "dialogic loop" were perceived necessary for genuine dialogic communication to happen (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001). |
| Expression of genuineness in the Chinese culture | -Typical lexicons revealing honesty and kindness, which were two primary elements associated with genuineness (Ray, 2011).  
-The expression of honesty and kindness of particular value to Chinese audience.  
-They are traditional moralities of Chinese nationalities and regarded as the basis of the making of a man (Bai-cai, 2008). |

Table 1: Brief elaboration on how the framework of genuineness is developed
Results and conclusions

The findings indicated genuine responses was positively associated with comments and positive comments while negatively related to shares. Likewise, functional interactivity was found in positive association with shares, whereas negative correlation with comments and positive comments. Besides, expression of genuineness in Chinese culture was positively related to the shares. Though significant differences in four dimensions of genuineness were witnessed, it was important to examine further the associations between the sub-categories resources of each dimension and public engagement indicators. By analyzing the sub-categories separately, the findings were as follows in Table 5.

Limitations

The genuineness dimensions studied in this work were limited to the description and interpretation of posts by ten SMIP from March 1st to August 31st on Weibo. Future studies could collect more extensive samples of data. Moreover, the other driving factors should also be considered to investigate what kinds of elements enhance public engagement.

Implication

This study is the first that contributes to the understanding of effect of genuineness on Chinese public engagement in the online communication of SMIP where insights from different disciplines are drawn in developing an integrated framework to measure genuineness in online health communication. Also, this study provides insights to pediatricians and other physicians on the dimension of genuineness to be employed when they attempt to engage the public in health conversations online. Moreover, Chinese government aims to improve the better-living society by spreading high-quality online health information. Therefore, this research will provide insights into the formation of such information and communication strategies that have positive impacts on the public’s health awareness and better living society.

Keywords: Pediatrics, Online Communication, Genuineness, Public Engagement
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major dimensions</th>
<th>Sub-dimensions</th>
<th>Operational description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-disclosure</strong></td>
<td>Disclosure of personal life</td>
<td>Share daily life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disclosure of personal thoughts,</td>
<td>Uncover the views and attitudes towards something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>opinions, feelings and values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disclosure of information in</td>
<td>Share the content related to pediatrics and children's health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pediatrics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genuine response</strong></td>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>Rephrase public's questions and concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge, skill, experience and</td>
<td>Provide medical knowledge and experience to raise public health awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>treatment advice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitation of helpfulness</td>
<td>Express a sense of hope, e.g., “you can handle that”, “no worries”, “I can help you”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Functional</strong></td>
<td>Conservation of visitors and</td>
<td>Link to the Pediatrician’s clinic/organization/own Weibo page;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity</td>
<td>Generation of return visits</td>
<td>Link to other social networks in which the Pediatrician is present;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Link to other Weibo pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dialogic loop</td>
<td>Reply by the Pediatrician to a user’s comment on a post/comment thread;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Multimedia (type: text, live chat, video, audio);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage more enquiry;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ask questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expression of genuineness in Chinese</strong></td>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>The words of details and explanation: for example, because, so, reasons, include;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>culture</td>
<td></td>
<td>The words of insight: I think, I contend, I prefer;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The words of modal verb: may, could, would, should;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The words of objectivity: in fact, it is true, according to, on the basis of;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The words of adverbs of degree: most of, many, sometimes, rather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>The expression of care: is that okay, are you satisfied, is this clear for you;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The expression of friendliness: hello, could you please, welcome;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The expression of gratitude: thanks, appreciate it;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The expression of blessing: wish you, no worries, everything will be fine;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The expression of compliment: good question, you are right</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: The major dimensions, sub-dimensions and operational description of coding schemes
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
<th>Share</th>
<th>Like</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Positive comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>EXP</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(B)</td>
<td>(B)</td>
<td>(B)</td>
<td>(B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-disclosure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.037</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.814</td>
<td>0.436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genuine response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.247</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.782</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional interactivity</td>
<td>0.180</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>1.135</td>
<td>0.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression of genuineness in Chinese culture</td>
<td>0.115</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>1.122</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Results of associations between four dimensions of genuineness and public engagement.
A Holistic Model of Institutional Public Diplomacy and Foreign Correspondents: Israel as a Case Study

Clila Magen Bar-Ilan University (Israel)
Amira Bejerano Bar-Ilan University (Israel)

Introduction and purpose of the study
Since its inception, the State of Israel has been struggling to advocate its complex and controversial foreign policy to the international community. For many years it has been considered common wisdom among Israeli governments that the most effective way to achieve support among foreign audiences is to develop an effective public diplomacy (PD) mechanism (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008; Gilboa, 2006; Margolick, 2012). This is reflected in the academic literature as well. Israel's PD is mostly studied from the official institutions’ perspectives, analyzing their public affairs, their strategic communication, methods and efforts, strategies and tactics.

Literature review
The literature survey reveals that a key component to better understanding Israel’s public diplomacy is lacking: How are these PD efforts received and perceived by the media? Surprisingly, this absence in research is the case in other geographical areas as well (Cohen, 2009; Bourdon, 2015). Numerous studies focus on how states conduct their PD, while very limited research exists on how these efforts are been perceived by the media (Bruggemann, et. al., 2016; Dell’orto, 2013; Hachten & Scotton, 2015; McLaughlin, 2002,2016; Tumber & Webster, 2006). The objectives of this research are twofold: a) to suggest a holistic empirical analysis of the relationship between the parties; b) to introduce “The Feedback model” for PD analysis, which takes both sides to consider in research.

Methodology
This study compares and contrasts the perceptions of foreign correspondents in Israel and officials from three Israeli PD institutions. Applying comparative analysis allows us to trace similarities and gaps in the ways the two sides perceive the Israeli advocacy mechanism. 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with both correspondents, and PD senior and minor personnel. The questions covered tactical and strategic aspects, as well as general perceptions of the roles that these institutions fulfill.

Results and conclusions
The findings indicate that on the tactical level, both similarities and gaps existed in the ways that the parties perceived the Israeli PD institutions. All officers were found prompting quick response, up-to-date information in different languages and using a broad range of technological tools. As for face-to-face meetings, significant gaps were found between the correspondents and the officials’ perceptions. While the officials noted that they dedicated many resources to
face-to-face interactions, correspondents depicted several tactical weaknesses that exist in all three PD institutions: a lack of relevant forums for exchanging valuable information; absence of briefings with the Chief Commander of the IDF or other seniors and organizing tours that can be more relevant and efficient to their work. On the strategic level, there was a significant gap between the perceptions of the parties.

While many of the correspondents expressed their general appreciation of the public diplomacy personnel which frequently has to juggle in a very intense environment, wide gaps were detected in the ways the governmental entities’ and the foreign correspondents perceived the motivations of these institutions. Officials claimed that despite complicated limitations they feel they manage to apply a two-way communication with the foreign correspondents. However, many of the foreign correspondent’s interviewees perceived it quite differently. They claimed the relations between the parties was more of a one-way communication than a two-way dialogic platform, raising tough questions and receiving detailed answers. Discrepancies regarding the mismatch of providing valuable information to the reporters’ and tailoring it to the specific needs of the correspondents, was also mentioned. Several correspondents depicted it is a “carrot and sticks” mechanism in which cooperative journalists, mainly from large Western media outlets, received access and tips, while (others) reporters were implicitly hinted that “punitive” measures exist for (fewer collaborators) reporters. While the three organizations perceived the relationships they had with the foreign correspondents as dialogic, the latter valued their efforts but criticized the one-way communication nature of these connections. The correspondents expressed their understanding that there are objective difficulties and unique security circumstances, but that these diplomatic actors should endeavor to take more risks, which can create dialogue even in intersections of a clear dispute between the parties.

**Practical and social implications**

This research suggests for the first time a holistic analysis of Israel’s public diplomacy, demonstrating the importance of analyzing public diplomacy activities and the way they are received by the media. By applying a grounded theory approach, the study suggests a theoretical contribution and introduces “The Feedback Model”. The model was derived from a specific case and the findings are limited to Israel. Moreover, the role of foreign correspondents is shifting dramatically due to advanced technology and is not the same everywhere. To validate the model, future research needs to expand the scope of cases analyzed, exploring diverse geopolitical arenas.

**Keywords:** public diplomacy; foreign correspondents; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; IDF Spokesperson Unit; Government Press Office.

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Importance of nation-branding for Ukraine – Challenges and opportunities

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Ukraine is the only country on European continent with an ongoing conflict. It suffers from either a nonexistent or negative public image abroad, reinforced by an aggressive disinformation campaign led by its biggest neighbor, the Russian Federation.

Myths and prejudices against Ukraine, an unknown country until recent scandals involving the US president, confirmed that very few people in North America ever heard about Ukraine. In Europe, Ukraine is more known for its oligarchs and quarrelling politicians, former Prime Minister Yulia Timoshenko and her stint in jail and two revolutions in space of twenty years. Since 2014, the image was reinforced by aggressive Russian propaganda and information warfare against Ukraine using key narratives of Ukraine being a failed state, revolution of Dignity/Euro-Maidan being a West-back coup d’état, a country led by fascist, anti-semitic and far right groups. Ukraine matters for many reasons – geopolitical and political, economic and social. It is therefore a prime example of a country in a need of a strong nation branding strategy and campaign.

After the revolution of Dignity in 2014, Ukrainian successive governments and civil society understood the importance of a strong soft power push and for a need to build a positive image abroad. Several initiatives were launched since 2014 with limited success. Ukraine still lacks behind in all major nation branding indexes and needs to adopt a strong and long-term strategy which goes beyond pure advertising and PR techniques.

What the initiatives and campaigns of the former government of President Poroshenko failed to address is to build a strong narrative about importance of a successful and prosperous Ukraine which is good both for the region and for the larger world. This narrative needs to be built against the long-term goal of building a country that is attractive to visit, to study in, to invest in and to invite to all important strategic geopolitical structures such as the European Union or NATO for example. To achieve this, Ukraine needs to become serious about its reforms, its willingness to shake off of its past twenty five years of misdeeds and corruption by a small but influential political class and be smart about communicating its achievements abroad.

There are many successful examples of nation branding in the world. The one which stands out is that of Singapore which has successfully branded itself over five decades in a government led strategy of a state-city always on the edge of innovation and openness. Whilst the comparison of small Singapore with one of the largest countries in Europe might be odd at first glance, it offers some useful lessons learned for Ukraine.

The methodology and resources used will be mainly secondary sources citing from well-known nation branding authors such as Simon Anholt’s article Nation Brands of 21st century, his Nation brand index, Nicholas Cull’s Public diplomacy – Foundations for engagement
in Digital era and Koh Buck Song’s Brand Singapore monograph. The Ukrainian initiatives, campaigns and other ongoing activities in the area of public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and PR campaigns to attract investment will be described by using local Ukrainian government and media sources.

One of the keys to Singapore’s success lies in the long-term vision of its government to make Singapore a hub of modernity and innovation. This goal was steadily pursued for decades in a coordinated manner across all government bodies and is underpinned by the Singaporean business and art community.

By comparing the key lessons learned from Singaporean nation branding with the Ukrainian initiatives to date, the recommendations will focus on analyzing key principles of building a strong and sustainable nation branding strategy for Ukraine which based on four key principles:

1. Continue adopting difficult but necessary reforms with clear and real results;
2. Long-term and sustainable strategy going beyond one political cycle of five years;
3. Government-led strategy that unites all governmental units together with non-governmental and business sector
4. Creating a strong narrative for Ukraine.

Ukraine and Ukrainian people deserve to live in a peaceful and prosperous country that is well perceived abroad, can attract the necessary investment and achieve its goal of European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

**Keywords:** soft power, nation branding, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, narratives
Doing “Good PR” Online: Understanding social media use in Québec PR work

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Social media have now become an integral part of contemporary media landscapes and, as such, of PR work. However, still few studies have built on sociotechnical perspectives to better understand what practitioners are doing with social media. Building on the analysis of social media use in the field of Québec PR, this communication aims to contribute to shedding light on how, through their daily uses and representations of social media, PR practitioners are enacting plural normative frames, thus contributing to the weaving of our online environments.

Literature review

PR has shown a vivid and continuing interest towards Web technologies, with research on applications and perceptions of social media flourishing in recent years. Keeping with established paradigms, these technologies have been considered mostly from instrumental and managerial perspectives, with a strong focus on dialogue and symmetrical communication, despite persisting evidence of ambiguities between these normative ideals and logic of control or influence. Yet, with some notable exceptions, PR research is still to engage with some of the main perspectives and debates emerging from Internet studies and while a “sociocultural turn” has also furthered our understanding of how the practice is embedded in wider cultural and social dynamics, still little attention has been paid to the sociotechnical mediations that give shape to the practice. Conversely, Internet research has been mostly interested in so-called “ordinary” users. In this context, much is left to be understood about what PR practitioners are doing on a daily basis with social media and the normative frames they enact.

Methodology

Our analysis is based on the results of a multi-method qualitative “thick data” research conducted within the field of Québec PR. In addition to content analysis and participant observations of professional events and materials, our study followed 10 participants, who had various experiences of PR work and social media use, through a 3-step protocol. We first conducted in-depth interviews, then performed cross platform online observation for a period of 4 to 6 weeks, depending on the level of activity and saturation, and met for feedback interviews. Following the sociology of uses sociotechnical approach, our study aimed at understanding what Québec PR practitioners are doing with social media, drawing attention to the interplays between technological affordances and materiality; social environments; and micro-individual realities.

Results and Conclusions

Our results show how PR practitioners’ use of various social media platforms are embedded in daily routines associated to a variety of commitments, interweaving personal and professional
online presences. While following clear patterns, these routines were fragile, showing breaks and changes that feedback interviews revealed to be related to such things as a colleague’s illness or a change in employment.

Our analysis also shed light on the plural and overlapping normative frames associated with social media uses. In addition to repertoires associated with public information, professional responsibility and strategic performance, the “good use” of social media is also defined in relation to technological standards, platform affordances and social Web industries’ promotional material intended for communication professionals. Other normative frames, echoing both the “Web 2.0” promise and its pitfalls, were related to the mastering of a “style” and “art of online conversation”, various degrees of participation and contribution to online “communities”, and the rules or netiquette needed to manage online crowds.

These results give us a better understanding of normative frames associated to online PR beyond the unidirectional/bidirectional or dialogical dichotomy, and how these are enacted in relation to sociotechnical mediations. Our research showed evidence of dynamics in which social media are part of communication industries for which PR practitioners are important stakeholders contributing, through their use and representations of social media, to both the normative and economic valuation of online participation characteristic of informational capitalism.

While the scope of our results is limited by the sample size of our study, it nevertheless demonstrates the potential of thick data analysis combining offline and online methods across platforms for understanding PR uses of social media by going “underneath” traces of online activity and organizational presence. It also opens promising avenues for exploring how PR practice is enacted through the sociotechnical mediation of Web technologies and, at the micro-level, the hiccups, routines and realities of “ordinary work”.

**Practical and social implications**

By making more explicit the overlapping of plural normative frames and the part PR plays in the valuation of participation, our analysis provides practitioners insights that can help them develop their ethical reflexivity about their use of Web platforms – and other emergent technologies, such as AI. It also contributes to give the public a better understanding of PR work and the part it plays in shaping our online environments.

**Keywords**: social media uses; sociotechnical mediation; normative frames; Québec PR
Exploring Millennials’ perception and trust towards online external advocates

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Recent empirical researches in public relations and corporate communication field focused on trust have emphasized the relevance of the source of information compared to the importance attributed to the content: external and alternative advocates like experts, top management, employees are more trusted than professional communication and public relations practitioners by the general public (Zerfass et al., 2019; TICS, 2019). According to these researches, it seems to emerge a general call for the need to explore the role that external advocates could play in the organizational trust-building process. Additionally, within this communicative scenario, social media have empowered external advocates by providing them with a fertile ground where to develop trustworthiness with different publics (Saxton et al., 2015). As social media have traditionally been defined as “the local TV of the Millennial generation” (Mitchell et al., 2015, p.1) where Millennials search for and find information, this study intends to explore how Millennials perceive and trust external advocates such as experts and employees who share their recommendations online and how such external advocates are perceived by them compared to online influencers.

Literature review

This study implements a multidisciplinary approach. The perceived trust towards external advocates will be explored by taking into account the trust literature according to which trust can be intended as “the willingness of a trustor to be vulnerable to the actions of a trustee based on the expectation that the trustee will perform a particular action” (Colquitt et al., 2007, p. 909). Additionally Millennials’ perceptions towards online external advocates compared to influencers will be analyzed by using extant studies on para-social interaction relationships (Rubin McHugh, 1987), according to which it is possible to investigate how media users perceive their relationship with media personalities.

Methodology

A two-step research design will be implemented by combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. A quantitative survey will be implemented for collecting information about Millennials, their attitudes to rely on online recommendation by external advocates and influencers, their habit to share opinion online and their perceptions about the role of external advocates such as experts and employees. Then a focus group will be conducted in order to explore the topic more in details.
Results and conclusions

Millennials seem to have different perceptions towards external advocates and online influencers and such differences could impact their willingness to trust them and to follow their recommendations. Understanding their point of view could be helpful for communication and PR professionals who need to develop knowledge about the social media environment and the active role that external advocates could have for Millennials.

Practical and social implications

This study contributes to the research stream of research focused on the role of external advocates, by providing an overview concerning the Millennials’ perceptions, attitudes and communicative behaviors towards them and the external advocates’ impact on the organizational trust-building process. Results from the study will be useful to communication and PR professionals who deal with online communication strategies and tactics to enhance the management of online relationships with such alternative advocates.

Keywords: External Advocates, Digital Trustworthiness, Millennials generation

References


Who needs public relations? A comparative analysis of two countries over public relations consultancy agencies

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The increase in public relations activities of corporations in the US and Europe have led to the proliferation of consultancy agencies. Upon the fact that Bernays was giving similar services in the 1920s or after John W. Hill founded his own agency in 1927 (Miller, 1999), public relations consultancies increased in number and became able to meet various needs of their clients. However, economic turmoils give rise to cuts of public relations budgets being the ones given up by corporations primarily. Corporations often prefer to invest in advertising efforts over public relations efforts whose outcomes become visible in the longer run. Corporations prefer to hire a public relations consultancy agency more frequently than the cases in which they prefer to employ their own in-house public relations department. They usually opt for cooperating more than one agency as per their area of expertise. The main objective of this study to examine closely Turkish and Slovenian public relations consultancies, reveal their structures and evaluate their clients as well as their areas.

Literature Review

Research on public relations consultancy agencies is limited. A research by Sriramesh and Vercic in 2007 on global public relations consultancies is one of the major ones. Others include a research by Schauster and Neil (2017) on ethical situations at advertising and public relations agencies, a paper on public relations agencies within the progress of public relations discipline in respective countries (Wu and Taylor, 2003), a research on how consultancies respond to widespread digital trends (Triantafillidou and Yannas, 2014) and the one in which public relations practices under specific conditions are addressed (Erzikova and Bowen, 2019).

Methodology

This paper is based on the research by Wirtz and Ngondo (2013) on the website strategies of top fee-generating US-based public relations agencies and the research by Ki and Kim (2010) on ethics statements of public relations firms. Clients of top Turkish and Slovenian public relations agencies will be analyzed to query the following points in terms of both clients to which they render services, and their own organization / employees.
Points to consider in terms of characteristics of clients to which public relations consultancy agencies render service:

- Industry of clients
- Clients’ scope i.e. national or international
- A comparison between clients to see whether they hire more than one agency or not.

Points to consider in terms of inner organization of public relations consultancies:

- How many employees work in which position
- Whether communication with these employees is available or not
- Gender distribution
- How they define and promote themselves
- Ethical approaches of agencies
- Whether agencies are part of an international network or not (e.g. WPP)

All these points will be addressed based on data they made available on their web sites.

**Results and conclusion**

The main purpose of this study is to make a situation determination of public relations consultancies in both countries and evaluate their actual clients to examine closely the execution dimension of public relations profession in both countries.

**Practical and Social Implications**

This paper seeks to reveal a situation determination by detecting whether the “ideal” public relations activities addressed in literature are realized or not within the organizational framework of consultancies and services rendered in both countries.

**Keywords:** public relations consultancy agencies, ethics, Turkey, Slovenia.

**Literature**


Public Relations for Public Relations Professionals: Relationship Management of Public Relations Professionals

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Public relations functions to build and maintain the organizations’ relationships with its publics. The relationship is important in the sense that relationships can enhance and constraint an organization's existence. The relationship concept provides a framework for what public relations should do and it is not only limited to the organization itself, but must cover the well-being of the society as well. The suggested study is an attempt to understand how relationship is formed, maintained and evaluated between a public relations professional and its publics. How does the relationship building/management work, when this time, it is not for the organization, but for the public relations professional for herself/himself? The aim of this study is to come up with relationship management and personal branding practices of public relations professionals. It is expected from public relations professionals to be the agents of relationship management, to create positive perceptions on behalf of their clients, and to manage the social media. This study attempts to look at how they accomplish these on their behalf.

Literature Review

The many definitions of public relations highlight the relationship building between an organization and its publics. Public relations creates interactions for organizations and in this role has to be neutral so that they do not lose its multi-stakeholder perspective (Gregory and Willis, 2013). Public relations people within the relationship building paradigm is engaged in many activities which can range from strategic planning to execution and assessment. From the organization point of view, establishing organization and public relationships are important and has been one of the important focuses of public relations, but how it is initiated, built and maintained is not yet clear (Rhee, 2004). Management of relationships is becoming more and more important in an era where multi-stakeholder perspectives can be heard on many platforms, real or even fake.

Methodology

The research aims to explore the relationship building and management efforts of public relations professionals. The exploratory research will take in two parts. Firstly, semi-structured interviews with public relations professionals in Turkey will be conducted. The sample consists of agency public relations professionals with ten or more years of experience and corporate public relations professionals with similar experience. The aim of this research is to find out how public relations professionals approach to their relationship building, what they do, and how they assess themselves. The second part of
the study will include an analysis of their social media presence, including Twitter and Instagram. This analysis will take into consideration specifically the organizational, professional and personal identity of the public relations professionals on these two platforms. Which aspect/s of identity is communicated? Is there a hybrid approach? What does this imply?

Results and Conclusion

The findings will help us to understand the motives of public relations professional for their own relationship management. It will also show which motives are more prominent on social media.

Limitations of the study

The study is using a qualitative method which allows us to get in-depth information about the study questions, but the results cannot be generalized.

Suggestions for future research

A survey can be conducted and the focus can be broader than social media; covering in general the relationship management of public relations professionals.

Practical and social implications

Public relations professionals is expected to focus on organization and public relationships, and this study may help to uncover similarities and differences between organization and public relationships and public relations professionals and his/her public relationships.

Keywords: public relations professionals, relationship management, social media

References


Can a Profession which has a Negative Impression Contribute to Society?  
A Qualitative Research on Public Relations, Public Relations Ethics and its Contribution to Society

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**Introduction and Literature Review**

The Commission on Public Relations Education (2019) defines public relations ethics as a set of “a priori principles, beliefs and values that should be followed by all who engage in public relations practice.” In fact, ethics and acting responsibly in public relations provide a vital communication function that helps develop an understanding between organizations, countries and the world and ultimately reduce conflicts (Grunig, 1993: 138). Ethical consciousness should be part of organizations seeking long-term efficacy and striving to engage with their publics and stakeholders (Bowen, 2008: 272). Many public relations practitioners have faced decisions with ethical consequences at some point in their careers. Some of these dilemmas are about personal policies and personal conflicts with organizational norms; others point out the differences between the interests of the organization and the public interest (Boynton, 2002: 223). Wright (1989: 3-4) states that in the USA being ethical in public relations or not is often the voluntary choice of public relations practitioners. Among the common themes of critiques of public relations, it is mentioned that public relations does not have a clean history and that public relations is assumed to distort the truth. Power relationships in public relations and the power of corporations are also another ethical concern in public relations (Coombs and Holladay, 2007).

**Methodology**

In this study, semi-structured interviews with 30 people from different professions in Turkey will be conducted to identify their views and perceptions on the ethical aspects of public relations and its contribution to society. With the data obtained in Turkey, the objective is to arrive to an ethical and theoretical framework for the public relations profession, for the public relations practice and its usefulness to society.

**Results and Conclusion**

The data obtained within the scope of this study is important in terms of determining how public relations is perceived by people from different professions. The in-depth data gathered from Turkey respondents will help us to come up with a picture about the perception of public relations. Thus, the study aims to contribute to the improvement of the negative aspects of public
relations and explain public relations profession correctly.

Limitations of the study

The data collection will be done using qualitative method and because of this, limited number of people will be reached.

Practical and social implications

The study will shed light to the perception of public relations profession and the data obtained will be important in several aspects; it will help us to see the status of the profession, evaluate the main ethical issues and its social contribution. It will also seek answers on how public relations practices could be ethical.

Suggestions for future research

In future, quantitative studies can be conducted. In addition to it, it is suggested that the research is repeated in different countries and thus comparisons can be made between the countries.

**Keywords:** Public relations, Professionalization, Ethics, Societal Contribution, Power Relationships

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Cultural Intelligence and Strategic Partnerships: Examining communications protocols in emerging markets

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Introduction

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is an asset for organizations embarking on strategic partnerships. The ability to work with people from diverse backgrounds, build, and translate that relationship into one of mutual understanding is important. Managing across cultures is crucial due to global sourcing, global mobility, global marketing, and global wisdom and collaboration (Solomon & Schell, 2009, p. 12). From North America to Europe, Australia, Asia, and Africa, business initiatives have spanned across borders. Cultural Intelligence in today’s diverse workplace is a skill for the toolbox of management executives and all employees.

Research problem

What are the communications protocols an organization should be aware of and adapt, to ensure success in its partnership ventures abroad?

Research Methodology

In-depth interviews with nine executives and business professors provided qualitative results. A detailed content analysis of new markets and brand expansion articles from samples of 2015 and 2016 issues of business publications- Canadian Business and Bloomberg Business, provided quantitative results. Research was conducted from June 2016 - February 2017.

Literature review

Cultural Intelligence

Building a cross cultural relationship takes time and needs two-way communication to establish trust and mutual understanding. Cultural Intelligence is needed for today’s executive to function globally and effectively and is also related to the concept of emotional intelligence as both share a “propensity to suspend judgment-to think before acting,” according to psychologist, Daniel Goleman (Earley and Mosakowski, 2004, p.1).

It is impossible to master all cultures, however, one should have some basic knowledge of how to integrate and function in a culturally diverse landscape especially for business. Livermore (2010) notes the four step cycle of cultural intelligence, “CQ: Drive-motivation, CQ: Knowledge-cultural knowledge, CQ: Strategy-Plans or initiatives, and CQ: Action-Behaviours needed to adapt and function effectively (p.4). Also crucial is what Kingston (2012) debates about today’s leadership skills, “They demand a combination of cultural dexterity, curiosity about the country, and sensitivity to working with partners in government,” (p.1). A global leader’s tool kit needs a stash of cultural intelligence.
Strategic Partnerships

It is the coming together of people or enterprises in a symbiotic relationship where each benefits over time (Storm, 2009). Businesses and people making a huge impact in the world are not going solo; they have come to understand the formidable force of strategic liaisons because two or multiple good heads are better than one. Strategic partnership takes time to identify and build. It often means moving “slowly” but strategically says IMAX CEO, Gelfond Richard.

Results and Conclusions

Communicators gain Cultural Intelligence by educating themselves on emerging markets, studying, and meeting with ethnic communities at home before embarking on strategic partnerships abroad. Travelling and immersion in a new culture through interaction with the locals is crucial for trust in long term relationships.

Research on political power in the region to understand the decision making process and management is structure is paramount for affect communication channels for key stakeholders. Is leadership egalitarian or hierarchical?

Research on Internet penetration in the region is important to avoid wasting resources on websites and social media. What media platforms are predominant in the region? Newspapers, radio, cell phone SMS (Texts), chats etc. Most emerging regions prefer face-to face communications to build trust in the initial stages of the relationship.

For effective communications in cross cultural partnerships, language is an asset. A local talent on staff or a skilled international team member is invaluable for crisis communication and navigating sensitive issues.

Practical and Social Implications

Public relations professional should be open minded, willing to participate, and be trained in cross cultural relationships. Mergers, global acquisitions, trade agreements, and exploration of new markets are opening doors for product development, managing relationships, and mitigating issues during crisis. By understanding the cultural landscape and effective communications channels with various stakeholders, information is disseminated and managed in the new work space. Experts interviewed agreed that the role of communications in helping to broker, foster, and maintain relationships relied greatly on knowledge and use of local communication channels. It is not one- size-fits all approach, but one that is adaptive and flexible within the cultural landscape.

Limitations

Recruiting participants in the research was a challenge. Out of about 40 global executives and academics contacted, only nine agreed to participate. This is a small sample which does not represent the diverse business partnerships that exists globally.

Limited time and resources to travel to a new environment, be immersed in the culture and conduct more in-depth interviews.

Future study

The convergence of communication and culture and how it can be leveraged to strengthen the role of public relations practitioners.

A case study model with an organization over a period of time to monitor and measure cultural intelligence and its impact on partnerships.

Keywords: Cultural intelligence, Strategic partnerships, strategic communications, emerging markets, cross-cultural ventures.
Abstracts

Networked Campaigning. Mobilizing in the age of transformation

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Introduction and purpose of the study

In general, the body of knowledge that deals with mobilization widely neglects the role of communication management. That also counts vice versa: communication management and PR literature does not discuss its role in organizing civil society. But keeping in mind the vast changes of the public sphere and the conditions of mobilization we ask how a small or relatively young civil society initiative might achieve its communication goals in the age of transformation. In our conceptional paper we suggest networked campaigning as a way to achieve public perception.

Literature review

In a digitalized public sphere, we take networked publics (Boyd 2010; Friedland et al. 2006) as a given scenario and assume that in a fragmented perception well established actors enjoy preferred access to public forums. And since we live under conditions of “Power-law” (Neuberger et al. 2009) where public appearance and perception might be more important than actual deliberation the chance to participate in political deliberation is more and more dependent on the medialization of interest in a public sphere that is built spontaneously and only last short-term.

Methodology

In this conceptional paper we argue that a digitalized public sphere is depending on relational networks (Donati 2011; Chadwick 2013) that focus on ties and interrelations rather than the knots of the network. In these networks, weak ties (Granoveter 1973) become increasingly important since the acceptance of traditional institutions and the willingness to engage oneself on a permanent basis (e.g. as a member) is in decline. Therefore, we assume that individuals engage in multiple, fast changing networks (networked individualism; Rainie & Wellmann 2014).

Results and conclusions

As a result, we propose a concept that we call “networked campaigning” which is designed to conform with the above-mentioned scenario. In line with Liacas & Mogus (2016) we believe that networked campaigns need a compelling cause (1) and is dependent on cross movement network hubs (2). It is open to grass-roots power (3) – but where Liacas & Mogus (2016) still use the traditional control paradigm they label as “focus and discipline” (4) we suggest a co-cre-
ative and agile approach as a valid alternative not only in conducting campaigns (Botan 2018) but also to define and refine the cause and focus of the campaign.

**Practical and social implications**

In a world of information overflow Networked Campaigning is meant as a concept for new and small organizations or social movements to cope with the mentioned power law (Neuberger et al. 2009) in the public sphere. Networked campaigning is similar to strategies we can observe at movements like XR – it is an approach to focus attention by bringing together organizations with similar communication objectives. In contrast to other approaches to campaigning, however, this does not take place through control by a central entity, but through the use of networking and the openness that network partners evolve the messages of the campaign through adaptation and iteration and carry them into their networks.

**Keywords**: Mobilizing, campaigning theory, networked public, relational sociology, networked individualism

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Internal Communication as a strategic function in organizations: Proposal for a Best Practices Guide in Internal Communication

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The current context is characterized by high dynamism, competitiveness and uncertainty, consequently creating new challenges for organizations, in terms of not only business but also regarding the relationship management with employees.

The paradigm has changed, and organizations are facing a new employee profile, who is not looking for a job for life, but professional development, recognition and new experiences. Therefore, the employee is no longer seen as a number, but is perceived as a person, with unique values, expectations, needs and skills. Consequently, organizations began to look more inwardly, showing greater concern for their employees and their contribution for organizational reputation.

In this sense, it is necessary to know the reality of organizations and understand their vision on internal communication and the way the function is managed, drawing useful resources and knowledge that can contribute to its development.

The main goal is to present a proposal for a Best Practices Guide that can contribute to increase knowledge about internal communication and help its professionals to improve or introduce the function in organizations.

Literature Review

Within the scope of this investigation, internal communication is placed as one of Public Relations (PR) areas, understood as a strategic function that combines philosophies, values, purposes, people, meanings, channels and practices. It is a decisive element in organizations, acting as an agent of change and promoting internal cohesion (Men & Bowen, 2017; Brandão, 2018). The purpose of internal communication is to inform, engage and connect employees, aligning them with the organization. PR emphasizes the strategic and multidisciplinary nature of internal communication, arguing that it is the function responsible for the strategic management of relationships and interactions within the organization at all levels, contributing to employee’s commitment and engagement, as well as to the achievement of business goals and organizational success.
Methodology

The Best Practices Guide was built from a literature review and face-to-face interviews with Portuguese organizations from different sectors - consulting, aeronautical industry, retail, air transport, Portuguese Armed Forced, third sector (consumer protection) and energy - that shared their vision and experience regarding internal communication. One of the founding members of The Internal Communication and Corporate Identity Observatory (OCI), which has contributed to the development of internal communication, was also interviewed. The collected data were analyzed through a Qualitative Content Analysis. In order to give more support to the interpretation of the results, an accounting of the coding units was also carried out.

Results and Conclusion

This research has allowed to understand that each organization is unique, as well as its way of managing internal communication, which is influenced by several factors such as the activity sector, organizational structure and culture, leadership style, size and business strategy. Although some common elements can be found between the organizations, these factors will create special conditions for internal communication that can hardly be replicated in other contexts. Despite the differences observed in organizations, the transformation process that society, people and business are going through are common to all of them.

Internal communication has been playing an important role, not only in helping organizations to be more flexible and to adapt to this new reality, but also in creating new spaces and forms of communication to face these changes. Even so, communication is still not one of the main priorities for organizations, lagging behind business areas and not being properly represented on the organizations boards.

Organizations have a practical view of internal communication, and therefore the way their professionals perceive and manage the function is related to the day-to-day experience, the strategic priorities and the profile of employees. Consequently, it was possible to observe significant differences between the organizations interviewed and to identify best practices in all of them.

Even though these best practices must be adapted to the context, dimension, strategy and purpose of each organization, they can make a difference in the results and effectiveness of internal communication.

Practical and social implications

This investigation contributes to clarify the Public Relations view about internal communication and to a greater knowledge of the function, namely its practical aspects and the crucial role it plays in the success of organizations. Likewise, the Best Practices Guide represents an approximation between the academy and the market, joining two distinct views, which complement each other.

It is expected that this Guide generate some discussion and reflection, not only on the internal communication itself, but also on the role that it can play during this transformation period that organizations are facing and which has been shaping their way of acting and working, as well as the relationship with their most important stakeholder: the employees.

Keywords: Public Relations, Internal Communication, Employees, Strategy, Best Practices
What Impact Can Internal Social Media PR Have on Organisational Culture? Results from three consecutive interview studies concerning internal social media within 500 German companies, 2013-2019

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Internal communication can undoubtedly have both a positive and negative impact on the culture of an organisation. It is also obvious that social media also plays a more and more important role within organisations. However, what is the exact impact that social media PR can have on organisational culture e.g. in a change situation? The paper proposed here wants to analyse these issues by focusing in particular on the question of how, and to what extent, trust, as one of the foundations of modern organisations, can be built and destroyed via internal social media PR. This will be done via a particularly long-term survey of up to 500 German companies.

Literature review

According to Niklas Luhmann (see 2014, pp. 27-37), trust can be understood sociologically as a “mechanism for reducing social complexity”. Trust is therefore seen as a necessary basis for any cooperative action, something which specialist literature in both business management (see Dasgupta 1988: p. 49; Curall & Judge 1995; Meifert 2003: p. 303; Herger 2006: pp. 65-84) and organizational sociology (see e.g. Malik 2006: p. 149; Covey 2009, pp. 57-294) has addressed. In communication studies, Bentele (see 1994 and Bentele / Seidenglanz 2008) developed a “theory of public trust”, while Hofmann (see 2013, pp. 23-36), for example, dealt somewhat with the issue of trust in PR research. After all, according to Sao (2010, p. 4), “[b]uild[ing] trust” is one of the core aspects of social media in general.

However, all these approaches deal with trust primarily as an external communication issue and tend to take little account of it internally. This is regrettable, as internal communication is today mainly understood as an integrative part of holistic communication management (see Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002: p. 480). Particularly against a backdrop of increasing digitalization also in internal communication (see e.g. Chui et al. 2012: p. 47, Lee et al. 2013: p. 14, Smith & Mounter 2008, Huck & Sandhu 2016: p. 8), trust, as a communication issue, is becoming ever more important, especially via internal social media.
Methodology

For the paper proposed here, trust, as a framework for internal communication and internal social media, was examined in three successive survey studies, with Germany used as a sample country. The underlying survey studies were conducted in 2013, 2016 and 2019, in each case online in January, with 579, 555 and 352 respondents respectively. In all cases, the questionnaire link was issued to company representatives in the areas of communications, human resources and general management via address lists and editorial references.

Due to general problems in company studies with sampling and participation, this study is, unfortunately, also not representative; it does, however, illustrate a good selection of companies in the country being analysed, roughly corresponding to official statistics. Above all, however, it is most comparable in terms of development trends since there is a very similar composition of distributors and participants for all three surveys. Nevertheless, this is a limitation of the study and an even broader and more international approach to the subject would be suitable for the future.

Selected Results and Conclusions

One of many results shows that currently “only” 30 percent of those surveyed see a strong culture of trust as an important or very important basis for internal social media in companies; there is hardly any change vis-à-vis previous figures. However, there are clear developments when the question arises of what the reliable development of internal social media can foster: in a six-year comparison, the importance of and impact on flatter hierarchies increases by almost 13 percent, while the supporting role of clearer guidelines falls by 7 percent in the same period. Nowadays, internal (corporate) influencers are also given a much larger role in creating an internal culture of trust. At the same time, cross-hierarchical communication grows the most slowly in comparison to communication within the same level.

In summary, trust represents a condition precedent for successful internal communication: to function successfully as a company, one needs employees to not only trust in management decisions, but also for management to trust employees to act responsibly. If this happens, a positive development of trust, with and without internal social media, is possible for building a safe, sustainable and promising future for those organisations in which the internal communication concerned occurs.

**Keywords:** Internal Social Media, Organisational Culture, Trust
Introduction and purpose of the study

The aim of this paper is to examine the influence of specific public relations dimensions on individual organizational culture dimensions. The paper also analyzes the moderating effects of the companies’ ownership structure on the observed relationships.

Literature review

Research shows that the following can have positive effects on organizational culture: excellent leadership in public relations (Meng, 2014), open and clear communication within the organization (Schulz-Knappe, Koch, Beckert, 2019), and symmetrical internal communication (Men, Yue, 2019). Although a significant number of papers confirm the existence of the influence of various aspects of public relations on organizational culture, the impression is that there is not enough research to measure the direct effects of specific public relations dimensions on individual organizational culture dimensions.

Methodology

In order to achieve the research goal, it is necessary to simultaneously measure the public relations dimensions and the organizational culture dimensions. The dimensions of the PR department (office, section) work quality are observed as the independent variables, and the GLOBE dimensions of organizational culture as the dependent variables.

The questionnaire presented in the paper (Nikolić, Božić, Terek, Vlahović, Kavalić, 2020) was used to measure the quality of the work of the PR department in organizations. In short, the methodological procedure for forming this questionnaire consists of three phases:

1. Defining the initial items for the process. 56 items were created.
2. Exploratory factor analysis. The initial 56 items were reduced to 43 (in 7 factors).
3. Confirmatory factor analysis. The 43 items were reduced to 16 (in 5 factors).

The questionnaire consists of 5 dimensions and 16 items. The dimensions are: Ethical and Responsible Action, Proactive and Quality Performance, Strategic and Effective Action, Media Relations and Internal Public Relations. In the process of developing the questionnaire (two
questionnaires in phases II and III), experts evaluate the importance of the items, and later, in the process of applying the developed questionnaire, the state of the items constituting the newly formed questionnaire is evaluated. When applying the questionnaire (for the purposes of research in this paper), the respondents evaluated the state of the items on a seven point Likert scale.

The GLOBE project instrument was used for measuring organizational culture (House et al. 2004). The first part of the questionnaire was used (the state “how it is”). This questionnaire contains 34 items with a seven-point Likert scale. The instrument measures nine dimensions of organizational culture: Uncertainty Avoidance, Future Oriented, Power Distance, Institutional Collectivism, Humane Orientation, Performance Orientation, In-Group Collectivism, Gender Egalitarianism and Assertiveness.

The research was carried out in companies in Serbia where the respondents completed the questionnaires. The respondents included were PR managers, PR practitioners and marketing professionals. A total of 236 questionnaires were collected from 78 companies.

The data were processed by statistical methods: descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis and hierarchical regression analysis for examining the moderating effects.

Results and conclusions

The PR department work quality dimensions have a statistically significant effect on all of the organizational culture dimensions. The dimensions of Strategic and Effective Action and Ethical and Responsible Action have the strongest influence. The biggest impact is on the dimensions of Assertiveness, Performance Orientation and In-Group Collectivism. The Power Distance dimension has statistically significant and negative correlations with all of the PR department work quality dimensions. This means that the PR department has the potential to influence the reduction of power distance in organizations, especially in state-owned companies.

One of the limitations of the research is that it was conducted in Serbia. However, with a high degree of certainty, it can be assumed that similar relationships of the observed dimensions exist in other countries, especially in those countries with a similar degree of economic and social development. The proposal for further research is to examine the impact of the PR department work quality on leadership in the organization, the organizational commitment of employees, confidence at work, etc. It is possible to examine the impact of PR on national culture: the questions in the questionnaire would relate to PR department work quality at the national level, and the GLOBE national culture questionnaire would be used.

Practical and social implications

Continuous promotion of the work of the PR department, and in particular strategic and effective action and ethical and responsible action, creates the conditions for improving the organizational culture, including reducing the power distance. Leaders and PR managers need to be aware of these dependencies, as well as their role in these processes.

Keywords: Public relations, PR department work quality, organizational culture, GLOBE, Serbia
Finance, trust and Facebook: The public relations discourse of the Libra cryptocurrency project

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Introduction and purpose of the study

In June 2019, Facebook announced it was establishing a new subsidiary called Calibra that would introduce a digital payments platform using a new cryptocurrency called Libra. The Libra project was an attempt by Facebook to generate more profits from the connections and user profile information that it has gathered through its social network. The aim of this study is to analyse the promotional public relations discourse used by Facebook and other actors in support of the Libra digital currency project since June 2019. The project also investigates the argumentation against the Libra project, which included the risks of enabling fraudsters, drug dealers and terrorists. Regulators, central bankers, lawmakers and politicians used varied channels to make their case against the Libra project in the public sphere, including the French Finance Minister, Bruno Le Maire who wrote an opinion article in the Financial Times, to argue against Facebook’s digital currency project on behalf of EU countries.

RQ: What were the modes of public relations discourse were deployed by the proposers and opponents of Facebook’s Libra cryptocurrency project from June 2019 onwards?

Literature review

Financialization has been defined by Marazzi (2011, p. 26) as pervasiveness of the financial economy in society “that spreads across the entire economic cycle” funding cars, consumer goods and so on in a way that makes the financial services sector “co-substantial” with production. Financialization has not been much addressed in public relations and media literatures, although Bourne (2017, p.1) has asserted that one outcome of the “successive trust booms and busts in financial markets” is a new emphasis among public relations firms and professional associations on “trust as a pressing agenda for public relations”

Methodology

The study is based upon a content analysis of the organisational rhetoric deployed by various actors in the project, that in total formed the total public relations discourse associated with the launch of Facebook’s Libra initiative in 2019. The author analysed varied communications outputs and materials – including press releases, opinion articles, press statements, white papers, promotional web pages - from Facebook and its Libra partners, as well as similar types of materials issued by those opposing the project, including the Bank of International Settlements in Basel, regulators and central banks.

Results and conclusions

The content analysis of publicity material led to
thematic categorization of Facebook’s messaging. A primary message was of the corporate separation between Facebook and the Calibra consortium, in order to validate it as trustworthy - in the face of Facebook’s issues with the handling of user data on its social network in 2018 and 2019. The second recurring message in Calibra’s promotional material was the “empowerment” that the Libra digital currency could bring to the world’s unbanked population, yet the imagery on the website and publicity material clashed with that proposition in the way it portrayed global elite users rather than those with no access to bank accounts.

The public relations discourse from objectors centred explicitly on whether Facebook could be trusted in the financial sphere. There was evidence of cultural clash and misunderstanding by Facebook, which seems to have overextended itself and its ambition to exercise power equivalent to many central banks in seeking to create and handle money. There was also evidence of clashes between the technological rhetoric from Facebook on innovation versus the emphasis placed on security and fidelity by regulators and central banks.

Practical and social implications

The role of social networks in the spread of disinformation, the influence of digital media platforms in society and the power of leading providers such as Facebook requires that the public relations discourse that they use to promote their goals should be subject to close scrutiny.

The Libra project is a strategic move that could expand Facebook’s scope, influence and power beyond the technology and social media sectors it has dominated for the past 15 years into finance. The clash between Facebook and lawmakers over the ambitions of the Libra project crystallised a culture clash between the technology-oriented messaging typified by Facebook’s mantra of “move fast and break things” and the need for stability, conformance and fidelity in the international payments and banking sectors.

Keywords: finance, digital finance, public relations, discourse

References


Internal communication satisfaction and employee engagement as determinants of the employer brand

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**Introduction and purpose of the study**

For modern organizations, attractiveness, profitability and future operations depend on their readiness to put employees and future employees first and recognize them as most important stakeholders to organizational development (Aggerholm, Andersen & Thomsen, 2011). The association of concepts such as internal communication satisfaction, engagement and employer branding is integral to this. If public relations experts want to manage organizational relationships, it is crucial to have a clear grasp of how internal communication satisfaction is related to engagement and how both, in turn, relate to employer brands. The main goal of the study was to contribute to the understanding of internal communication and its connections with engagement and employer brands. We wanted to test the relationship between the three variables and determine if employees’ perception of employer brands is a result of their internal communication satisfaction and engagement.

**Literature review**

Internal communication is a part of the organizational context in which employees are engaged or disengaged (Bakker, Albrecht & Leiter, 2011). However, in public relations literature dealing with internal communications (and especially employee engagement) has been rather scarce (Tkalac Verčič, Verčič & Sriramesh, 2012). Additionally, very little attention has been given to employees’ preferences of communication by their organization (Ruck & Welch, 2012). Welch (2011) gives a thorough overview of the link between engagement and internal communication and specifies that engagement is under the influence of internal communication. She states that internal communication has the potential to effectively transfer values of the organization onto all employees and involve them in organizational goals. This type of practice leads to engaged employees. On the other hand, another way of differentiating an organization from its competitors amongst potential employees is through the organizational employer brand. Employer brands help potential employees in understanding their future workplace. Employer branding can be defined as the ‘sum of a company’s efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work’. Ambler and Barrow (1996) defined it as ‘the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company’ (p. 187). In this study we explored the potential influences of internal communication satisfaction and engagement on employer brands.
Methodology

In order to answer the research question, we applied three predesigned measurement instruments, as a part of a larger communication survey, among 1524 employees from 10 large companies. The communication survey was a part of a four-year Croatian national scientific project to map out internal communication. The choice of organizations that were approached within the project was based on the typical unit criteria. In selecting the organizations for the sample the project team reached a consensus on what is considered typical and which criteria should be typical. Number of employees range from 300 up to 10 000. Within each company, significant effort was made to include representative samples of employees.

Results and conclusion

The results showed a significant connection among the three variables. Theoretically that implies that not only is there an important relationship between studied concepts, but that it is impossible to manage one without the other. For satisfied and engaged employees that perceive their employers brand as a good one, all three variables need to be developed and managed together.

Practical and social implications

The main practical implication of the study is to help organizations measure, manage and enhance their internal communication by strategically managing all of the studied concepts – internal communication satisfaction, employee engagement and employer brands.

**Keywords:** Internal communication, internal communication satisfaction, employee engagement, employer brand.

References


New realities of public relations and cyber security

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Literature review

We are all becoming more and more reliant on the internet and digital communication: "The internet and other digital technologies as well as its underlying network and information systems are the backbone of the European Society and the Digital Single Market." (ENISA, 2016, p. 5). This dependency of individuals and organizations is making us all vulnerable to cyber (in)security. Indeed, the World Economic Forum report on global risks revealed that cyber-attacks and data fraud or theft are two of top five risks CEOs are most likely to face (WEF, 2019). In the global business community cyber security is becoming a common nightmare. As a global insurance group wrote in its Small Business Cyber Risk Report: "Cyber attacks are the new normal" (Hiscox, 2018). Cyber security is defined as a set of guidelines, technologies and training that provide protection of an organisation’s data and of its computer and digital communication infrastructure (c.f. Schatz, Bashroush & Wall, 2017).

Purpose and theory

The purpose of this investigation is to collect empirical evidence on how the public relations profession in Europe follow broader societal concerns about cybersecurity and map the impact of the profession on cybersecurity in organizations.

Methodology

In January and February 2020 2,324 PR practitioners from 44 European countries administered an on-line questionnaire in English language that was previously pre-tested.

Results and conclusions

There is a cyber security divide between Northern and Western Europe on one side (German professional agree with a statement that cyber security is a much debated topic in their country at 81.9%, in the UK at 80.0% and Denmark at 78.8%) and Southern and Eastern Europe on the other side (with only 20.0% of Croatian professionals agreeing with the same statement about their country, 25.5% in Serbia and 30.2% in Greece). The major concerns for communications departments and agencies in the field of cyber security are that cyber criminals could hack their website and/or social media accounts, close down their digital infrastructure, and to a lesser degree steal data about stakeholders or leak sensitive information. In reality, more than half (54.0%) communication practitioners in Europe experienced cyber attacks or incidents of data theft in their own organizations – joint stock companies and governmental organizations more often than private companies, non-profits or agencies (with statistically significant differences between countries). More than a quarter (27.4%) of organizations experienced multiple attacks, and nearly a half (45.0%) none. While a
business consultancy found that "[t]raining employees to think and act with security in mind is the most underfunded activity in cybersecurity budgets" (Accenture, 2019, p. 8), this opportunity is overlooked by public relations practitioners in Europe: while nearly half of them (45.5%) are often involved in handling cyber security crises and nearly a third of them (31.0%) address cyber security in internal communications, only a quarter of them are involved in employee cyber security education (26.0%) and even less in developing cyber security guidelines – although 90% of cybersecurity issues originate from human error or behavior, and almost never in the IT department (Kelly, 2017). Therefore, increasing cyber security literacy through education and implementing cyber security technologies (where only 17.7% of communication practitioners are involved) should be raised on the agenda of the profession. Since cybersecurity concerns also the integrity of content and not only of channels, it has important implications for positioning public relations professionals within organizations and their impact on organizational and societal wellbeing.

**Keywords:** cybersecurity, public relations, positioning, competence development,

**References**


Perceived organizational transparency as a multidimensional construct: Discovering its benefits and unintended consequences

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Public relations professionals seem to be convinced of a utopian transparency ideal. Increasingly, organizations are expected and pressured to disclose information to organizational members and external stakeholders. This is no surprise, given the auspicious outcomes that are reported in the literature. Negative consequences of transparency for employees are not fully understood in transparency research, and there is little knowledge about the consequences of the disclosure of particular types of information.

In this project, a multidimensional conceptualization of organizational transparency is proposed consisting of seven dimensions. Each dimension is measured by a theory-based scale. Finally, this study explores what content can instill job satisfaction and organizational trust upon disclosure.

Literature review

Prior research indicates a positive link between organizational transparency and employee performance. Transparency is seen as a way to empower employees and improve the quality and speed of decision-making. While transparency is usually defined as the disclosure of information, it is also a highly subjective concept as it refers to the extent that the information is deemed ‘accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal’ (Rawlins, 2009, p. 75). Therefore, in this project, we treat transparency as a perceptions rather than behavior.

As the realization is growing that transparency should be treated as a multi- rather than unidimensional construct, it is no longer relevant to ask to which extent an organization is transparent, but which information an organization chooses to disclose. On the basis of our literature study, we distinguish transparency about (1) decisions & policies, (2) employee behavior monitoring, (3) board and management structures, (4) financial accounting, (5) investments, (6) employee efforts & rewards, and (7) salaries.

Methodology

A survey was deployed resulting in a convenience sample of 269 employees, working at least 8 hours a week for an employer. Freelancers and business owners were excluded. Seven dimensions of transparency perceptions were measured, as well as organizational trust and job satisfaction.

Results and conclusions

The findings revealed that transparency is not always related to positive outcomes, and can
even have negative consequences. Transparency in (1) decisions and policies and (2) employee behavior monitoring were positively related to job satisfaction. Both relationships were mediated by organizational trust. This supports the much-heard notion that employees are appreciates organizations that are open about topics that matter to them because this openness instills trust. However, transparency in (3) board and management structures, (4) financial accounting, (5) investments, and (6) employee efforts and rewards were not associated with job satisfaction or organizational trust. Not all topics appear to be important for employees and transparency in those fields do not affect employees much. Finally, the study showed that transparency in (7) salaries is negatively related to organizational trust. The disclosure of confidential information (such as the height of salaries) can harm organizational trust.

Practical and social implications

These findings indicate that, rather than uncritically pursuing the transparency-ideal, organizations need to get smarter about which information to disclose or withhold. The perceived disclosure of different types of information has very different effects on employees. First, it is very important that employees perceive the organization to be open about policies and decisions because such information can make (future) organizational behavior predictable, and can give employees insight into the aims and strategies of the organization. Such insight can generate organizational trust, which makes employees more satisfied with their jobs. Furthermore, organizations have an obligation to be open about the data the organization gathers about its employees. When organizations appear secretive about their employee monitoring programs, employees may feel like they are secretly being watched, which harms trust and satisfaction.

However, perceived transparency does not always translate in trust and satisfaction: some (perhaps more technical) information may require too much expertise and effort to make sense of, may raise new questions, or may contribute to information overload. Furthermore, employees may not always understand and appreciate the relevance of such information for their own situation. Finally, the disclosure of salary information can violate the trust in the employer because employees expect such information to remain confidential. A trust relationship also implies confidentiality about the arrangements between those parties.

References

Immersive CSR? Exploring the Potential of Immersive Storytelling in Public Relations and CSR-Communication

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Introduction and purpose of the study

When asked about the most important technical developments for future society, Apple CEO Tim Cook just recently emphasized the potential of AR: “My view is it’s the next big thing, and it will pervade our entire lives.” (Burke, 2020). It’s already been two decades of media practice since the concept of Augmented Reality has been introduced and precisely defined by Azuma (Azuma, 1997) and Milgram et al. (Milgram et al., 1995), but just recently there has been an increasing number of studies, ranging from urban studies (Burd, 2008; Manovich, 2006; Pranz et al., 2020), media studies (Caldera-Serrano & León-Moreno, 2016; Nielsen & Sheets, 2019; Ross, 2018; Rupp et al., 2016) to journalism studies (Aitamurto, 2019; Lewinski, 2018; Shin & Biocca, 2018).

In this paper, we focus on the potential immersive storytelling (IS) has for Public Relations in general, and for Corporate Social Responsibility communication in particular. Since, there is also expanding evidence, that the potential of CSR or sustainability communication is still underdeveloped.

Short literature review

Among the main barriers that communicators face in trying to convey the issue are the “lack of immediacy and direct experience”, e.g. the long-term effects of climate change and its “complexity and uncertainty” (Wibeck, 2014). Another problem of making sustainability issues salient in public communication lies in its unseen and intangible character (Moser & Dilling, 2004). Therefore, laypeople seem to have difficulties understanding the underlying problems. (Sternman & Sweeney, 2007).

For organizational communication, which is being examined here in particular, further specific challenges are emerging. Not only are most customers and employees’ laymen, but communication with these target groups primarily serves other goals than the ecological shift in attitude and behavior. Customers want efficient and credible information about products and services, employees want clear and precise information to fulfil their duties. The willingness and ability to go beyond this is not very well developed against the background of information overload and ever-increasing workloads. (Wagner, 2019).

Nevertheless, organizations are required to contribute to a more sustainable society (Ihlen, 2009; Averchenkova et.al., 2016). To engage and inspire customers and employees’ new ways must be explored to win the fight for attention and to facilitate sensemaking processes (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995; Weick et.al., 2005; Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010; Morsing...
& Schultz, 2006) in order to induce behavioral changes (Nijhof and Jeurrissen, 2006; van Vuuren and Elving, 2008). It is here important to note that the natural medium of sensemaking is narrative (Taylor, 2009) – people must be emotionally engaged, enabled to narrate by themselves and among themselves.

On this background immersive media (Slater & Wilbur, 1997), such as Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality and 360-degree video, offer a special potential. In consideration of similar fields of application like journalism (Lewinski, 2018; Páino Ambrosio & Rodríguez Fidalgo, 2019) or marketing (Jung et al., 2020), we assume that immersive storytelling has great potential in communicating complex topics like climate change (Neuberger, 2019) and could raise the level of user engagement (Shin & Biocca, 2018).

Methodology

In order to identify the potential of IS has for CSR Communication, we conducted a study that is based on two questions: (RQ 1) In how far is immersive storytelling used to communicate topics in the field of CSR? (RQ 2) How do CSR and PR experts perceive the potential of immersive storytelling. To answer the RQs this study used a mixed-methods approach: We conducted a content analysis of a sample from German company websites (n=210); we further draw on survey data collected from an online survey (n=140). The quantitative data is contextualized through qualitative narrative interviews with PR-professionals (n=20) and a focus group discussion (n=18).

Results

The data collection took place from December 2019 to January 2020; data analysis will be finished by April 2020.

Keywords: CSR, CSR-Communication, immersive Media, Storytelling, AR, VR

Literature


An employee-centered model: Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for CSR, morality and organizational identification

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Prior research argues that inconsistent CSR strategies, such as larger external than internal efforts, can reduce employees’ identification with an organization. However, the mechanism through which external CSR and internal CSR may affect organizational identification differently remains unaddressed. This research examines the mediation roles of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for CSR as well as perceived organizational morality in the relationship of CSR and organizational identification.

Literature review

Drawing on social identity theory and attribution theory, we distinguish internal CSR (i.e. meeting employees’ need for safety and security) and external CSR (i.e. meeting employees’ need for distinctiveness), and argue that the impact of internal CSR on organizational identification is mediated by intrinsic motivation and perceived organizational morality. On the other hand, the impact of external CSR is predicted to be mediated by extrinsic motivation and perceived organizational morality.

Methodology

The proposed mediation effects are empirically tested through a survey among professionals working at a multinational alcoholic beverages company in Russia. In total 622 employees participated in the online survey, out of which 481 completed the questionnaire. The dataset (n=481) was analyzed through structural equation modeling.

Results and Conclusions

The results provide insightful evidence with regard to how different types of CSR are perceived among employees. First, we confirm that internal CSR influences intrinsic motivation and perceived organizational morality, which in turn influences organizational identification. Second, we found that external CSR has a negative direct effect on perceived organizational morality, but a positive mediated effect on perceived organizational morality through extrinsic motivation. This result can be potentially explained by a mixed feeling of the employees: They do not recognize a direct linkage of external CSR with organizational morality, but can understand the value of external CSR on enhancing extrinsic motivation which will in turn contribute to justifying organizational morality. Next, the results indicate that organizational identification is mainly affected by internal CSR, and only marginally by external CSR.
Practical and social implications

This research contributes to our understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying impactful employee judgements of CSR strategies. It provides important guidance for organizations in aligning employees through committing to specific CSR strategy and active CSR communication within the organization.
Key-Opinion-Consumers (KOCs): the emerging influencers contributing to the purchase intention

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) have been proven as an effective way in affecting consumers’ purchase intention (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). As KOLs’ endorsement gradually turns to paid sponsorship by brands and public relations agencies, the effectiveness of using KOLs as a way of communication is decreased in Hong Kong (Tang, 2017). While the potency of employing KOLs started diminishing, the use of Key Opinion Customers (KOCs) as a novel means has started emerging.

Key Opinion Customers, or Key Opinion Consumers (KOCs), is a newly developed concept that emerged and claimed to be more favorable in building a brand’s image (Digital Business Lab, 2019). KOCs refers to a group of general consumers, who provide product reviews and trial experiences from consumer perspectives, and spread their content via private accounts on social media networks. KOCs are viewed as authentic-oriented and are more credible (Digital Business Lab, 2019). This study aims to investigate KOCs, as influencers, whose impact on consumer and what are the major inherent factors and attributes of source credibility to KOCs.

Literature review

Source credibility model (Ohanian, 1990) claimed that the reliability of a message depends on a perceived level of attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness of an endorser, such as KOLs or KOCs. A scale was constructed to measure the source credibility.

The definitions, nature and audiences between KOLs (Katz, Lazarsfeld & Roper, 1955; Kotcher & Nisbet, 2009; Misci Kip & Uzunoglu, 2014) and KOCs, were also investigated through literature review.

Methodology

Online quantitative survey was conducted targeting interviewees who lived in Hong Kong for over 180 days in 2019 and purchased kids and parenting products or services from Aug 1 to Oct 31, 2019. KOLs and KOCs definitions were stated in the survey and only those who declared themselves to understand the definitions were valid samples.
Snowball sampling was made through social media networks, including Whatsapp, Facebook inbox messages and posts on Facebook pages related to parenting groups. Data were collected during the period from November 14 to 17, 2019, and a total sample of N=147 were received, where 111 were valid.

Results and conclusion

Based on a 5-points scale, results indicated that KOCs (mean=3.90) have a greater impact on related purchase intention than that of KOLs (mean=2.88), who have neutral impact in the kids and parenting industry in Hong Kong. Furthermore, the results indicated that the selected inherent factors of KOCs and KOLs, i.e. trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertise, could all positively affect the purchase intention of general consumers. Out of the three factors, trustworthiness (mean=3.95) is the most important source of power of KOCs as they influence general public’s purchase intention. It is worthwhile to learn that sexy-not sexy is the least important attribute of attractiveness to both KOCs (mean=2.11) and KOLs (mean=2.30).

Results also demonstrated that trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertise have a strong positive correlation to KOCs in their influences on the related purchase intention. Particularly, purchase intention is strongly related to trustworthiness and expertise of KOCs (r>.8) while trustworthiness and attractiveness (r>.5), and attractiveness and expertise (r>.5) also play important roles in influencing related decision-making behavior.

The study concluded that KOLs have less impact on general consumers’ purchase intention when it comes to kids and parenting products or services in Hong Kong, which is different from Dhanesha and Duthler’s 2019 study. The findings revealed that KOCs, a newly developed group of influencers, who have a greater positive impact on consumers than that of KOLs. Due to authenticity concerns, KOCs might be linchpin influencers than KOLs in certain industries, such as maternal and child products.

Practical and social implications

Along with the results where KOCs have been proven to have a significant impact on customers’ purchase intention, practitioners may consider adopting different influencers, such as KOCs, in certain context where authentic word-of-mouth does have an impact. When choosing KOCs, trustworthiness and expertise factors would be considered first than attractiveness in kids and parents industry.

This study illustrated the potential investigation into KOCs communication and its effectiveness. Researchers could further study related topics in a bigger scale or in other industries such as healthcare or financial fields, where authenticity and credibility of the word-of-mouth is of high requirement. (word count: 715)

Keywords: key-opinion-leader, key-opinion-consumer, key-opinion-customer, kids-and-parenting, purchase intention

References


Are Likers All Buyers? Effects of Storytelling Strategies of WeChat’s Sponsored Content on Chinese Millennials’ Brand Favorability, Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Social media are critical for brand communicators today. As China has become the world’s largest emerging market, understanding how Chinese consumers process online information is indispensable for international brands. However, studies on sponsored content are largely based on Western media platforms (Voorveld et al. 2018; Smith, 2017).

WeChat, the largest social media app in China, had over 1.15 billion monthly active users as of Q2 2019, and 86.2% are 18-36 years old (Statista, 2020). WeChat Public Accounts (WPAs), a key and popular functional module of WeChat, is similar to Facebook pages where users can follow their favorite KOLs and brands to receive pushed articles. WPAs has become an integral tool for brands to build relationships with their potential and existing customers. It greatly contributes to Tencent’s (WeChat’s parent company) annual advertising revenue of RMB25.61 billion (approximately $3.8 billion) (Tencent, 2018). Some Internet celebrities make as much as RMB100 million (approximately $14.8 million) per year by producing sponsored content (Li, 2019). But do these brands get their money’s worth?

The effectiveness of branded content has been an abiding interest for marketing public relations scholars (Campbell & Marks, 2015; Carlson, 2015; Hart, 2014; Hwang & Jeong, 2018), while a distinctive type of content on WeChat remains unexamined. Instead of using “paid” or “ad” as traditional sponsored content does, WPA authors use “plot twist”, a literary technique that introduces a radical direction change or unexpected outcome of the story, to disclose the sponsorship: The narrative starts with an ordinary and irrelevant story; as the story towards the end, the sponsorship suddenly emerges. This “seamless transition” exhibits playfulness while often generates controversy among readers: Some praise its innovativeness, while some feel betrayed. Although this phenomenon has gone viral among over one billion WeChat users, the types of disclosing strategies, the rationales behind the strategies and their effectiveness still lack attention from academia.
This study aims to answer two questions:

• What storytelling strategies best motivate consumers’ brand favorability, purchase intention and word-of-mouth?

• How perceived deceptiveness and perceived innovativeness of the article mediate the impact of storytelling strategies on consumers’ brand favorability, purchase intention and word-of-mouth?

**Literature review**

The signaling theory provides a framework to understand how informational cues (i.e., signals) are conveyed by one party to another to facilitate a favourable attitude or action (Mavlanova, Benbunan-Fich, & Lang, 2016). Brands interacts with their existing and potential audiences by sponsoring the KOLs (mostly Internet celebrities), hoping to convey quality informational cues (product-related signals) to influence people’s brand attitude and buying decision. Meanwhile, the KOLs, also need to build affective bonds with their followers on WPAs via person-related signals to stimulate trust. In this study, we categorize the information cues conveyed by the sponsored articles into product- and recommender-related characteristics (Chen, Lu, Wang, & Pan, 2019; Li, Srinivasan, & Sun, 2009).

Additionally, referencing to Frow’s (2015) genre theory and Gerrig’s (1993) narrative transportation theory, our preliminary study on 100 recent sponsored content on WeChat identified three storytelling strategies:

• Problem-solution narrative: the sponsored product/service is disclosed as a solution for a problem;

• Analogy narrative: the sponsored product/service and the first half of the storyline share common characteristics (e.g. the article begins with a story about masculinity ends with a sportscar)

• Associative narrative: the sponsored product/service and the story have inherent logical connection (e.g. the article begins with a wedding or relationship-related story ends with a jewelry or photo frame brand)

**Methodology**

A 2 (product-related vs. recommender-related) x 3 (three story narratives) is conducted to test the effectiveness of different storytelling combination on consumers’ brand favorability, purchase intention and word-of-mouth. A virtue brand of speakers is used in the stimulus to avoid confounding factors. Representing China’s main consumer force (Dudarenok, 2018) and major WeChat users, 300 millennials (born between 1980-early 2000) are recruited in the experiment. Perceived deceptiveness and perceived innovativeness are examined to see whether they act as mediators between IVs and consumers’ responses.

**Results and conclusions**

The study is in progress and will be completed in around three months. Some preliminary results from pilot study include: Problem-solution narrative with product-related signal generates more trust and less perceived deceptiveness, less perceived innovativeness, and lower level of word-of-mouth, while associative narrative with product-related signal produces higher level of perceived innovativeness, brand favorability and intention to share with others, but lower level of purchase intention. “Likers may not be buyers”.

**Limitations and suggestions for future research**

The study is limited to the context of WeChat and Millennials, therefore the research results may not be generalizable to other ages and cultures. Future studies can test the model on other social media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook. Moreover, product type and involvement
Practical and social implications

The study represents the first investigation into the storytelling strategies of WeChat’s sponsored article, emphasizing the importance of information cues and storytelling, contributing to the research stream of the genres of branded content strategies and their effectiveness, providing valuable insights to both communication researchers and brand communicators.

Keywords: Mass media effect, WeChat, Sponsored content, Chinese consumers
2020 PAPERS
The swing effect of CSR between society and company

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Abstract

In research, the reputation of companies is understood as a multidimensional construct that is primarily constituted by the perception of market performance, management, employer quality, financial strength and sustainability. Overall reputation is seen as a key factor for the social legitimation of companies. As a result of the social developments of recent years, the dimension of sustainability is expected to become increasingly important. The present study investigates the question of whether the perception in the area of sustainability has an influence on the perception of a company in the other dimensions. The social listening method is used to determine whether there is a swing effect between the sustainability dimension and the other dimensions.

Introduction

At the latest since the Fridays for Future began, the topic of sustainability, and consequently also corporate social responsibility (CSR), has become of the highest current relevance. Companies are under increasing pressure to legitimise themselves. Time and again, they feel compelled to justify their business decisions and actions to society. The implementation of a CSR strategy and the fulfilment of the societal demand for corporate social responsibility have meanwhile proven to bring a competitive advantage and be important tools in reputation management. CSR thus represents a decisive determinant of corporate reputation (CR). Even in Fombrun’s classic approach, it is one of the six dimensions of reputation. Commitment and initiatives in the area of CSR are therefore expected to radiate to other dimensions of reputation and possibly interact with them in the form of swing effects.

Reputation research has shown that, in addition to the factors mentioned, communication also makes a significant contribution to reputation building. This trend, which is characterised by the omnipresence of the Internet and constant accessibility, has given communication a new meaning for everyday life and also for reputation management. With the help of an analysis procedure based on artificial intelligence, this article attempts to determine the individual reputation dimensions for a total of three companies on the basis of online communication and to draw conclusions about the overall reputation of the companies. The focus is on investigating swing effects between the dimension of sustainability and the other dimensions. Results, limitations
and further research needs are discussed at the end of the study.

**State of research and research gap**

**Reputation**

The relevance of reputation and appropriate management has been recognised in both scientific and practical discourse since the end of the 1990s at the latest and is an integral part of communication management. The basis for this was provided by Fombrun (1996, p. 72), who conceptualised reputation as “a perceptual representation of a company’s past actions and future prospects that describes the firm’s overall appeal to all of its key constituents when compared with other leading rivals”.

A closer look at the state of research shows that the findings regarding the criteria that serve as reputation drivers are quite divergent.

Various authors have shown that industry, interest and requirements, or the expectations of the respective shareholders are the focus of the individual image and reputation dimensions. Accordingly, there are a large number of associations and individual factors that are decisive for the overall assessment of a company (Veh et al. 2019, p. 315). In addition, individual assessments, perceptions and social norms also influence the opinion about an organisation (Einwiller 2013, p. 293). Against this background, reputation is a fragile construct rather than a constant and stable one (Kaul et al. 2015, p. 459) and is made up of the attitudes and perceptions of all relevant stakeholders and the current values and norms that prevail in society (Einwiller 2013, p. 293).

In addition, communication also plays a key role in building and managing reputation (Carroll 2013). Carroll’s definition (2013, p. 4), according to which reputation is a “widespread, often repeated message of minimal variation about an organization, which says something about the nature of the organization”, makes it clear that a company’s reputation develops from a variety

![Image of the six dimensions of companies' Reputation Quotient](image_url)

*Figure 1: The six dimensions of companies' Reputation Quotient*

*Source(s): Fombrun and van Riel, 2004, p.53*
of external sources, such as dominant opinion leaders from outside third parties (Aula/Mantere 2008, p. 179), and is therefore only partially in the hands of the company itself.

With the advent of the Internet and social media, the importance of communication for reputation has come to the fore. The role of the customer has changed from passive consumer to active “consumer manager” (Jones et al. 2009, p. 934). Every day, huge amounts of data are sent around the globe unfiltered and free of time and space restrictions, and the interaction between individual customers and various stakeholder groups is continuously intensified and accelerated.

For companies and managers, the merging of the online and offline worlds represents a double-edged sword with new challenges and opportunities, requiring new rules and changed behaviour.

Although on the one hand many companies are taking advantage of the new opportunities and building communities around their brands to strengthen access to their customers and greatly increase brand awareness with little time and money, on the other hand they find themselves in a risky environment where “one negative tweet can torpedo a brand” (Bernoff/Schadler 2010, p. 95) and can ruin the reputation of the entire company (Kaul et al. 2015; Jones et al. 2009). Due to “socialcasting” (Jones et al. 2009, p. 931), the development of enormous reach when a single contribution is spread via a scandal poses a threat to the entire company and all other factors.

Accordingly, it is of enormous importance for companies and managers in today’s world to regularly examine the changing media landscape with all its consequences and channels in order to obtain a comprehensive overall picture of their own reputation on the one hand and to react to possible opportunities or risks as quickly as possible with suitable measures on the other (Fertik/Thomson 2010, p. 16; Szwajca 2017, p. 162; Bernoff/Schadler 2010, p. 95; PRWeek 2008). Nevertheless, due to it being highly time and cost intensive, classical market research is often not carried out at sufficiently regular intervals.

As a result of the increasing importance of the Internet as an information and communication medium, reputation management that meets current standards takes into account all online and offline communication and is able to adequately analyse, filter and interpret data from social media (O’Connell 2010, p. 2 ff.; Fertik/Thomson 2010, p. 16).

This opens up a “process of positioning, monitoring, measuring, talking and listening as the organisation engages in a transparent and ethical dialogue with its various online stakeholders” (Jones et al. 2009, p. 934), which can be seen as an important success factor for the future of a company (Carroll 2013, p. 4; Kumar et al. 2015, p. 459, Venkateranam/Das 2014, p. 33).

Several authors conclude that using social media is an excellent way for companies to communicate their CSR activities, reduce scepticism and even increase brand equity (Yang et al. 2020; Dunn/Harness 2018; Du/Veira 2012). Stakeholders and customers react very sensitively nowadays, especially when it comes to social issues and all topics related to CSR. Communication in social media about social commitment promotes credibility and leads to further positive effects for the brand and reputation of a company (Chu et al. 2019). According to the thesis, a cycle of positive effects is created that can lift the entire reputation of a company to a new level.
CSR and CR

“CSR and CR can be treated as two sides of the same coin” (Hillenbrand/Money 2007). Both constructs play an important role in scientific research and business practice. Their mutual relationships and the resulting effects are discussed below.

The Link between CSR and CR

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the issue of CSR has gained increasing importance in public and academic discourse. The origins of this development can be traced back to the changing roles of state and society in the course of industrialisation and the emergence of ever-larger corporations (Frederick 2018; Kosher 2015). The concentrated power and the immense influence on economic, ecological and social events associated with this led to companies being held responsible time and again for social problems and, at the latest since the 1970s, for “all the evils of the world” (Homann/Lütge 2013, p. 99). Time and again they have been criticised for maximising their profits at the expense of the general public (Porter/Kramer 2006).

The first strategic reorientation of social responsibility can be located in the 1960s, when the change to a liberal mindset, more room for manoeuvre and the anchoring of socially relevant issues in the economic orientation of a company took place (Raupp et al. 2011). The pursuit of profit and social conscience, often addressed under the term “business ethics”, were expected to be united in a company as “twins that belong together” or “two sides of the same coin” (Homann/Lütge, 2013, p. 1). In addition, there was the increasing enforcement of and demand for co-determination, which was primarily concerned with the protection of human dignity, power control, equal rights and democratisation of the economy (Homann/Lütge, 2013). With other socio-political problems, including the oil crisis, the economic crisis and the Cold War, the property rights approach and the idea of corporate social responsibility became more acute, polarised society and became institutionalised. Particularly formative in Germany were the environmental movements and the so-called 1968 movements, in which a reorientation took place via ecological awareness and corporate practices were questioned (Raupp et al. 2011). After further crises and business-related environmental damage, the movements continued in the 1980s and 1990s, leading to new political oppositions and bringing to the fore demands for greater transparency and the issue of sustainability as a further dimension (Raupp et al. 2011).

The growing socio-political scepticism led to immense pressure being placed on companies to legitimise themselves. They felt the rising expectations on the part of the population (Weber/Wasilewski 2018; Kosher 2015) to consider socially relevant issues and to reconcile the interests of all stakeholders with their business activities (Mildenberger et al. 2008). In the course of globalisation and internationalisation, which force companies to justify their business activities not only at home and abroad but also to the entire planet, the topic of CSR is receiving immense attention even today. Following Carroll (2000), corporate social responsibility is a highly relevant topic, as it unites the core concerns between the two areas of tension between companies on the one hand and society on the other. With the advent and steady progress of information technology, the challenges will continue to rise as all enterprises are pushed towards a global-level frame of reference and functioning.

As a result of this development, many associations, partnerships, CSR networks and multi-stakeholder initiatives have emerged since the beginning of the 21st century, particularly in the USA and Europe, from which standards and codes of conduct have emerged (Matten/Moon 2020). Companies that ignore aspects such as
climate change, sustainability, human resource management, globalisation, free flow of information (Branco/Rodrigues 2006), etc. in their decisions are not accepted in today’s society and run the risk of incurring competitive disadvantages and damaging their business in the long term (Mishra/Nigam 2015). Accordingly, companies must take into account the demands of society and respond to its needs, as well as considering numerous other external factors such as regulations, customs and norms, all of which influence company decisions and actions to a high degree (Beddewela/Fairbras 2014). This is because it has become apparent that society is reacting more and more sensitively to media reports that address scandals on sustainability issues, such as the emissions scandal at Audi and VW (Wensing 2017). Current movements such as Fridays for Future debates fuel the omnipresence of the topic and demonstrate its current relevance in practical discourse. The debate on CSR has thus become an important part of modern corporate governance (Vishnupriya 2016); companies are aware of the consequences of disregard and have understood that they must develop a social conscience in addition to achieving profit maximisation (Friedman 2006) and that socially relevant problems are part of their area of responsibility (Carroll 2000; Korscher 2015; Vishnupriya 2016). Society demands sustainability, and companies have to react (McWilliams/Siegel 2001). In this sense, companies that combine the dualism of economy and ethics and give back to society are rewarded in the long term (Lin-Hi/Blumberg 2018). Commitment and the anchoring of CSR as an integral element of a business and corporate-level differentiation strategy is therefore considered a strategic investment and represents an opportunity to build a company’s reputation (McWilliams et al. 2006; Fombrun 2005).

Despite the great research interest in the field of CSR, the topic is still very controversial. Even a universally valid definition has not yet been found (Okoye 2009). One of the reasons for this is that the construct is used in many different contexts. However, the approach that companies have to stick to the triple bottom line and have to regard the ecological, economic and social situation has become generally accepted across the various disciplines. Companies demonstrate their social responsibility in situations “where the firm goes beyond compliance and engages in actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law” (McWilliams et al. 2006), actions that are “voluntary by definition – demonstrating the inclusion of social and environmental concern in business operations and in interactions with stakeholders” (van Marrewijk 2003). After examining the literature, certain key principles can be identified in the context that the topic of CSR is often associated with and in which it is researched. These include involvement in community life, accountability, sustainability, clearness as well as honest and ethical behaviour (Carroll 2000, 2016; Wood, 1991, Moir, 2001, Nazari et al. 2012, Zink 2007). Furthermore, there is widespread agreement that the construct spans two additional dimensions that are necessary to explain CSR. These are two ideal-typical constructs that can be clearly distinguished from one another in theory, but in practice tend to appear as a hybrid (Lini-Hi/Blumberg 2018; Lin-Hi/Müller 2013). Companies have the responsibility on the one hand to maximise positive impacts in the form of “doing good” (Carroll 1979; Maignan/Ferrell 2005) and on the other to prevent negative impacts on the well-being of society by “avoiding bad” (Maignan/Ferrell 2005; Strike 2006). The “doing good” dimension is not subject to any legal regulations or social norms, has a voluntary character, and is manifested, for example, in behaviour such as art funding, disaster relief donations, microfinance, cause-related marketing or the recruitment of minority employees. Avoiding bad, on the other hand, ensures compliance with the rules and minimum ethical standards in
everyday business life (Lin-Hi/Blumberg 2018). Negative behaviour to the detriment of society and stakeholders, such as corruption, customer fraud, market manipulation or tax evasion, can be curbed by avoiding bad.

Since social commitment in the form of doing good or avoiding bad is always associated with costs and represents an investment for a company, many studies have already examined the effects of CSR on other well-known constructs such as corporate reputation, corporate brand, corporate identity, corporate image and corporate performance (Lu et al. 2020; Lin-Hi/Blumberg 2019). A theoretical basis for this is provided by Burgeon’s Expectancy Violations Theory (1993). In order to attribute reputation, companies must meet certain public expectations of performance, morality and uniqueness. In this way, practices and the legitimacy of the company are validated and socially recognised (Raupp et al. 2011). If the promises made by companies and the expectations associated with them are violated or not fulfilled by stakeholders, a general doubt arises about how to predict the future behaviour of a company. Negative consequences, such as a lack of trust, a bad reputation or loss of image are the result (Bailey/Bonifield 2010).

In addition to the valuation of various CSR outcomes, other well-known key topics of research include communication, stakeholder commitment and the quantification of CSR levels.

The positive effects on corporate success in terms of economic and financial performance have already been demonstrated in numerous studies (Russo/Fouts 1997; Mishra/Nigam 2015; Vishnupriya 2016). The reasons for this are, on the one hand, the better or “more sustainable” budgets of companies, which can be explained with the RBV theory (Branco/Rodrigues 2006), but also the competitive advantage over competing companies (Lin-Hi/Blumberg 2018). In addition, a number of studies have shown that the establishment of CSR in corporate strategy leads to a positive corporate balance sheet, and companies are rewarded with greater success.

In this context, Wang (2020) was able to show that CSR has positive effects on corporate image, customer satisfaction and customer behaviour, such as willingness to buy or pay a price. The results of Ali et al. (2019) also confirm that CSR strengthens customer satisfaction and a company’s image, thus improving financial performance and increasing success. A further motivation for involvement in CSR activities is the higher brand loyalty of customers (Nor et al. 2013; Sindhu et al. 2017; Cha et al. 2016). In addition, commitment to the company and relationships among individual stakeholders are also positively influenced (Sindhu et al. 2017).

The positive effects on intangible assets within the company were also empirically confirmed. In addition to higher employee satisfaction and motivation (Chan/Hasan 2019), CSR also generates organisational citizenship behaviour among employees (Cek/Eyupglu 2019). The empirical evidence thus confirms the economic sense and necessity of integrating social concerns into corporate strategy. Particular relevance is also attached to the topic when building the brand (Lu et al. 2020).

After numerous corporate governance scandals in connection with dangerous products and services, corruption, involvement in politics, etc., qualitative intangible assets such as the brand purpose and the reputation of a company have become increasingly important for building a brand (Lu et al. 2020). The positive connection between the two constructs of CSR and CR has already been demonstrated in many cases (Lin-Hi/Blumberg 2018). For this reason, it is not surprising that numerous authors repeatedly emphasise the importance of CSR as a suitable management tool for building and promoting reputation (Lin-Hi/Blumberg 2018; Lu
et al. 2020). In this way, they can strengthen the credibility of their intentions, provide evidence of their “reliable and honest” character (McWilliams/Siegel 2001; p. 1209), and clearly demonstrate an interest in the well-being of others (Lin-Hi/Blumberg 2018). The results of the RepTrak Study show that CSR has a significant impact on overall corporate reputation, accounting for more than 40% (Reputation Institute 2015).

The reason for companies to strive for a positive reputation compared to their competitors is, among other things, the positive effect these have on corporate and brand equity (Tucker/Melewar 2005; Deephouse 2000). In addition to strengthening loyalty (Walsh et al. 2009), relationships with all stakeholders (Lin-Hi/Blumberg 2018) and commitment (Bennett/Gabriel 2007), a positive reputation also increases the probability of attracting new employees to the company (Cable/Turban 2007).

As has been shown in academic discourse, the two constructs of CSR and CR are not only determinants of a company’s success; they are closely interrelated and interdependent. Through corporate social responsibility, solidarity and economy are viewed through a “dualistic lens” (Homann/Lütge 2013) and business and society are placed in a relationship. CSR promotes CR on the one hand and is at the same time a decisive component or dimension of CR on the other.

This leads to the assumption that efforts in the field of CSR have an impact on the other factors of CR. Two different variants are conceivable here: on the one hand, a simultaneous effect is conceivable in which the individual reputation dimensions sit figuratively speaking next to each other on a Hollywood swing and simultaneously swing forwards or backwards. Following Mishina et al. (2012, p. 459) past actions of a firm combined with beliefs regarding the way it will behave in the future, whether or not substantiated, impact on the firm’s reputation, and a time-delayed swing effect would be plausible, in which the dimension of sustainability provides the impetus and leads to a change in the other dimensions with a time delay. In concrete terms, therefore, both positive and negative developments in the reputation dimension of sustainability should affect the other dimensions with a slight time lag, but with the same sign.

Studies examining these connections in form have not supplied results regarding the present conditions so far. In order to close this gap, the following theses using social listening by means of artificial intelligence will be examined more closely in the context of the present study:

1. There is a parallel swing effect between the dimension of sustainability and the other dimensions

2. There is a downstream swing effect between the sustainability dimension and the other dimensions

Social Listening and Methodology

Against the backdrop of the development of the social web, social listening is now considered a common procedure for obtaining a comprehensive picture of the public’s opinion of one’s own company and then managing the resulting reputation in an appropriate manner (Turban et al. 2018).

In the recent article “Improve your customer engagement with the help of social listening”, the leading analytics consulting firm, Quantzig, presented the various benefits of social listening for companies in various industries. This relatively new procedure not only provides a way to effectively monitor the various new social media channels and the entire Internet for statements about one’s own brand, but also helps to track further discussions on various key issues
and customer needs in order to derive appropriate measures for strategic decisions (Quantzig 2019).

Over the years, various studies have been published in different contexts and different industries, in which, among other things, customer behaviour, political communication and sustainability debates have been subjected to closer scrutiny with the help of semi-standardised or manual content analyses by analysing online communication.

This includes:

- the identification of trends in the US automotive industry (Du et al. 2015, p. 29 ff.),
- the influence of user- and marketing-generated content on consumer behaviour (Goh et al. 2013, p. 88 ff.),
- the development of a competitive market strategy (Harrysson et al. 2012, p. 1 ff.), and
- social media analyses for political communication (Grubmüller et al. 2013, p. 1 ff.).

Now that the technical and content-related possibilities have been largely sounded out in a series of pilot projects and the degree of professionalisation has increased over time, the analysis procedure is considered well tested and is already widely used (Lee et al. 2019).

Internet-based communication analysis is particularly popular in market research to gain valuable customer insights and generate important competitive advantages (Chui et al. 2012). With the help of social media analytics, for which the investigation of online communication is a necessary prerequisite, reputation management is taken to a new level (Aula 2010). Traditional methods are subsequently being replaced by the new, far more objective method (Poynter 2010) or at least substantially supplemented.

In practice, a number of different terms have now become established which can ultimately all be used synonymously: e.g. social listening, social media analytics, social analysis and social media intelligence (Holsapple et al. 2014). It is important for reputation management that despite the different terminology based on the different focus, all online sources, both social media and traditional media, are considered equally and included in the analysis. This makes the two-stage process of the method clear: the first step is the listening, in which all statements about the respective company that can be found on the Internet are collected, and the second step is the analysis, the analytical consolidation.

With the increasing use of the Internet and the associated growing amount of data, also called big data, it becomes clear that conventional analysis methods quickly reach their limits here. In order to sufficiently filter out all available information about customer decisions, behaviour or the cause of waves of outrage on the Internet, it is also necessary to adapt the method to the current conditions (Humphreys/Jen-Hui-Wang 2018).

Unfortunately, it has been shown that manual content analysis, for which good text comprehension and human cognition are prerequisites, is no longer up to the increasing demands, so that much information goes unnoticed or is misinterpreted (Kietzmann/Pitt 2020). Even purely computer-aided analysis methods fail in real content analysis because they only provide a pure reflection of language and sentence structure but are not capable of breaking down contexts and feelings.

In contrast, AI-based methods have meanwhile proven their worth in filtering out the elementary components from the flood of online messages (Humphreys/Jen-Hui-Wang 2018, p. 1274), which are otherwise neither recognised nor understood in their meaning (Lee et al. 2020).
According to Zerfass et al. (2020, p. 3), AI is based “on technologies such as natural language processing, data retrieval and knowledge representation, semantic thinking and machine learning”. In general, AI works on the basis of a category system consisting of two main components, the entity – for example the observed company – and the event type – one of the five dimensions of the reputation model. The AI is “trained” in such a way that, in a further step, it is able to read the tonality for the respective dimension – positive, neutral or negative – from the contribution using signal words.

For a better understanding, the functioning of the AI used in this study and the methodology of the automated analysis procedure in Forthmann/Westermann (2020) is explained in more detail.

Due to the automated and programmed mode of operation, the methodological procedure is considered to be very reliable and efficient. The relevance and advantages of the new methodological procedure are particularly evident for future research, since it can also provide easily usable results when analysing huge unstructured data sets and media types (video, text, speech) (Kietzmann/Pitt 2020; Lee et al. 2020). Despite the high level of attention in academic research and the numerous opportunities and possibilities that can take marketing and communications management to a new level, AI has been little used in practice to date (Zerfass et al. 2020). For this reason, there is extensive evidence of the need to adapt AI for content analysis (Zerfass et al. 2020; Lee et al. 2019; Humphreys/Jen-Hui Wang 2018) in order to “extract meaning and value from the oceans of text” (Kietzmann/Pitt 2020, p. 473). The present study thus also has a pilot character for application in a scientific context.
Results

To investigate the present research question whether a parallel swing effect or a Newton’s pendulum swing effect (or both) exist, we conducted a social listening of three companies (Daimler, Kik, Lufthansa) for the 640-day period from 1 July 2018 to 31 March 2019. For each of the companies, we collected daily data for the total number of fragments and each of the three tonalites (negative, neutral and positive) for each of our five dimensions of reputation (management, product & service, sustainability, profitability and employer; the emotional dimension merges with the five functional dimensions). Therefore, for each company we have 20 time series available.

The following graphic shows an example of the data for the total number of fragments of the “management” dimension for Daimler.

As shown in the figure above, the graph is relatively volatile. Especially noticeable are the outliers that appear at irregular intervals.

To investigate time-delayed effects, distributed lag-models were conducted (see below). However, these can only be interpreted validly if no unit root is present. To check for the presence of unit roots, an Augmented Dickey–Fuller Test was carried out for each of the 60 time series. In every test, the existence of a unit root was rejected. Accordingly, the data can be incorporated into regression models without being differenced first.

Our first hypothesis referred to the existence of a swing effect in the style of a garden swing: if a swing in the style of a garden swing (paral-
As is clearly visible, almost every variable correlates positively and significantly with almost every other variable. These correlations are weaker in the case of Kik than in the case of the other two companies, but the general principle applies to all of them. Looking at the dimension most interesting for this article (sustainability) specifically, it can be seen that in the case of Daimler, the four variables considered (total, positive, neutral and negative) correlate significantly with almost every other variable of almost every other dimension. Only with the employer dimension some correlations are not significant.

Therefore, regarding our first hypothesis, it can be said that quite strong evidence exists to support the claim that a garden-swing type of effect does indeed exist.

Our second hypothesis referred to the existence of a swing effect in the style of a Newton’s pendulum. To check whether there is empirical evidence for such a swing effect, we made a series of regressions. For each dimension of reputation (except sustainability) we made a model to explain the present of that dimension using the present and the past of the sustainability dimension (i = index for the days; ranging from 7 to 640):

Figure 4: Correlation diagram Daimler
Source(s): Own representation
We conducted those four regressions for each tonality (total, positive, neutral and negative) of each company (Daimler, Kik, Lufthansa). This resulted in 48 regressions. As an example, the following table shows the regression results for Daimler’s total number of fragments.

Almost every one of the 48 regressions conducted shows a significant F-statistic, which is a clear indicator that the present of management, profitability, employer and product & service can at least in part be explained by a combination of the present and the past of sustainability. For the Newton’s pendulum type of swing effect, the interesting question is whether the present is explained better by a combination of the present and the past than by the present alone.

As a first step to solve this question, a look at the significance of the past variables might help.

Table 1: Regression results Daimler total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable:</th>
<th>MANAGEMENT_TOTAL[7640]</th>
<th>PROFITABILITY_TOTAL[7640]</th>
<th>EMPLOYER_TOTAL[7640]</th>
<th>PRODUCT_SERVICE_TOTAL[7640]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUSTAINABILITY_TOTAL[7640]</td>
<td>0.585***</td>
<td>1.064***</td>
<td>0.154***</td>
<td>0.850***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
<td>(0.060)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUSTAINABILITY_TOTAL[6639]</td>
<td>−0.051</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>−0.010</td>
<td>0.095**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>(0.062)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUSTAINABILITY_TOTAL[5638]</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>−0.061</td>
<td>−0.096</td>
<td>−0.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>(0.062)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUSTAINABILITY_TOTAL[4637]</td>
<td>−0.004</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>(0.062)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUSTAINABILITY_TOTAL[3636]</td>
<td>−0.053*</td>
<td>−0.054</td>
<td>−0.007</td>
<td>−0.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>(0.062)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUSTAINABILITY_TOTAL[2635]</td>
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<td>−0.068</td>
<td>−0.012</td>
<td>0.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>(0.062)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUSTAINABILITY_TOTAL[1634]</td>
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<td>−0.046</td>
<td>−0.009</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
<td>(0.060)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>7.405***</td>
<td>17.186***</td>
<td>2.068**</td>
<td>12.795***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.554)</td>
<td>(3.025)</td>
<td>(1.044)</td>
<td>(2.011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations: 634
R²: 0.384
Adjusted R²: 0.358
Residual Std. Error (df = 626): 25.258
F Statistic (df = 7, 626): 55.081***

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Figure 5: Regression results Daimler total

Source(s): Own representation
It is visible that a few of the past variables have significant coefficients, indicating that the past might be of some value to explain the present.

To get more detailed information about this, we examined a scatterplot of the four-day-lagged sustainability and the management of the total fragments of Daimler:

Following the above scatterplot, it becomes quite obvious that the point cloud is somewhat L-shaped. This shape can be explained at least in part by the outliers shown in one of the previous figures. For this it might be useful to test whether the management variable is better explained by a polynomial regression than by a “purely” linear one. To do this we add quadratic terms to our models and check whether this results in an improved performance.

Thus to answer the question of whether a Newton’s pendulum effect does exist, we will first have to answer two questions: 1) Is a model that explains the present of the reputation dimensions using the present and the past of the sustainability dimension better than one that uses the present only? 2) Does a polynomial (quadratic) model have a higher explanatory power than a linear one?

To answer those questions, partial F-tests were conducted. Since there were 16 models for each of the three companies (total, positive, neutral and negative for each of the four dimensions of reputation under consideration), 48 tests were conducted for each selection of model classes. The following table shows how many of those tests were significant on different levels.

Figure 6: Scatterplot sustainability and management Daimler
Source(s): Own representation
The results suggest that the explanation of the present can be somewhat improved by adding the past and can quite clearly be improved by adding polynomial terms. This suggests that a Newton’s pendulum effect does in fact exist. And it is better explained by having a polynomial model than a linear one.

**Conclusion**

For the three companies investigated – Daimler, Kik and Lufthansa – the study proved that there is a swing effect of sustainability communication in the sense of a Hollywood swing and – to a slightly lower degree – as well in the sense of a Newton Pendulum. A positive or negative perception as far as sustainability is concerned radiates to the other reputation dimensions:

- management performance
- employer performance
- performance in products and services
- economic performance.

However, the finding, that the effects proved by the Hollywood swing are stronger than those in the Newton Pendulum lead to the assumption that it is not just sustainability which influences the other dimensions, but that the system is more complex with other dimensions having a “radiation effect” as well.

The finding concerning sustainability and its effect on the other dimensions is consistent with the advantages of a positive perception in this area formulated in theory (Einwiller 2013; Almeida/Coelho 2019; Veh et al. 2019). A sustainably operating company tends to be a more attractive employer (Cable/Turban 2007). Consumers prefer products and services from sustainably operating suppliers (Ali et al. 2019). And it is also assumed that sustainably operating companies are more successful (Lin-Hi/Blumberg 2018).

Systemically, the perception in the sustainability dimension reflects the social acceptance or rejection of a company. A strong positive perception of sustainability leads – at the same time – to an improvement in the overall reputation. However, a negative perception of sustainability also leads to an increase in negative effect.

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**Figure 7: Summary of the results of the partial F-tests**

*Source(s): Own representation*
Companies need a good reputation in order to be accepted by society and receive their “licence to operate”. This study shows that sustainability plays a special role in obtaining this “licence to operate”. Companies are therefore well advised to strengthen their strategic orientation with regard to the sustainability factor in the sense of the triple bottom line and to report on it in sustainability communications in order to increase their public acceptance.

Contrary to the view of Mishina et al. (2012, p. 459) that past actions of a firm combined with beliefs regarding the way it will behave in the future, whether or not substantiated, impact on the firm’s reputation, the underlying results show that sustainability communication in the context of reputation is low. The swing effect in terms of the Newtonian pendulum for the investigated period of seven days is of secondary importance. This means that a positive or negative perception with regard to sustainability at a certain point in time hardly affects reputation values in the future. This result is in contrast to previous research as CSR engagement has proven to be some kind of “moral reputational capital” (Godfrey, 2005, p. 783) that has “insurance-like effects” (Shiu/Yang 2017, p. 455; Amer/Bonardi, 2017, p. 446) on the occurrence of negative events. For business practice, this means that companies must constantly provide communicative impulses to the public in order to continuously stimulate the perception of sustainability. Sustainability communication should therefore be planned as an ongoing campaign and not as an individual activity.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study has proven the swing effect of sustainability communication for three companies based on communication in the German-language Internet. These research results should be generalised in the future, for companies in general and beyond the German-speaking cultural area.

Furthermore, the results using social listening are based on a methodological approach that solely analyses online contributions. Thus, the results are limited in the course of the undercover age problem. Furthermore, only contributions from persons, or more specifically active Internet users, who tend to communicate their opinions openly on the World Wide Web are considered. The attitudes of silent observers or passive Internet users are therefore not taken into account. For this reason, in the sense of a multi-method approach, it would be conceivable to verify the results with the help of classical research methods. In this context, both population-representative and target group-specific surveys could be used. It would also be conceivable to use a classic content analysis with regard to online conversations in order to establish a methodological approach comparable to social listening:

For the investigation of the swing effect in the form of the Newton pendulum, the results of this study are based on a period of seven days only. The significance of the results is therefore limited to short-term effects. In light of previous research, CSR engagement usually represents a kind of investment which requires long term processes to succeed (Porter/Miles 2013; Purnamasari et al. 2015). Since CSR activities are repeatedly linked to trust building, positive long-term effects for stakeholder relationships (Lee/Lee 2019) image (Kim et al. 2019) as well as corporate reputation in the long run (Arslanagic-Kalajdzie/Zabkar 2017), further measurements and investigations over a longer period of time might produce clearer results and open up room for further research.

Finally, a model that conceptualises reputation as a construct of different interacting dimensions offers the possibility of tracing further connections between the different dimensions. In theory as well as in communication practice, it is
often postulated that the CEO of a company and the perception of his management performance plays a central role for the overall reputation of the company (news aktuell and Faktenkontor 2015). This could also be examined analogously to the procedure described here. The same applies to the spillover effects that an outstanding perception has with regard to product and service quality (Einwiller et al. 2010) or to the question of the extent to which a poor image as an employer influences the other dimensions. Moreover, to determine the Newton’s pendulum swing effect, the time series analysis was carried out exclusively for the sustainability dimension. Further tests and time series analyses would therefore be of interest in order to consider possible further time-shifted influences of other factors on the reputation dimensions. Finding out the significance of individual dimensions for the overall reputation and the interaction of these individual dimensions will offer plenty of room for further research in the future and at the same time pose one of the greatest challenges in reputation research.

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Earned Media in a Digital World: Relationships with Modern Journalists

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Alex Sevigny  McMaster University (Canada)

Abstract

This study examines positive and negative experiences between journalists and public relations professionals through in-depth interviews with six daily news reporters and six practitioners who deal regularly with the media. The author sought to answer how and to what extent relationships can be cultivated between the professionals. Interviews yielded several examples in which journalists and practitioners were able to develop a measure of trust. However, in many cases, trust was earned through consistent honesty and transparency over time and could be irreparably broken with any transgression. While both types of professional continued to harbour misgivings, the establishment of trusting relationships was perceived to be beneficial by both journalists and practitioners. The study concludes that when journalism and public relations are practiced according to their established, and largely parallel ethical codes, the professions can achieve harmony and mutual gains. Public relations should advocate for journalism, and journalists should be taught how ethical public relations is a partner, and not an obstacle to fair, open and truthful news reporting.

Keywords: media relations, journalism, Canada, fully functioning society theory, excellence theory

Journalism and public relations have an intertwined history, often marked by clashes born of a dearth of mutual respect and comprehension. Even today, many reporters dismiss the “PR flack” as an obstacle to overcome on the way to information, and many public relations professionals are disdainful of the “muckraker” they expect will twist the truth and sensationalize the trivial. This, although both professions have been profoundly impacted by society’s shift to digital. Traditional journalism still drives the narratives and news stories published or broadcast in mainstream media venues are still more credible than information provided by an organization through its public relations department, but journalists these days have more to do and fewer resources. As news outlets shrink or close entirely, the number of public relations positions continues to rise. Journalists could use the help of public relations professionals but often they remain distrustful. Likewise, practitioners are often leery of the media. Public relations in many ways has managed to bypass traditional media and seize the advantages of social media, to communicate directly with stakeholders and widely share their preferred narratives. However, social media has also dramatically increased the risks of corporate crises and forced companies to be more transparent in their practices. Experts in crisis communications advocate build-
ing relationships with journalists so that a foundation of trust is already in place in the event of a crisis. Yet, relationship building with journalists is an increasing challenge; workplaces are generally smaller, and workloads are reportedly higher. Conflict and distrust between journalists and public relations practitioners continues although both professions are necessary to democracy. What insights can be gleaned through in-depth interviews with mainstream journalists, and with public relations professionals who deal with journalists? What remedies might be found to conciliate those relationships? This study explores those questions.

Research Problem

How and to what extent can public relations professionals cultivate trusting relationships with journalists?

Research Questions

• RQ1: How and to what extent do journalists and PR professionals have conflict and hold negative views of one another?
• RQ2: How and to what extent do journalists and PR professionals have fruitful collaboration and hold positive views of one another?
• RQ3: How and to what extent can journalists and PR professionals identify and realize mutual goals?

Literature Review

Acrimonious, yet co-dependent history

Public relations and journalism are professions equally as old as the discovery that humans need to communicate in a public way in order to foster community and prevent chaos (Bentele, 2013). The profession of public relations flourished in reaction to sensation-seeking calumniators, and in the attempts to access journalistic audiences; but public relations activities also allowed the profession of journalism to burgeon into a mass media powerhouse. That co-dependency persists; “PR is providing vital input for the ongoing social discourse which is mediated by journalism” (Schonhagen & Messner, 2016, p. 754). And yet despite (or perhaps, because of) this innate co-dependency between the professions, public relations practitioners and journalists have forever been intertwined in relationships marred by acrimony and distrust.

An illustration (see Figure 1) from 1986 by a renowned Canadian newspaper cartoonist, Terry Mosher, reprinted in Carney, Babiuk and LaVigne (2019, p. 47), lead to an impromptu telephone interview with the artist, who explained to this author the circumstances that led to the publication of the image of a reporter and a publicist smiling over drinks, while silently maligning the other in bubble images over their heads.

Press clubs were very important to journalists at one time. After work, they’d all go and hang out there and tell lies and drink too much and that sort of thing. So, they were very important to journalists for any number of years, but journalists, not having a lot of money, they were always puzzling over how to raise money to keep these things going. Eventually, we decided to let advertising agency types in. And the reason for that, they were often writers, or in some cases they were ex-journalists, and they always had a lot of money. So that allowed press clubs to really survive. But they didn’t always get along. The media types looked on the ad agency types as sell-outs. Ad agency types looked on the journalists as interesting people, but they never had any money and they were always broke, and they looked down upon (the journalists) a little bit. (T. Mosher, personal communication, July 17, 2020).

That antagonism is evident in the earliest iterations of the professions, as they were establishing
themselves after the First World War; “misunderstandings and stereotypes arose as journalists and PR practitioners tried to define their roles, causing their relationship to become an adversarial one” (DeLorme and Fedler, 2003, p. 100). Early public relations activities were overzealous and often unscrupulous (Grunig, 1990) and “journalists feel that the “bad apples” continue to reinforce the climate of distrust” (Pang, 2009, p. 195). Even today, students of media relations learn “the parties are locked in a relationship based on mutual need. Neither one, however, is fully comfortable with the other” (Carney, Babiuk & LaVigne, 2019, p. 41).

Journalists may prefer conflict-based relationships in order to preserve their reputations as watchdogs; “Reflecting this concern, journalists have typically been wary – if not contemptuous – of the motives of PR professionals” (Lewis, Williams and Franklin, 2008, p. 2). Or perhaps, journalists and practitioners play at exchanges and compromises, trying to at least minimally satisfy the other: “Relations between public relations practitioners and journalists are maintained and become institutionalized in a game, because both sides want to continue playing” (Charron, 1989, p. 53). Journalists and public relations practitioners should each expect the other to be civil and responsive, although both sides continue to relate horror stories that tend to be memorable. “Unfortunately, both professions tend to judge each other by the worst of exchanges between them, forgetting that the day-to-day relationship is usually business-like and productive for both” (Carney, Babiuk & LaVigne, 2019, p. 46).

Many of the first public relations practitioners were former journalists, and the profession was first taught within the confines of journalism schools; to its detriment, according to Gibson (1987), who argued practitioners needed to understand persuasion in order to best represent their employers, rather than present information in a straightforward journalistic manner. “Successful public relations campaigns depend upon a theoretical knowledge base and skills acquisition unobtainable from journalism educators” (Gibson, 1987, p. 31). This distinction, the advocacy nature of public relations, in itself can create suspicion among journalists (Shin & Cameron, 2003). However, “the antagonism is not straightforward,” (Tilley & Hollings, 2008, p. 1). Journalists can appreciate how the efforts of public relations have meaningful contributions to their work, but still be wary of motives and possibly even jealous of public relations practitioners; “because they resent the higher salaries and better working conditions they perceive practitioners to enjoy” (Sallot & Johnson, 2006a, p. 157). On their part, journalists profess they continue to be frustrated with “practitioners who didn't seem to understand them; they lacked news judgement, accuracy and timeliness... and often overlooked the local angle to a story” (Sallot & Johnson, (2006b), p. 85).

**Hidden Homophily**

Between practitioners of public relations and journalists, Sallot, L., Steinfatt, T., & Salwen, M. (1998) found that “despite the widespread belief of adversarial relations, the two groups shared generally similar news values. Journalists, however, particularly were unaware of this similarity” (p. 372). Journalists and public relations professionals tend to have similar backgrounds, skills and experiences; however, journalists are not likely to identify those similarities unless the practitioner has prior journalism experience (Sinaga & Callison, 2008). Journalists have been found to maintain their skepticism even with practitioners who once shared their métier, but “professional journalism experience contributes to the positive evaluation of PR practitioners’ expertness and capability of meeting journalistic values and expectations in assuming media relations responsibilities” (Sinaga & Callison, 2008, p. 293).
Journalists historically do not think of public relations as a high-status, worthy profession, even when they reluctantly appreciate the crucial role of public relations in newsgathering (Aronoff, 1975). However, in what became known as the “Jeffers Effect,” researchers have learned that that perception changes once a journalist gets to know a practitioner personally; journalists “believe that the practitioners they come in contact with regularly are significantly more ethical than practitioners in general” (Jeffers, 1987, p. 304). Ongoing research shows that more experienced journalists tend to have better relationships with practitioners than less experienced journalists (Sallot & Johnson, 2006a); but journalists in general may not understand that a public relations role includes much more than media relations; or that the profession has evolved to prefer high ethical standards (Shaw & White, 2004). Purcaru (2016) argued “both journalism and public relations are “professions with moral finality… in the absence of ethical conduct, no journalists or PR specialists may call themselves professionals, since morality is intrinsic to both” (p. 332).

Some studies suggest the level of trust between journalists and public relations practitioners might depend on sector; Len-Rios, Hinnant & Park (2009) found that organizations that promote health or non-profit services may get more coverage because they’re seen as less self-serving; and Cho (2006) found that practitioners in the health field tended to have particularly fruitful relationships with health-focused journalists; “It seems regular contact breeds close relationships, respect, and trust” (p. 576).

Yang, Taylor & Safer (2016) compared ethical codes between journalism associations and public relations associations, finding they “share core values such as professionalism, expertise and moral standards” (p. 146) and that further convergent values likely existed; indeed, journalism and public relations were most alike when each was practiced ethically. Carney, Babiuk and LaVigne (2019) also compared ethical codes between journalists and public relations practitioners, in a Canadian context. The Canadian Association of Journalists and the Canadian Public Relations society each list nine principles of ethical practice (summarized in Figure 2). Both professions prioritize accuracy and truth, but both are also self-regulated, and standards are not enforced; “Professionals in both fields are always striving for higher standards (among other ways by teaching courses in journalism and communication) and trying to inculcate ethics and standards of practice in their students and colleagues” (p. 50).

Exit journalism; Enter PR

The digitization of society has created massive upheaval in both public relations and journalism; arguably in favour of the former and to the detriment of the latter. McChesney (2014) noted that with loss of advertising revenue, it has become clear that journalism is a requisite public good, but one “that the market cannot provide in sufficient quality or quantity” (p. 98). The demise of journalism would be a disaster; “democracy requires an informed, participating citizenry, and such a citizenry can only exist with strong and vibrant journalism” (McChesney, 2014, p. 97). Williams (2017) opined that the watchdog role of journalism falters as struggling news organizations whittle down their newsrooms, although many people are unaware of the problem due to the apparent preponderance of freely available news content. Many former journalists turn to public relations as a second career “with potential journalists understandably choosing more lucrative career paths – that might not be as beneficial for democracy as journalism” (Williams, 2017, p. 4735).

The impact of digitization on Canadian journalism is constantly monitored and updated on an online map by a team led by Ryerson University journalism professor April Lindgren, who have
been tracking the decline of local news coverage since 2008\(^1\). That year “marked the beginning of a deep recession and a turning point for many previously profitable local news organizations” (Lindgren, A. & Corbett, J., 2019, para. 1). In October 2019, the Local News Map data showed 236 closed media outlets in the country, among other markers representing change to the Canadian media landscape. Lindgren, Jolly, Sabatini and Wong (2019) surveyed Canadian newsrooms and found that journalists today face more challenges that include smaller newsrooms, a more demanding work culture and limited training in technology or investment in news staff. Journalists also had concerns about job security.

Since those months, and as this research was underway, Canada and the rest of the world has been struck by an economically paralyzing pandemic. The news media have become among the essential workers of society, connecting with people isolated at home and starved for information. However, as the economy stops, so does the advertising that continues to sustain the mainstream news institutions, and as the media become even more important, they have fewer and fewer resources to do their jobs. The Local News Map data shows that more than 100 Canadian media outlets made cuts over the first six weeks of the pandemic; almost 50 newspapers folded and about two thousand workers were laid off (Wechsler, 2020).

A Public Policy Forum (2017) study looked at the risk to democracy as, in Canada, “the news media’s march to the precipice appears to be picking up speed” (p. 9) with traditional news outlets losing two thirds of all advertising revenue to internet giants Google and Facebook. “In a form of vampire economics, the new portals channel and exploit the content of traditional news organizations, through newsfeeds and ranked search results, even as they siphon away the revenue these outlets require to generate the content in the first place” (Public Policy Forum, 2017, p. 31). Canadians are largely unaware of the extent of the risk, and although they still trust journalism, they are reluctant to pay for their news feeds. There is little awareness that journalism helps build community, and that “a society composed of archipelagos of interest without agreed-upon commonalities is one that may no longer see mutual benefit – the public good – as its binding principle” (Public Policy Forum, 2017, p. 35).

Verčić and Verčić agree that public relations would not benefit from the demise of journalism; “the notion of a general public as a space of public deliberation and representation of a society would probably disappear. Without public communication and publicity there can be no democracy” (2016, p. 497). In the 1960s, there were more journalists than public relations practitioners; practitioners now outnumber journalists by at least five to one, and at the same time are taking on some of the storytelling role of journalism with ‘brand journalism’ and ‘content marketing’; albeit with credibility limits; “it is assumed that the publication in the editorial (journalistic) part of a medium is more credible if compared to the publication in the advertising section” (Verčić & Verčić, 2016, p. 495).

Still, lines may be blurring between the professions of public relations and journalism, and the power balance is shifting “because of new technologies that allow more participation and allow ordinary citizens to set their own agendas, often bypassing media gatekeepers. The internet in particular has become the great communication equalizer” (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2013, p. 287). The difference between the professions

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\(^1\) The project includes an interactive map and data reports released every two months. Retrieved from http://localnewsmap.geolive.ca/embed
seems to remain the orientation of goals: “however good or bad, communicating with a specific purpose has to remain part of the field and has to remain a focus in strategic communication” (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2013, p. 286). At the same time, practitioners who become active in online forums must be especially honest and transparent; “fellow users are increasingly wise to those who would attempt to deceive” (Duhé & Wright, 2013, p. 103). Moreover, the power of traditional media to set the public agenda (what we collectively think about and how we think about it) has not disappeared along with the advertising revenue; “to a considerable degree, traditional news media thrive on the daily habits of the public,” (McCombs, 2005, p. 545).

**Fully functioning society theory**

Journalism and public relations are both essential to a healthy democracy, according to the fully functioning society theory: “The goal of public relations, as described in the theoretical discussions, is to build relationships whereby factual information, not propaganda or spin, is shared with the public. The media share the information and create a venue for discussion” (Yang, Taylor & Saffer, 2016, p. 149). Communication allows networks and organizations to be possible, and if public relations is a purposeful act of mediating power, it can either help make the world better or it can do the opposite; “Progress is not an automatic ride, it is a man-made condition. And at the center of that condition is communication” (Verčič & Verčič, 2013, p. 265).

In a normative sense then, a practitioner is no longer an advocate for an organization but an advocate for a better society, and public relations as a profession is “more wholesome and substantially valued because of its service to society” (Heath, 2006, p. 96). When communications is used as a force for good, “to foster community as blended relationships, resource distribution, and shared meanings that advance and yield to enlightened choice” (Heath, 2006, p. 97), organizations benefit because they earn credibility; “relationships are mutually beneficial; stakes are exchanged for the good of the whole community” (Heath, 2006, p. 106).

**Excellent public relations**

Since 1985, when researchers began a quest to understand Excellence in public relations, studies have continually demonstrated that companies benefit most when they communicate in order “to adjust their ideas and behavior to those of others rather than to try to control how others think and behave” (Grunig, 2006, p. 156). Ideally, public relations is a strategic management function that brings the voices of the public into the decision-making process and “public relations should be able to improve the ethics and social responsibility of organizational behaviors” (Grunig, 2006, p. 165). Practitioners succeed through what Grunig dubs ‘two-way symmetrical communication’: balancing interests, managing conflict and improving understanding. “public relations increases organizational effectiveness when it builds long-term relationships of trust and understanding with strategic publics of the organization” (Grunig, 2001, p. 21).

Valentini, Kruckeberg and Starck (2012) argue that the digital transformation of society makes the ethical onus on public relations to contribute to community-building even more profound; “in such a chaotic environment, it is thus paramount that organizations realize that publics cannot be controlled or managed and that organizations are better off when publics are part of a community in which organizations are also full-fledged members” (p. 874). Practitioners should develop even those relationships that don’t necessarily benefit the organization (Grunig, 2006); the goal is relationships involving trust, commitment, mutual influence and satisfaction (Grunig, 2006; Smith, 2012; Bowen & Gallicano, 2013). Paramount among those qualities is trust, which
comes with consistency in ethical choices and meeting expectations with responsibility: “The other relationship outcomes are undermined if at least some degree of trust is not present; therefore, trust is the foundational element that must be present” (Bowen & Gallicano, 2013, p. 195).

Excellent public relations increasingly depends upon ethical decision-making. “Careful and consistent ethical analyses facilitate trust, which enhances the building and maintenance of relationships – after all, that is the ultimate purpose of the public relations function” (Bowen, 2007, Conclusion). As Grunig’s Excellence Study first revealed, “if it develops good relationships with strategic publics, an organization is more likely to develop goals desired by both the organization and its publics and is more likely to achieve those goals because it shares those goals and collaborates with publics” (Grunig, 2006, pp. 158-159).

**Media relations**

If public relations is a function of strategic management, then media relations is not the essential element it once was, according to Grunig (1990), who envisions the practice to have symmetry; in where practitioners balance needs and manage conflict with an ultimate goal of benefiting society. Therefore “practitioners practicing symmetrical public relations should have a more interactive and cooperative relationship with the media” (p. 21). The less a practitioner needs the media, the better the practitioner’s relationships with media (Grunig, 1990). Grunig’s approach describes a more reactive style of media relations, in which practitioners respond to any journalistic inquiries but don’t necessarily pitch story ideas or solicit coverage; proactive media relations is often associated with aggressive email campaigns full of non-newsworthy, self-promoting pitches. Carney, Babiuk and LaVigne (2019) argue “reactive media relations – having the media call you instead of you calling them – can be very successful... if properly planned and managed” (p. 96).

This vision of reactive media relations still includes active maintenance of media relationships (Khodarahmi, 2009) and a deep understanding of media through daily consumption of print and broadcast news. “It is no surprise then that journalists regarded practitioners who have prior journalism experience as ‘more skilled and ethical’ (Pang, 2009, p. 202). The practitioner proactively develops relationships with journalists; typically, journalists do not feel likewise responsible (Pang, 2009). The effort is worthwhile, as Pang (2009) indicates, “the longer journalists know the practitioner, the more they ‘feel more kindly’ towards them” (p. 202). The relationship-building process begins with extensive media monitoring in order to identify journalists whose work is relevant to the practitioner’s organization, learn their routines, and allow the practitioner to plan coverage for a slow news day. Those efforts lend legitimacy to the practitioner in the eyes of journalists, which can lead to more access to news coverage and a more favourable perception by journalists; “sources that can provide journalists with constant and usable story ideas are likely to become regular and favorable sources” (Yoon, 2005, p. 767). Waters, Tindall and Morton (2010) also found that journalists learned more about the practitioner’s role and were more appreciative of their contributions once they experienced good relationships with practitioners; “they often develop a sense of trust and recognize that the practitioner is not going to feed them one-sided stories” (pp. 257-258).

Effective media relations treats journalists as a key stakeholder group. “Researchers should also not look at the journalist in the media relations relationship as an intervening audience, but rather as a primary audience” (Supa, 2014, p. 10). Some organizations, such as government bod-
ies, must be available to media. Others should be concerned with media, when it is important for them to show transparency. Sometimes there is a specific purpose that can be achieved through media relations; sometimes you’ll be in the media anyway. The advantages include potentially wide distribution; “a simple mention in a local newspaper or television broadcast can end up being carried literally around the world, if a news wire or news channel picks it up” (Carney, Babiuk & LaVigne, p. 7). The disadvantages, of course, include lack of control over the output.

Good media relationships are invaluable when crisis hits an organization. Regular spokesperson training is key to the front-line response; “the media have deadlines, so they are driven to fill the information void quickly. And media demands trigger a chain reaction. The media are going to report on a crisis” (Coombs, 2015, p. 131). Coombs (2015) ascribes to what he calls “stealing thunder;” when an organization reports on its crisis before other sources, it gains credibility. An organization should be open to the media and deliver on its promises; “failure to provide promised information damages the organization-media relationship, thereby eroding the organization’s credibility with the media” (p. 133). Media portrayals of a company during a crisis affect the perceptions of other stakeholders involved. “Thus, if the media are critical of the organization, its reputation with stakeholders could suffer. Conversely, the reputation would be protected by favorable media portrayals” (p. 166).

The economic crisis in journalism means there are fewer reporters to approach, fewer column inches of print content and fewer minutes of broadcast news. Curtin (1999) found that reporters were not necessarily using more information subsidies from public relations unless the practitioners represented government or non-profit institutions. Decisionmakers in newsrooms are however necessarily more selective about the worthiness of stories they pursue. Zoch & Supa (2014) maintain that practitioners must understand newsworthiness in order to land attractive pitches to journalists. Practitioners should help meet the needs of both the media and their organizations through symmetrical relationships with journalists; put simply, “news releases should further serve the public interest, not the interest of the organization” (Zoch & Supa, 2014, p. 4). This approach helps dispel the possible preconception that practitioners are less than ethical in their pursuit of free publicity; “understanding that a relationship between public relations practitioners and the media exist as a symbiotic and mutually beneficial relationship is important to understanding how news releases can be used effectively” (Zoch & Supa, 2014, p. 10). The authors distilled newsworthiness down to eight factors; localness (local issues, trends, events), timeliness (current/new angle or trend), prominence (famous people etc.), cultural proximity (otherwise non-local story relevant to local readers), unexpectedness (man bites dog), human interest (unusual, entertaining, arouses emotion, inspires conversation), and significance (educates, moral or socially important). Interestingly, the study by Zoch and Supa (2014) found “the most important factor for journalists was cultural proximity… the most important factor for public relations was timeliness” (p.14).

A key takeaway offered by the 2020 State of the Media report by media software service provider Cision is that practitioners should be more targeted and relevant than ever when pitching story ideas to journalists; “the relationship between PR professionals and journalists is more important than ever, as journalists continue to find themselves strapped for resources. That’s a relationship that takes work to maintain” (Cision, 2020, Executive Summary). Internal staffing levels and resources continue to be the paramount concern for journalists, and especially in this time of global pandemic, the advice remains to re-
search journalists and their outlets thoroughly and find local news angles before pitching an idea for coverage.

**Methodology**

This research set out to learn how and to what extent public relations practitioners can build trusting relationships with journalists, in today’s climate of fast-paced online content and dwindling news resources. In-depth interviews were chosen to generally elucidate the current state of those relationships. The aim of qualitative research, like in-depth interviews, is to glean “rich detail and the ability to understand what the individual being interviewed really thinks about something, adding his or her own insight and opinions to enhance the data” (Stacks, 2017, p. 196). This researcher has more than two decades of experience working as a (primarily broadcast) journalist in southern Ontario, Canada, and therefore used purposive as well as convenience sampling to target an equal number of journalists and public relations practitioners to participate in the study. The journalists all work in daily news for different print and broadcast outlets in southern Ontario. The practitioners all deal with media as a key function of their responsibilities. Six from each profession were interviewed by telephone between April 22 and May 7, 2020:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journalists interviewed</th>
<th>Practitioners interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susan Clairmont, The Hamilton Spectator</td>
<td>Sheryl Nadler, YWCA Hamilton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy Rath, CHCH TV News</td>
<td>Kristine D’Arbelles, CAA National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick Dixon, CP24 News</td>
<td>Sarah Kiriliuk, independent consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Radley, CHML radio &amp; The Hamilton Spectator</td>
<td>Lillian Badzioch, Hamilton Health Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Lea, The Oakville Beaver</td>
<td>Peggy Chapman, Hamilton Bulldogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Benzie, The Toronto Star</td>
<td>Peter Turkington, political consultant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The interviews were conducted over the telephone, recorded and transcribed by the author working from her home office. All interview subjects are previously known to the author (who continues to work as a broadcast journalist through this research) and all made themselves available during the short window of opportunity the timeline provided. Each participant received a recruitment email (Appendix A) with an attached Letter of Information (Appendix B) that included eight interview questions (Appendix C).

However, the eight interview questions were not posed exactly as written to every interview subject. Rather, they formed an outline to allow the researcher to probe the subject’s thoughts in four general areas: negative experiences with the other profession, positive experiences with the other profession, mutual goals that are identifiable, and the concept of trust in relationships between journalists and practitioners. Funnel questions were followed by more specific and relevant probe questions as the researcher questioned for rich information (Stacks, 2017, p. 199).

As noted, the author is a journalist with 21 years of experience and was able to use a semi-structured interview model effectively. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by the author, who then used a spreadsheet to organize and analyze quotes according to the relevant research questions.

**Results**

**RQ1:** How and to what extent do journalists and PR professionals have conflict and hold negative views of one another?

The interviews in this study indicate that some conflict and negative perceptions continue to exist in the working relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists. Two journalists and three practitioners identified an underlying tension between the professions.
I wouldn’t say adversarial, but it’s largely a position of conflict. PR people always want you to spin your story toward their point of view. And quite often their point of view isn’t what is going to serve the public good. It isn’t the truth. It’s a version of the truth that puts their client in a favourable light. Sometimes it’s an outright lie. (R. Rath, personal communication, April 25, 2020)

Some journalists reported that they feel instantly disliked by public relations practitioners. “Those PR people who, it’s immediately clear that they consider the media to be the enemy. It’s confrontational and adversarial right from the beginning. There are unfortunately a fair number of those” (S. Clairmont, personal communication, April 24, 2020). These journalists feel the hostility is rooted in unjustified bias. “I believe that there is a built-in corporate-world suspicion of the media. So, if a reporter calls the first reaction is, ‘holy crap something horrible is going on, they’re out to get us.’ Which is rarely the case” (S. Radley, personal communication, May 1, 2020). For two of the journalists in this study, bad experiences with public relations are the norm, not anomalies: “Bottom line, if someone calls me, I don’t trust them. I try to figure out what their agenda is” (R. Rath, personal communication, April 25, 2020).

When I’m dealing with a new PR person that I’ve never met before, I start from a place that is not trust. I start expecting to be screwed over by the PR person. That’s my starting point, which is unfortunate. That’s 25 years of experience. I start with my back up. They have to win me over. Maybe I have to win them over too. (S. Clairmont, personal communication, April 24, 2020)

Half of each type of interviewee (three journalists and three practitioners) opined that some skepticism or caution is necessary when dealing with the other profession. One practitioner related an experience in which a journalist asked her to repeat an answer three times during an interview. She didn’t realize she had done anything wrong until the national publication of a misleading headline, based on the wording that she had eventually been badgered into giving the reporter. The practitioner was chastened into understanding that she can’t ever really let her guard down; that journalism-PR relationships must at the core be business relationships, not personal friendships, and that each must maintain some level of distance and some hesitation in their trust.

Like, trust with tension. We want to trust each other, and we try to trust each other as much as possible, but in the end, there’s also looking out for me. In the end, I have to make sure that the one that I am looking out for is my brand. (K. D’Arbelles, personal communication, April 22, 2020)

Most interview subjects described their negative experiences with the other profession as the consequence of individual bad actors, and not indicative of regular experiences. For two practitioners involved in this study, this means dealing with the occasional journalist who exhibits overt biases and pre-chosen narratives: “They take what you’ve given them and make it fit their lens” (P. Turkington, personal communication, May 2, 2020). Another practitioner had a couple of experiences with younger journalists who were not mindful of the privacy exigencies in the context of a social service agency that provides for vulnerable people. In both cases she was able to intervene and explain the safety ramifications before any publication or broadcast that would have posed a risk. She attributed the problems to the individual journalists’ lack of experience.

For journalists, the complaints about some practitioners ranged more broadly. Wasted time was the most grievous sin according to a broadcast journalist interviewed in this study, who is occasionally irritated by spin disguised as a news
angle. A live interview that doesn’t measure up to its public relations pitch is enough to sever a relationship with a broadcast journalist.

Why am I going to turn to you again if I’m not going to have faith that it’s going to be worth my time? Time is the most precious commodity we have; we can’t put off something until tomorrow. We need to file today. (N. Dixon, personal communication, April 25, 2020)

Print-based journalists face equal time pressures, as indicated by another interviewee frustrated about so often being asked about his deadline: “It’s not like the olden days when you only had a six o’clock newscast and you only had a morning newspaper and your deadline was assumed to be in the evening. Nowadays, your deadline is right now” (R. Benzie, personal communication, May 14, 2020). Meanwhile, a community news reporter felt stymied by inconsistent access to information and lack of transparency from practitioners: “So often, it seems like they’re just being over cautious. They’re afraid of providing information that could get somebody else in trouble, so they provide as little information as possible” (D. Lea, personal communication, May 13, 2020).

Failure to respond to emails and other messages was a key gripe that recurred in interviews, including mentions by four of six journalists and one of the six practitioners. The latter has practiced public relations for a variety of government and social service agencies since to 2004, and she described her main frustration thus: “Journalists don’t respond to your email with even a courtesy ‘thank you’... the main thing that really bugs me is that there’s no common manners and courtesy” (S. Kiriliuk, personal communication, April 22, 2020). However, among interviewees involved in this study, journalists were more likely to complain about inadequate or inexistent responses to their queries. “It’s not that they can’t provide the information that day, they don’t even get back and say, ‘got your message, looking into it’” (S. Radley, personal communication, May 1, 2020). One journalist interviewed is a political beat reporter who has, because of the pandemic, recently been filing a greater variety of news stories. He expressed surprise at the range of media relations acuity outside the legislature buildings. “They don’t get back to you, or they get back to you really late, or they don’t get back to you with proper information. There are some industries where I guess you don’t have to be on the ball as much as politics” (R. Benzie, 2020, personal communication, May 14, 2020).

The interviews leave the impression that each profession is sometimes misunderstood by the other. For practitioners (including two of six interviewees in this study) journalists don’t seem cognizant of some of the risks and requirements in their role; for example, that the requested information is not always readily at hand and a statement is not always quickly producible. For journalists, practitioners don’t understand their motivations (benefitting society) or their impossibly increasing time constraints.

In summary, tension, even outright hostility still exist between some public relations practitioners and some journalists. Negative experiences are still copious, and they are frequently described as situations in which the practitioner and/or the journalist is not acting in accordance with their established professional standards. The interviews seethe with frustration, and suggest practitioners and journalists continue to misunderstand each other’s roles, challenges and motivations. In particular, the interviews suggest that practitioners do not appreciate the immediacy within which today’s journalist must operate; and that journalists do not appreciate that a practitioner’s role often involves much more than media relations.
RQ2: How and to what extent do journalists and PR professionals have fruitful collaboration and hold positive views of one another?

All the practitioners interviewed said their experiences with the other profession are overwhelmingly positive; while only one of six journalists shared the same observation. This finding should not be considered indicative of industry-wide trends, given the limitations inherent in a study conducted by a member of the media who works in the same market as the practitioners interviewed. However, it is compelling to note that four of six journalists and three of six practitioners identified that cooperation between the professions is mutually beneficial. One practitioner explained that he approaches all media relationships “like a two-way street or a two-way bridge... I hope when my number or my name comes up to a journalist, they’ll think it’s worth the call back, that I’ll actually have something that benefits both of us” (P. Turkington, personal communication, May 2, 2020).

Another remarked; “good journalists understand that PR people are partners, and that working together builds a much better story” (S. Kiriliuk, personal communication, April 22, 2020). Journalists in the study also understood “there’s a symbiotic relationship. We need them and they need us. That’s the bottom line” (N. Dixon, personal communication, April 25, 2020). “We can be beneficial to a good PR person and they can be beneficial to us if they just understand that that’s possible” (S. Clairmont, personal communication, April 24, 2020).

This study indicates that from a journalist’s perspective, the effort and attitude a practitioner puts into the relationship with a journalist will affect the final outcome. R. Benzie professed “a ton of respect for the good (public relations professionals). People get a reputation among journalists. There are a certain number of organizations that probably get better press because they have good comms people” (personal communication, May 14, 2020).

Sometimes I think the organization doesn’t understand as well as the media about how valuable (public relations practitioners) are to the organization, and how much they can, maybe, take a bit of the edge off a bad story, and put a brighter shine on a good story. (S. Radley, personal communication, May 1, 2020)

Half the journalists interviewed expressed strong appreciation for the public relations professionals with whom they had established trusting relationships, and with whom cooperation made their lives easier. “Public relations is a profession, a craft, and the people who are good at it are worth their weight in gold” (R. Benzie, 2020, personal communication, May 14, 2020). The practitioners who glitter for journalists were described as those who always reply promptly with accurate and relevant information, if possible, and if not, an adequate justification for the failure to produce information. Practitioners who consistently lived up to these expectations earned the trust of journalists, particularly if they maintained that transparency and accessibility in the face of an institutional crisis. “I would take their call if I got an unexpected request for a story, or a pitch for a story from a PR person I have a good relationship with. I’m going to always take that into consideration and see what I can do” (S. Clairmont, 2020, personal communication, April 24, 2020).

In summary, the interviews conducted for this study suggest both journalists and public relations practitioners find self-serving value in positive relations between the profession; most feel the cooperation is mutually beneficial and even essential. Practitioners are more likely to seek out and foster those relationships, but once they are established, a journalist falls under the Jeffers effect and is likely to respect and appreciate that practitioner. For practitioners, the good relationships mean journalists are friendly, respect-
ful of their perspective and fair in their coverage. For journalists, good practitioners are friendly, prompt, honest, and forthcoming.

**RQ3:** How and to what extent can journalists and PR professionals identify and realize mutual goals?

Most interview subjects identified that both journalists and practitioners seek to inform; but some practitioners involved in this study connected the professions more deeply: “There are standards and guidelines. There’s an association; you adhere to principles and ensure you’re behaving in an ethical, appropriate, professional manner. That applies to PR and it applies to journalists” (L. Badzioch, personal communication, May 7, 2020). “It’s making a better society. Helping Canadians be smarter and safer and have better knowledge of certain topics. We’re both trying to do that” (K. D’Arbelles, personal communication, April 22, 2020). “When a journalist tells a story, they want it to resonate with the community. They want it to be relevant and newsworthy, but they want to make a connection with the community, so the community comes back for more. We want to do that too, just, in a different way” (S. Nadler, personal communication, April 24, 2020).

Half the interview subjects (two journalists and four practitioners) agreed that building relationships with the other profession takes time. “You can’t have a new person calling you up and instantly thinking they’re going to be trusted by you. That’s impossible” (R. Rath, personal communication, April 25, 2020). For four of six journalists and three of six practitioners, relationships are built simply by basic civility and friendly interactions. “At the end of the day being respectful of each other is one of the most important qualities” (L. Badzioch, personal communication, May 7, 2020). Another practitioner keeps adding to a spreadsheet that includes personal information about reporters as well as their areas of professional interest, “so I know that when I’m reaching out, I’m not just blindly blasting out a story with talking points” (P. Turkington, 2020, personal communication, May 2, 2020).

A large number of participants (four of the six journalists and four of the six practitioners) said they appreciate extra discussion time when dealing with the other profession. “If there’s some way we can have a quick conversation or email exchange or a really quick casual call to figure out what the reporter is looking for, that’s always helpful” (L. Badzioch, personal communication, May 7, 2020).

I find, personally, if someone is willing to say, can we talk off the record? And I’ll tell you the real story of what’s going on, for context, and then I’ll give you on-the-record quotes. I like that, because it helps me understand an issue. (R. Benzie, 2020, personal communication, May 14, 2020)

Journalists who participated in this study tended to appreciate good relationships with practitioners:

Building relationships is absolutely key... but that can only work if you talk to each other like real human beings and try and connect on some kind of personal level. It doesn’t mean you have to be best friends. But you should be able to actually speak to them on the phone. You should be able to be polite and consider each other’s challenges in their job. (S. Clairmont, personal communication, April 24, 2020)

The key to building trust in a relationship, according to all six journalists and two of six practitioners interviewed, is consistent honesty and transparency. As one practitioner explained, that means not always trying to put a positive spin on the messy and ugly. “Sometimes you just have to let it go. In order to build that relationship with the reporter and newspaper, it’s import-
ant that we show them our authentic selves” (S. Nadler, 2020, personal communication, April 24, 2020). “I respect a PR person who says I can’t tell you that because, and then explains and is transparent” (S. Clairmont, 2020, personal communication, April 24, 2020). “Being honest; acknowledging something has gone wrong, is a good thing. As soon as the person gets their back up; we’re like, ok, now we gotta keep digging” (S. Radley, 2020, personal communication, May 1, 2020). Like in any relationship, broken trust is a betrayal that cannot be mended. “If a PR person lies to me, and a few have over the years, I just never trust them again. And if I don’t trust them, then don’t bother calling me and wasting my time, or pitching me on your story, because I don’t trust you” (R. Benzie, 2020, personal communication, May 14, 2020).

Trust is also built with journalists when practitioners consistently understand and meet their needs. “If you are someone who can recognize what is a good story, and you can present that it’s a good story, and it is a good story, then we’re both happy” (S. Radley, 2020, personal communication, May 1, 2020). “We can’t engage the media unless it’s something they find of value, and truly is newsworthy. You’re putting their reputations at risk too” (P. Chapman, 2020, personal communication, May 4, 2020).

In summary, both journalists and public relations professionals recognize that their roles are intertwined, and that their goals can overlap. Both professions value and benefit from fruitful and cooperative relationships with each other. Ideally, those relationships are long-term investments. The relationships thrive when trust is built through consistent honesty and transparency. In addition, a friendly and helpful attitude goes a long way toward establishing positive relationships. Both types of professionals appreciate discussion time in order to more clearly articulate needs, and those discussions can spark positive relationships.

Finally, in addition to the human exercise of sorting through the interviews and organizing responses according to their relevance to the research question, the 12 interviews were fed into an online, natural language analysis tool found at voyant-tools.org. The word frequency compared throughout the separate interview documents generated the following word cloud.

The larger the typeface in the word cloud, the greater the number of times the word appears. While the scientific value of this graphic is questionable, some interesting insight may be gleaned from the frequency of some words. Consider the high occurrence of the words “people” and “person,” “story” and “relationship.” This suggests that at the core, relations between journalists and public relations practitioners can be boiled down to individuals, and how they interact with one another as human beings. Yet, some practitioners still panic when ‘the media’ call. They start strategizing and crafting responses rather than quickly getting back to the individual, who is in fact just another ordinary, busy professional trying to accomplish the day’s tasks and who may have a rather mundane inquiry. Similarly, many journalists still balk at having to speak to a public relations professional rather than the direct expert they are seeking for input on a news story; imagining them to be impediments rather than conduits to better information. The more a journalist appreciates the person behind the public relations title, the more likely they are to engage in a mutually beneficial relationship. This study theorizes that if public relations professionals and journalists better understood one another, they could instead see themselves as partners in the pursuit of a healthy, informed, democratic society.

**Discussion: A matter of trust**

This study supports literature that observes ongoing disharmony between public relations and journalism, in ways akin to those that have been
documented elsewhere and through other studies. Journalists continue to be skeptical of the motives behind public relations activities. However, journalists in this study were also likely to appreciate relationship-building efforts and the advantages of public relations contacts who had earned their trust. Furthermore, the Jeffers Effect was substantiated in the interviews. All the journalists interviewed consider those practitioners with whom they had developed relationships to be more valuable than the average public relations professional; trusted sources who are regularly sought during newsgathering.

Journalists in this study were not necessarily cognizant of the ethical values increasingly touted in the practice of public relations, however, they appreciated what they saw as ethical behaviour from public relations representatives: honesty and transparency. Consistent honest and transparent conduct, especially during a crisis, added to the value of public relations as perceived by journalists in this study. On their part, public relations professionals looked for fair treatment from journalists. Ethical reporters were seen as those who took the time to consider all perspectives and present a balanced news story.

Most interviewees who participated in this study have decades worth of experience in their respective fields, and several reflected on the dramatic changes in media wrought by the surge in social connectivity and the multitude of channels jostling for attention. Journalists have less time and more to produce and they tend to appreciate a public relations practitioner who understands newsworthiness and a compelling interview, who can be trusted to respond quickly with information and/or articulate and telegenic experts. This study indicates journalists will forgive a practitioner’s failure to deliver, if at least they offer a friendly, forthright and honest explanation as to why the information or the expert is unavailable.

The fully functioning society theory is as relevant as ever; journalism and public relations are both necessary to a civil democracy. Whereas public relations has flourished as a profession and is seen as increasingly important to society-based organizations and in corporate boardrooms alike, the institutions that provide journalism are in more dire straits than ever. It behooves empowered public relations practitioners to see themselves as friends to journalism, and partners in newsgathering efforts. For this to be possible, public relations must be practiced according to the excellence model established by Grunig. For that matter, this study indicates that trusting relationships between the professions are only to be possible when both public relations and journalism are practiced ethically.

Grunig (1990) advocated for a cooperative relationship with the media, in which practitioners respond to journalists but don’t necessarily seek the attention. However, Coombs (2015) argues that establishing relationships with journalists is an essential part of preparing for any (inevitable) organizational crisis. Journalists in this study purported to be amenable to these relationships. They expressed appreciation for practitioners who understood their needs, and for those who offered them pitches that could meaningfully contribute to their newscasts. News releases should never be thinly disguised attempts at spin. Public relations practitioners should keep in mind the ultimate goal is to make the world a better place. Honesty, transparency, and sharing information that meets the test of newsworthiness are valuable to journalism, and valuable to society as a whole.

The examination of trust between journalists and public relations professionals is central to this study. Identified as the most important factor to a mutual communal relationship, trust became the dominant concept explored in the literature review and through the interviews. While trusting relationships do develop between the two
types of professionals, it’s not the sort, as one interviewee described, where you could close your eyes, fall back, and expect that they would catch you. There may always be some measure of skepticism and caution between journalists and public relations professionals. However, a measure of professional trust is seen as beneficial by both types of communicator. A public relations practitioner can trust that a journalist will be fair and accurate and respect non-disclosure and non-attribution agreements. A journalist can trust a practitioner to be honest and transparent, and to approach them with pitches only when they have offerings that are truly newsworthy.

**Limitations**

The conclusions drawn from this study are limited by its short time frame and the small sample size. In addition, the author is a working journalist who may have unconscious biases that affected the gathering and processing of data in this study. The author is known to all participants in this study, and that factor may have affected the way some interviewees answered some questions. The participants all agreed to be identified in the study but may have hedged some answers or withheld some thoughts knowing that their responses could be published.

**Recommendations**

1. **Be ethical.** Public relations societies and academia must continue to expound upon ethics as a requirement in the profession. In this way, the goal of communications practitioners is to serve their employers by way of serving the greater good. They ask about considerations, consequences and obligations in every decision, are unerringly honest, and tend towards transparency whenever possible. Likewise, the goal of journalists is to serve the greater good by mediating the information that is relevant, interesting and important for people to know, after consideration of the consequences and obligations to the public. Conflict forms between journalists and public relations professionals when either or both of them do not conform to ethical standards. Trust forms and relationships become mutually beneficial when both journalists and public relations practitioners act ethically. Consistent ethical behaviour by more and more public relations practitioners should improve the reputation of the profession, and journalists should become less likely to assume the worst. The same is true for journalists with respect to their reputation with public relations practitioners.

2. **Understand news.** Journalists quickly learn which practitioners are worth responding to and which practitioners are merely scrounging for publicity thinly disguised as news. Before sending out a news release or reaching out to a reporter, practitioners should have a comfortable grasp of news worthiness; values which are described in more detail in the literature review above. In general, journalists are looking for stories about people, that affect a wide range of a population, that have important health and safety messages, and/or that resonate with people and foster community. Unless a practitioner has newsworthy information or a newsworthy client to offer a journalist, they should not bother with trying to “earn media” through pitches; particularly randomly sent, mass-produced pitches. This reactive style of media relations does not discourage the formation of relationships between practitioners and journalists; rather, it seeks a more productive and fruitful relationship, which is harder to achieve if the practitioner is known to spew spin. A practitioner should try to get to know relevant journalists who may be interested in the organization the practitioner represents, in order to understand and be ready to meet or exceed that journalist’s expectations. Some journalists interviewed for this study remain mystified by practitioners who don’t seem to have any insight into their world, or how they might achieve mutual benefits.
3. **Think local.** “The media” is not some amorphous blob of opinion-swinging power. What we think of as the media is in fact a collection of individuals who work in newsrooms dotted across towns in democratic countries everywhere. While national broadcasts and publications may get larger audiences, they often source news from smaller-market outlets. In fact, in Canada, media companies have amalgamated down to a few distinct owners; small-town weeklies are typically owned by a larger media empire. Stories that have impact in a smaller news market are likely to be picked up by their larger cousins. Furthermore, practitioners should not overlook the local angle when it comes to assessing newsworthiness of a potential pitch. Something that affects a local community will be news in that community.

4. **Be prompt.** Several interviews in this study suggest that a public relations practitioner can earn immediate respect and appreciation from a journalist with a simple prompt reply to an email or other form of message, even if it’s just an acknowledgment of receipt. Journalists understand reasonable justifications if information or interview subjects can’t be produced and they will be grateful to the public relations professional who lays it out quickly and clearly so they can move on. The deadline is always now; the information is always needed as soon as possible, don’t bother to ask. Especially today. Journalists are increasingly crunched for time; they are expected to constantly churn out content for those hungry online audiences.

However, journalists are also people, with whom you can sit down and have a casual conversation or call for clarification about a news item. In fact, this study suggests journalists welcome that sort of interaction with public relations practitioners. Kindness does go far. Journalists can be comfortable that this other human being will be honest and straightforward and help make their working lives easier; and often they, being human, will want to help the practitioner too. Even if it just means taking a bit of the edge off the coverage of the average corporate crisis.

5. **Buy advertising.** Advertising through print and broadcast media outlets whose audiences are relevant to your organization is a way to disseminate stories that may not meet the test of newsworthiness. Advertising supports journalism, and journalism needs the support; democracy is in peril. The goals of public relations are better achieved in partnership with journalism, and therefore it behooves public relations practitioners to advocate for advertising in mainstream media sources. Can advertising in local media also help foster relationships between public relations practitioners and journalists? Nothing in the interviews conducted for this research indicates that might be the case. Indeed, journalists who participated in this study agreed they would not hesitate to publish or broadcast a negative news story, if warranted, even if they had previously maintained an excellent relationship with the organization. Advertising departments are typically kept apart from news departments within a media organization, in part to dispel any notion that advertisers might gain any advantage in the newsroom. Journalism ethics specifically prohibit giving any preference to advertisers. However, further research may be warranted. Newsrooms are getting smaller while their needs, and their reach, are getting larger. Companies that spend money advertising can be thought of as friends to the newsroom, and while their treatment might not get preferential treatment by reporters, they do become more visible to those reporters. Some casuistry may be necessary in the ethical analysis. But when a reporter, on deadline, is looking for a generic expert on air conditioners, or pest removal, or personal injury law... those friends of the newsroom might well be the first to receive an interview request.
Applications for Future Research

1. Further research could include surveying journalists about their knowledge of public relations ethics; exploring their encounters with both ethical and unethical practices. A version of this study and its recommendations could be re-worked for a journalistic audience, to disseminate the knowledge about ethical and professional homophily. How, and to what extent, can journalists come to view public relations practitioners as valuable partners in the production of news?

2. Further research could explore how and to what extent media relations practitioners meet, or fail to meet, the needs of journalists, and whether that metric has an impact on the journalistic output. How, and to what extent, do practitioners of media relations understand newsworthiness, and other factors important to journalists?

3. Further research could explore whether financial support of a mainstream news provider, through advertising, could lead to relationships within the newsroom, and ultimately, more earned media coverage without compromising ethical boundaries.

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Introduction

This paper presents a selection of findings from a doctoral study on the potential of public relations within the strategic thinking process called: Communication at the Core: Exploring decision-making when communication is at the heart of an organisations’ strategy development. The research focused on the link between the communication function and the creation and development of strategy in organisations and explored whether the position, territory, and scope of the public relations function can influence decisions, tactics and in turn an organisation’s results.

Today’s sharing economy demands societal engagement and authentic dialogue with organisations; who in turn are expected to act in the best interest of the end-user (i.e. the stakeholder). Communicators act both as custodians of stakeholder relationships and the voice of the organisation they represent. This multi-faceted role raises an important question for the public relations function: Whom do we serve?

The concept: Whom do we serve? was a recurring point respondents raised during a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with senior professionals working in international organisations. The same issue mirrored the authors’ experience throughout her career. At one point she was employed by a public relations agency whose major pharmaceutical client focused on early stage research and innovation designed to challenge the market and secure investment. The author questioned a set of research findings which were planned for use in international press and investor briefings. On first glance, the data appeared promising, yet when her concerns were presented, the client (and employer) feedback was that she was neither qualified (enough) nor had the authority to ask an integrity related question. Furthermore, securing financial investment using the data as is was far more important than research integrity which, the client maintained, could be addressed if needed at a later stage. The response was unexpected and against her values. On further reflection, she made the difficult choice to step back from the client citing ethical and safety concerns. In the end she left the agency. The interview pattern of the doctoral research acted as a trigger to discuss the issue: Whom to we serve?

Literature Review

The literature review draws scholarship from studies of public relations, strategy, group dynamics and decision-making.

Greek in origin, strategy originally refers to the positioning of troops before battle. Organisations describe strategy as the ability to understand, predict and leverage stakeholder behaviour operating in an environment in which people and resources continually interact (Henderson, 1989, pp. 139–143). Strategy is also the product of history and learned experience (Tohidi & Jabbari, 2012). Understanding who, what, why, and how organisations and stakeholders have reached a particular point paves the way for strategic changes “allowed” by the exist-
ing culture (Darling, 2017, pp. 64–67) and creates “irreversible momentum” (Burt, 2010, p. 70).

Public relations is “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships [ ] on whom success or failure depends” (Cutlip cited by Broom & Sha, 2013, p. 26). Value comes through relationships (Grunig J.E. & Grunig L.A. 2010, p. 5) and “getting people to do what you want them to do” (Tolley cited in Grunig, Dozier, & IABC Research Foundation, 1992, p. 38; Tolley, 1988). Relationships are based on one-way, two-way and omni-directional communication (van Ruler, 2018, p. 368) with “the flow of purposive communication” and “continuous trans-actions” (Edwards, 2012, p. 21). Public relations professionals adopt highly co-operative behaviours which are underpinned by concern for others and perceived stakeholder needs. Behaviours change depending on the stakeholder and purpose of the interaction (Thomas, 2016, p. 266; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978, pp. 1143–1144).

Method, sample size and rationale

This was a mixed methods study incorporating meaning orientated methodologies such as interviewing, active listening and participant observation and identification of emerging patterns and findings (phenomenological & grounded theory traditions).

The sample was a mix of 34 senior professionals with an international remit. About 50 percent held responsibility for communication and the other 50 percent were part of a leadership team or experts with the ability to influence or help make communication decisions. The gender split was equal. 34 semi-structured interviews took place between 2018 and 2019 (figure 1). Follow up included transcript reviews as well as documentary and archival analysis of the findings. It is also worth noting that the study presents a multi-disciplinary perspective with participants drawn from different sectors and with diverse backgrounds.

Figure 1: Sample overview Communication at the Core
Findings

The research found that the sector is in perpetual flux, transitioning from a process-driven function into an organic, always on transactional flow. Secondly, capabilities such as sense-making to produce and exchange meaning (Fiske, 1982, p. 2) and identifying patterns, inter-relationships and the ability to agitate (Fuller et al., 2018, pp. 233–252; Meighan & De Ruijter, 2016, p. 9) are emerging as basic requirements. Thirdly end-user needs rated ahead of the organisation as indicators shaping the direction of modern strategy and communication with priorities shifting from profit and shareholder value towards trust and doing the right thing profitably. This suggests that communication is moving towards co-creation with stakeholders built on trust and making a difference.

Communication was positioned as an authentic voice enabling genuine stakeholder discourse rather than simply communicating for advantage (Moloney, 2006, p. 165). Furthermore authenticity assumes that social relevance and multiple participants cited the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a given practise and a standard expected by consumers. Critical and consequential thinking, doing the right thing and accessing ones’ moral compass to guide decision-making emerged as essential capabilities opening further dialogue on Whom do we serve?

The dynamic environment communicators operate within as well as the emphasis in recent years on issues such as transparency and accountability in scholarly and industry opinion are reflected in the research findings. Participants acknowledged that communication has moved from a process type function into an environment which is in perpetual flux with an organic, always-on, transactional flow and focus on the needs and concerns of others (figure 2). Academics such as van Ruler, Edwards, Thomas and Kilmann have highlighted aspects of this in recent years.

The consequence of this, is that the sector’s capabilities and the skillset required to thrive in

Figure 2: Views on communication
the profession are evolving. Communicators are more than well organised professionals who can meet deadlines and pitch a story. Today’s leaders operate at a level of sense making, identifying patterns and understanding inter relationships and what’s taking place on multiple levels. Furthermore, a pattern focused on “doing the right thing profitably” appeared in participants language and concepts, signposting a trend that user needs are valued ahead and above those of the organisation. Reputation measurement has pivoted towards doing the right thing and making a difference rather than shareholder value. This change in dynamic, the research suggests, presents an opportunity for the profession which is both empowering and has impact. As the foundations on which organisations make decisions shift, communicators are embracing a paradigm of co-creation, and trust building by leveraging trust making capabilities (i.e. interventions which actually make a difference in organisations and reflect stakeholder values). The research also found that communicators of the future and the end-users of the future have very different perspectives on what privacy, transparency, shareholder value stands for and indeed what value will mean in the future. It also highlighted outdated views on profit and margin which would have had high priority and influence; 10, 15 or 20 years ago.

The data found that communicators act as the custodian of the stakeholder relationship (figure 3) by (1) operating at the interface between the organisation and the stakeholder; (2) understanding the consequences and risk of organizational decision-making; (3) recognising the dynamic within and between different groups; and (4) the positive aspects of automation. Participants argued that expertise on the human side of communication combined with technology will make automated interactions more relevant and increase stakeholder engagement as automation becomes more and more invisible.

The research also suggests that as end users values change, in-turn definitions of success will change, away from profit and towards a definition which focuses on doing the right thing profitably. The consequence for the sector is the emergence of co-opetition (where opposing forces come together to leverage an opportunity or to solve a common problem) (Angwin, Cummings, & Smith, 2015, p. 418) versus

**Figure 3: Emerging role of communication**

**CO-OPETITION**
Opposing forces come together to leverage an opportunity, solve a problem

**CUSTODIAN**
Communicators act as custodians of the relationship(s), Communication operates at the interface between multiple stakeholder groups

**CURATE**
Leverage & curate the dynamic so that a communication transaction occurs

![Figure 3: Emerging role of communication](image-url)
cooperation where in practise mutually aligned groups work together and focus on building mutual relationships. In the case of co-opetition, an organisation can have one viewpoint and the stakeholder can hold opposing and / or multiple view. The communicator, the research found (figure 4), has to curate the space and allow the transaction(s) to flow and at the same time act as the custodian of the relationship(s).

Furthermore in order to mitigate overwhelm in an environment which is ongoing, omnipresent and omnidirectional, doing the right thing profitably underpins the professional choices. This point was emphatically made throughout the one-to-one interviews because when we go back and reflect on doing the right thing profitably then we are able to truly answer “Whom do we serve? “ Is it the payer? as in the employer or the client. Is it the end-user? Is it society itself or is it the responsibility of the individual, guided by his/her/their own moral compass (figure 5).

Further analysis suggests that credibility and reputation are directly linked with who communicators choose to serve first. Professionals working directly with the CEO were perceived as the mouthpiece of the organisation, politically motivated and followers or influencers. Those positioned as trouble-shooters or the conscience of the organisation team were thought leaders and change-makers acting in the best interest of everyone.
Results, conclusions and implications

Assessing the implications for communication professionals who curate and enable stakeholder & organisation dialogue warrants further examination. For example, are they appropriately skilled and resilient to adapt to constant change and clearly articulate who they serve and their motivation? Communicators are well positioned to leverage the opportunities this paradigm creates so that society thrives and authenticity driven indicators such as the SDGs are within reach. The question for the sector to reflect on is: Exactly whom do we serve? when, how and why and in what context? (Figure 6 [Updated presentation])

References:


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Belt and Road Sentiment Index

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Abstract

The Belt and Road initiative (B&RI), or new Silk Road initiative, is considered as one of the largest initiatives by the People’s Republic of China (China) to develop new trade, infrastructure, policy, and financial and people connectivity with 120 countries along six economic corridors. However, the initiative is often affected by sentiment between countries’ trust, geopolitical and policy risks. This chapter aims to introduce a B&R sentiment index (BRSI) based on the 12 laws of international news flow theory. In addition, psychic distance, cross-national intermedia agenda-setting power and non-egalitarian information flow measurement are included as sub-indices to enhance the index reliability and validity. BRSI aims to enhance information symmetry between the 120 B&R participating countries.

Background

The Belt and Road (B&R) initiative began when the President of the People’s Republic of China (henceforth, China), Xi Jinping, conducted his state visit to Kazakhstan. It was followed by an announcement to build the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road during a visit to South-East Asia in October 2013 (Flint & Zhu, 2019; NDRC, 2015). In 2017, a Belt and Road Forum addressed the initiative as “the project of the century,” with a vision of five ‘connectivities’: 1) policy, 2) infrastructure, 3) trade, 4) financial, and 5) people-to-people connectivity. The announcements have gradually evolved as the Belt & Road Initiative (B&RI) with a 35 years’ time horizon and a growing number of 120 B&R partners (HKTDC, 2020). The B&RI covers six economic corridors spanning Asia, Europe, and Africa (Figure 1) and two-thirds of the world’s population (Huang, 2016). China has invested US$60 billion in large scale infrastructure projects in B&R countries (World Trade Organization, 2018). One of the most significant projects is the China-Europe railway cargo express, which connects 59 Chinese cities with 49 cities in 15 European Countries (Zhao, Cheng, Li, & Hu, 2019). The current multilateral trade volume has exceeded US$5 trillion (Hu, 2018).

Since the implementation of the B&RI, the public has had mixed-responses because the participants (e.g., national leaders, enterprises, and the general public) of the partner countries are unsure whether the B&RI would harm or benefit their individual and national interests.

It is not difficult to find news on the B&R initiative, and China is often framed in a negative light (Eszterhai, 2019). For example, CNN re-
ports China may exploit its geopolitical influence to gain greater access to natural resources from emerging countries in Central Asia, Russia, and Africa (Griffith, 2017). The recent trade war between the US and China was triggered by a staggering US$419 billion of trade deficit between the US and China (SCMP, 2020; USTR, 2020). More recently, the US has accused China of the COVID-19 pandemic since its first outbreak in Wuhan, China (The White House, 2020a; The White House, 2020b). TikTok, a widely popular social media application developed by a Chinese-originated firm, ByteDance, is considered as a US national security threat (McCabe, Swanson, & de la Merced, Michael J., 2020). Stakeholders’ sentiments are mixed, as participating countries are uncertain if the B&RI would benefit or harm their country interests.

In view of the uncertainty and risk of the potential outcomes of the B&RI, this chapter aims to develop a sentiment index to support country players to gain two-way information symmetry (Grunig, 2006). The sentiment index aims developing a real-time measure using big-data capabilities to enhance information symmetry and transparency amongst the 120 participating countries with diverse cultures and varying levels of mutual understanding.

It is recognized and stressed in the B&R blueprint the importance of “friendly cooperation” through a “people-to-people bond” initiative to win multilateral and bilateral cooperation and public support (Flint & Zhu, 2019; NDRC, 2015). However, such intentions are often misinterpreted due to cultural distances (Lee, Leung, & Sharma, 2020), ethnocentrism (De Ruyter, Van Birgelen, & Wetzels, 1998), and contributed by information asymmetry (Grunig, 2006). This chapter outlines the methodological approach to conceptualize the B&R sentiment construct and to develop a B&R sentiment index using a big data tool, GDELT (Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone). We believe with enhanced information symmetry, enabled through big data capabilities, the sentiment index can assist B&R partners to be better prepared and close the cul-
tural gaps when countries intend to enter into long-term trade relationships with China. Practitioners equipped with this information can also allow the public and the media to have a tool to access and decipher their knowledge about the B&RI. Enhanced information symmetry allows the fourth estate (Lewis, Williams, & Franklin, 2008) and stakeholders to have better access to information and overcome myths of the B&RI.

For stakeholders who wish to navigate into the B&R, it provides real-time up-to-date knowledge about the rapid changes in the marketplace due to macro forces, such as geopolitical changes. It allows market players to stay ahead of the curve when operating in B&R initiatives. Furthermore, it can also give reference to assist B&R partner countries when considering public policy decisions in a timely and well-informed manner to achieve mutual benefits.

**Theoretical Background**

**International News Flow Theory**

Past research in the areas of International News Flow Theory (INFT) (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Ostgaard, 1965) suggests 12 laws governing the structure of foreign news (Table 1). In particular, from a country-oriented perspective, INFT is significantly determined by factors such as the size of a country, the perceived elite status of a country, as well as the historical, geographical, economic size, cultural distances, and “flows” such as cultural exchanges, trade, migration, and tourism between countries (Kim & Barnett, 1996; Segev, 2010; Segev, 2016; Segev, 2019; Shoemaker, 2006; Wu, 2000; Wu, 2003; Wu, 2007; Wu, 1998). Galtung and Ruge (1965) postulate that these 12 laws need to act in combination rather than independently to generate newsworthiness. Such a phenomenon is called the “additivity hypothesis” (Galtung & Ruge, 1965) and it is tested in the model of country salience by Grasland (2020), Segev (2010; 2014), and Wu (2000; 1998). In Wallerstein’s (1974) World System Theory, countries’ news interactions are categorized into three spheres: core, semi-periphery, and periphery. Not without surprise, the core countries (e.g., the US) dictate the direction of such information flow (Segev, 2016). Studies support the news flow from the wealthy and high political power countries to the rest of the world (Guo & Vargo, 2017). Perceptions are formed based on the information reported in news media and on social media platforms (Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004) where computer-assisted big data gathering techniques are becoming much more feasible in analyzing such flow (Guo & Vargo, 2017).

**Intermedia Agenda-setting Theory**

Apart from INFT, McCombs and Shaw’s seminal agenda-setting theory (1972) stipulates that the topics posited by the media will “transfer” or “attribute” to the public and form public opinions. An extension of this study is an intermedia agenda-setting theory, whereby elite or credible media agencies such as the *New York Times* will set the agenda of less elite media outlets and extend other media outlets, such as television and radio (Protess & McCombs, 2014; Reese & Danielian, 1989). Vargo and Guo (2017) further extend the model to examine the cross-national intermedia agenda-setting framework to determine how the news agenda of one country transfers to another. For example, how the US media coverage on the trade war with China triggers other countries’ media to cover the topic to push the agenda of the significance of the trade war on other countries.

Further studies on non-traditional media, however, follow a non-egalitarian information flow structure (Golan, 2006; Golan & Himelboim, 2016), whereby key spokespersons, such as political or partisan online news sites, have more influence over traditional media on agenda-setting influence (Guo & Vargo, 2017; Meraz,
To provide a robust yet effective solution to promote the B&R initiative, we aim to conceptualize the B&R sentiment as a construct to develop a B&R Sentiment Index (BRSI) to help B&R countries to devise country strategies to improve their B&R sentiment. We formulate the B&R Sentiment index based on the seminal work Galtung and Ruge (1965) of international news flow theory (INFT). In INFT, 12 rules working in totality, termed the additivity hypothesis, is used as a basis to determine the amount of media, economic, trade, political “flows” between country (Grasland, 2020). Psychic distance is the perceived cultural differences by a person at a national and individual level (Papadopoulos, Martín, Sousa, & Lages, 2011). We hypothesize psychic distance will affect the sentiment between B&R countries. It is hypothesized:

- H1: A country’s dual psychic distance (country and people) affects the BRSI cultural-distance sub-index.

McCombs (2014; 1972) proposes that core countries (such as U.S) set the agenda to semi-periphery and periphery countries (such as Indonesia and Africa). Applying the cross-national intermedia agenda-setting theory of Mc-
Combs (2014; 1972) and Wallerstein world system theory (Wallerstein, 1974), it is hypothesized:

• H2: News reported by countries in core position of the world system affects the BRSI country agenda-setting power sub-index.

Apart from mainstream media, studies have supported that emerging online news and partisan news also have the ability to set the agenda in international news flow (Guo & Vargo, 2017; Meraz, 2011). Therefore, it is hypothesized:

• H3: Emerging online news affects the BRSI agenda-setting power sub-index.

Methodology

We propose to crawl the information using computer-assisted analysis by using an open-source database, Global Data on Events, Location, and Tone - GDELT Translingual (GDELT, 2020). GDELT is a CAMEO-coded data set with over 200 million geo-located events from 1979 to date (Leetaru & Schrodt, 2013). GDELT supports real-time news monitoring in 65 languages with 98.4% of the daily non-English news translated into English (GDELT, 2020). GDELT crawls the news from news websites, Google News, and group stories into events based on textual similarities. GDELT can monitor news covering all parts of the world. The database captures 364 million global geopolitical events since 1979. Every year, the database adds on 70 billion images, 1.5 billion location references and three-quarters of a trillion sentiment assessments to enhance the predictability of global news monitoring (Hopp, Schaffer, Fisher, & Weber, 2019). GDELT retrieves information from news reports and translates news information using natural-language processing software. The big data from all news sources (i.e., print, broadcasts, and news web portals) are analyzed using image recognition and natural language processing tools: including 40 dictionaries, such as Sen-tiWordNet 3.0 (Baccianella, Esuli, & Sebastiani, 2010).

The relevant sub-databases in GDELT are Global Knowledge Graph, where the big data from different sources are extrapolated and analyzed using image recognition and natural language processing tools. The second sub-databases, GDELT EVENT, stores geopolitical events and coded using a CAMEO codebook (Conflict and Mediation Event Observations Event and Actor Codebook) (Schrodt, 2012). The third dataset is a global news imagery database (GDELT Visual Knowledge Graph). These GDELT databases can use various programme interfaces (APIs) to offer a user-friendly interface to access these database sets (GDELT, 2020).

Based on a Google scholar search, as of 30 June 2020, over 1,500 academic journals and papers discuss the use of GDELT.

To create the BRSI, we will measure Galtung and Ruge (1965) 12 laws in totality as a total score rather than measured individually in a multiple regression model (Grasland, 2020). Some authors have individually assessed each law (e.g. Segev, 2010), but the proposed measurement is to follow Peterson’s (1981) approach. It is known to be the only empirical study where Galtung and Ruge’s (1965) full set of laws (F1-F12) were tested (Grasland, 2020). Despite the limitations and the difficulty in determining the news in a completely objective manner, a strong emphasis on inter-coder reliability is required.

Based on Galtung and Ruge’s methodology, each law is measured in the following manner. F1, frequency, is measured by whether the news is released at the same time frame as the publishing cycle (e.g., 24 hours for a traditional newspaper). F2, amplitude or threshold, is measured by the size of the event (e.g., the death toll of an event). F3, unambiguity, is measured by the extent of how the news is clear and simple to
the news editor. F4, meaningfulness, relates to how relevant and proximate of the news involving their own nation/region. F5-F6, consonance and unexpectedness, are measured by the consistency and unpredictable nature of the reported events. F7-F8, persistence and tuning in to the particular media outlets; F9, elite nations, and F10, elite people are measured by the ranking of the nation/personal elitism (Peterson, 1981; p.145). F11, personalization of the message, and finally F12, negativity, are measured by four factors: frequency, unambiguity, consonance, and unexpectedness.

For Hypothesis 1, we will deploy the two-dimensional psychic distance (PD) scale comprising of country and people characteristics (Sousa & Lages, 2011). Country characteristics comprise factors such as economic and industrial development, communications and marketing infrastructure, technical advancements, market competitiveness, and legal structure. The people dimension includes items such as per capita income, purchasing power parity, consumer lifestyle and preferences, residents’ literacy, education, language levels, cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and traditions. With the assumption that tourism flow can close the psychic distance, an additional factor - tourism flow, would be added into the PD scale. The adaptation of the scale is based on the assumption that these complementary factors increase the chances of news attracting media reporting.

For testing Hypothesis 2, the classification of the core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral countries are selected based on prior studies done by Babones (2005), Chase-Dunn, Kawana, and Brewer (2000), and Vargo and Guo (2017). The list is refined by including the missing B&R countries from an up-to-date review of countries mentioned in international news flow literature. As the hypothesis assumes that the core countries set the agenda to semi-periphery and periphery countries, the agenda-setting of the core country adopts Vargo and Guo’s (2017) media agenda-setting operationalization method by using the Granger causality test. The number of issues a country caused another countries’ media agendas would be used to examine the country’s agenda-setting power.

For testing Hypothesis 3 which determines whether the emerging online news has agenda-setting power in impacting traditional agenda-setting power, (Meraz, 2011; Vargo & Guo, 2017), an ordinary least squares regression (OLS) model is used to regress between emerging online media and traditional media, to determine the causality in intermedia agenda-setting relationships at different time-lags.

**Implementation Plan**

**Web Portal Development**

To disseminate the information of the B&R sentiment index, a web portal can be developed to broadcast the real-time sentiment index. The web portal would be developed and launched in several different languages so that it can be a user-friendly communication channel for users who have interests, needs, and queries in the B&RI. The sentiment index fits well into an add-on page insert on different trade departments of each B&RI government websites, such as the HK Trade and Development Council Belt and Road portal (https://beltandroad.hktdc.com/). In the web portal, information on the B&R sentiment index is listed by the 120 countries. Tables 2-3 show a simple format to be displayed for basic information.

The information can create knowledge and disseminate information about the B&RI, and be a key reference to people and businesses from all over the world. The web portal is also a long-term self-sustainable platform for sharing knowledge and networking among potential business partners who are interested in participating and benefiting from the B&RI.
Conclusion

This chapter outlines the theoretical background and operationalization of the Belt and Road Sentiment index (BRSI). The BRSI is operationalized using Galtung and Ruge’s 12 laws of media news flow theory. The sub-indices of the BRSI is measured through several additional indicators, including (1) psychic distance (PD), (2) cross-national intermedia agenda-setting power of each 120 B&R country classified by core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral countries, and (3) the agenda-setting impact of non-egalitarian information flow (e.g. partisan news) on traditional news. BRSI and its sub-indices are designed to reflect a more accurate picture of the changes in the sentiment value of B&R countries. Real-time news will be fed into the BRSI sentiment index and provide stakeholders an up-to-date “sentiment” of relations between countries for different types of stakeholders in B&R countries to improve information symmetry. In turn, this can help B&R countries to respond to macro environmental changes in an era of misinformation and disinformation.

Limitations and future research

This research may have several limitations. First, the translation, sentiment values, and images use deep learning algorithms, which is somewhat a “black box” mechanism. The accuracy of the translation and interpretation requires face validity with an experienced researcher. Second, the index measures the sentiment and determines an overall view and comparison amongst the countries. The index as a sentimental measure requires the parameters to be re-calibrated and fine-tuned when it is implemented.

The sentiment index would be useful for countries to determine the various policies and assist their citizens in understanding the differences in culture and sentiment, especially when consider-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B&amp;R Country</th>
<th>Real-time Sentiment Index (Scale of 1-50)</th>
<th>Historical Trends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China (PRC)</td>
<td>+1.0</td>
<td>Historical Line Chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>Historical Line Chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>+2.0</td>
<td>Historical Line Chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Luxembourg</td>
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<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>-1.8</td>
<td>Historical Line Chart</td>
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<tr>
<th>Country Comparison</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sentiment Index (Scale of 1-50)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Input Country A vs</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>+1.5</td>
<td>Historical Line Chart</td>
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<td>Input Country B</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
ing various economic cooperation policies. The index can also be used as a quantifiable measure for practitioners and researchers to benchmark events and policy decisions that are impacted by sentiments.

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ness: A commentary. *Communications*, 31(1), 105-111.


Importance of nation-branding for Ukraine - Challenges and opportunities

Barbora Maronkova NATO Information and Documentation Centre (Ukraine)

Okrayina – borderland, the land on the outskirts

A second largest European country lies in the East of the continent. Yet for many around the world, a country named Ukraine is either unknown or vaguely familiar in connection with the 2019 U.S. impeachment inquiry.

Ukraine is second largest in size and eight in population in Europe. It is a young country with a long and complicated history that gained its independence in 1991 after the dissolution of Soviet Union.

It is also the only European country with an ongoing military conflict since Russia’s illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea in March 2014, a peninsula stretching into the Black Sea in the south of the country.

Paul Hockenos in his article for Foreign Policy in February 2019 notes that Ukraine’s reputation in the West largely remains that of a basket case—a country whose desire to integrate with the West, and specifically the European Union, far outpaces its reality. Yet he believes that the reputation is wrong and where under reasonable conditions it can succeed as a reasonably well off European country (Hockenos, 2019).

In Europe, Ukraine is more known for its oligarchs and quarrelling politicians, two revolutions in space of twenty years, Klitchko brothers- the former boxing champions and Ruslana, a winner of Eurovision Song Contest in 2005.

Since 2014, the already weak image was reinforced by aggressive Russian propaganda and information warfare against Ukraine which deployed false narratives such as Ukraine being a failed state, revolution of Dignity/EuroMaidan was a West-backed coup d'état, and that the country is led by fascists, anti-Semites and far right groups.

Ukraine matters for many reasons – geopolitical and political, economic and social. It is therefore a prime example of a country in a need of a strong nation branding strategy and campaign.

About nation-branding and why it matters

Scholars of international relations, international PR, marketing, history and sociology have been devoting considerable time in trying to define ‘nation branding’. Whilst Simon Anholt is often credited with coining the term of ‘nation brand’ in 1996, many scholars of international marketing have looked into the aspects of marketing of a country, region or a city already in the 80-ties.

Anholt, at the time, defined Nation Branding as “a concept involving a combination of the promotion of tourism, investment, and trade, plus public and cultural diplomacy”. Countries that want to succeed in this era of globalization must, according to Anholt, “have coordinated brand strategies in all of these areas” (Anholt, 2011).

And whilst many scholars associated nation branding with marketing and advertising, scholars of international relations associate it more
closely with soft power and thus public diplomacy. Nicholas Cull, a prominent public diplomacy scholar argues that whilst countries can have some sort of association with logo and placements (based on their geography for example), additional elements of good governance and reputational risks of a country can play a distinctive role as to how a country is perceived abroad.

Simon Anholt came to define a Nations Brand Index together with the polling company GfK that looked at six attributes of a country: exports, immigration, tourism, people, culture, governance. An annual survey of 50 ‘brand’ countries places countries into a ranking based on the highest score of all six areas thus moving away from a pure marketing to a slightly more nuanced political and societal standing of a country. The top five places rotate between Germany, France, Canada, United Kingdom and Japan.

According to Keith Dinnie, another nation branding scholar, there are five objectives for nation branding. Nation brand itself to (1) stimulate export growth, (2) increase inbound tourism for tourism receipts, (3) attract foreign investment into the nation, (4) enhance political influence internationally, and (5) manage negative stereotypes. All of these play a role to the brand identity and brand image (Kaneva, 2011).

Several scholars and practitioners continued in their research to bring even more nuances into nation branding and its ranking including that of Jonathan McClory, formerly with the Institute for Government, to bridge the ranking approach with objective measures to produce a tool to establish the relative soft power. Monocle Magazine became the media partners of the annual soft power index and it publishes its annual index even since. McClory further created the Soft Power Thirty, a study of 30 countries ranking them on a variety of criteria such as culture, engagement in the world, government, education, digitalization and other.

Aside from the theoretical and academic discussions of which there are plenty, a whole new industry evolved around ‘branding a country, region or city. Wally Olins, another British PR and comms professional believed that national identity is an artificial construction and that just as a product, a country can be also advertised by a variety of techniques used in regular advertising.

A boom in consultancies and agencies that offer services how to make a country more visible, more distinct, more ‘attractive’ has proliferated in the past twenty years and continues to be highly sought after to this date.

The case of Ukraine

After the revolution of Dignity in 2014, Ukrainian government and civil society understood the importance of a strong soft power push and a need to build a positive image abroad. Several initiatives were launched since 2014 with limited success. Ukraine still lacks behind in all major nation branding indexes and needs to adopt a strong and long-term strategy which goes beyond pure advertising and PR techniques of just a simple logo.

According to a study by the Reputation Institute, in 2017 Ukraine’s global reputation remained 64th amongst 73 countries analyzed. Main reason cited was the low effectiveness of Ukraine’s government. The same study revealed that only one out of four people interviewed said they would like to visit Ukraine.

The Ukrainian think-tank New Europe Centre conducted a research on Ukraine’s reputation in four EU countries in 2015 and in 2020. The key objective of the study is to determine the perception that the selected EU countries have of Ukraine. The 2020 opinion poll was conducted in France, Germany, Italy and Poland with
4,000 respondents aged between 18 and 65+. According to the results, in 2020, as in 2015, the main association with Ukraine is war. Ukraine is also increasingly associated with immigrants. In 2015, Ukraine’s association with immigrants was marginal. In 2020 this was the third most popular association with Ukraine, mentioned by 10.3% of respondents. This reflects an increasing trend of labor migration from Ukraine to the EU. The study found that a majority of respondents across the four countries have negative associations with Ukraine and that they have changed little in the past five years. As in 2015, the current survey shows that the biggest obstacle for Ukraine’s EU membership is its ongoing fight against corruption, which was prioritized by 43.1% of respondents compared to 33% in 2015.

A majority (55%) of respondents support Ukraine’s membership in the EU. Support for Ukraine’s NATO membership is also significant (38%) but does not represent a majority opinion.

The results of this study have important implications for Ukrainian policy-makers who see Ukraine’s future in the EU and NATO integration. As witnessed in the failed Dutch referendum in April 2016 on EU’s Association Agreement with Ukraine, reputation abroad matters not just for tourism and investment but also for foreign and international policy.

It is widely believed that the Dutch voters did not take a stand against Ukraine per se in the referendum but against wider EU policies especially on enlargement. Regardless, it was an important signal to Ukrainian policymakers and Ukrainian people that perceptions and reputation matter.

The Dutch expert on international relations and public diplomacy, Petr Van Ham has raised the connection between branding and foreign policy more than two decades earlier in his Foreign Affairs article on the Rise of a Smart State asserting that branding can also assist countries in their foreign policy and international relations. He argues that creating a brand is not only economically desirable, it has also considerable political and strategic implications, affecting even the dynamics of NATO and EU enlargement. (Van Ham, 2001).

According to Van Ham, NATO and the EU will not offer membership to poor or unstable applicants until these countries adopt the EU’s elaborate catalogue of economic and political rules or follow NATO guidelines on civil-military relations, membership will remain elusive.

If we take into account that Ukraine has changed its constitution in 2019 to enshrine the membership of EU and NATO as its primary foreign policy goals, the connection between positive ‘brand’ and positive perception of EU and NATO citizens towards Ukraine is paramount in achieving this goal.

**Brief overview of Ukraine’s nation branding attempts**

The importance of communicating Ukraine’s story was seriously taken into consideration by the government of Ukraine only in 2014 following the massive information warfare waged by the Russian Federation as a part of the conventional war which resulted in the armed conflict in East Ukraine and the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula.

In the run-up to the Revolution of Dignity in November 2013, Ukraine used some of the international cultural and sporting events as a magnet for promotion but with limited success.

In 2005, just a year after the Orange Revolution, Ukraine hosted the Eurovision Song Contest with the slogan ‘Awakening.’ The message attempted to portray the new emerging Ukraine in
the post-Orange revolution times. The dedicated postcards and short clips shown between performances for the 2005 show illustrated Ukraine’s culture and heritage along with a more modern and industrial side to the country.

Another attempt to communicate Ukraine to the world was when Ukraine and Poland won their joint bid to host the 14th UEFA European Football Championships in 2012.

EURO2012 was an excellent opportunity for Ukraine to tell its story and create a positive image but it failed to deliver due to several factors. Firstly, because of the imprisonment of Ukraine’s former Prime-minister Yulia Tymoshenko that was widely seen as politically motivated, secondly infrastructure investment corruption stories were widely publicized, stadiums restoration schedules violated as well as accusations on low level of tolerance towards LGBT community and racism reported.

Until 2014, none of the initiatives aimed at promoting Ukraine were government-led or long-term based strategies with a clear vision of what Ukraine wants to achieve and how it wished to be perceived by the outside world.

In the aftermath of the Revolution of Dignity and following Russia’s annexation of Crimea and war in Donbas, the government of President Petro Poroshenko took some important steps in the direction of a coordinated and government sponsored nation branding strategy. At the same time, the new government pursued some difficult reforms especially in the anti-corruption area.

In 2015, Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Ukraine created booklets “Invest in Ukraine” and a few promotional videos in English and German presenting opportunities in Ukraine for investment, tourism, and information technology services. It also launched a hashtag #FollowUkraine on Twitter to engage social media users.

The weaponization of cultural identity and history of Ukraine by Russian hybrid war led to a big boost in cultural identity in Ukraine. Grassroots activists and prominent figures in the newly elected Ukrainian parliament pushed for a creation of the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation under the Ministry of Culture. The main objective of the Foundation is to provide state grant funding for arts and culture. It also manages the Ukraine Book Fund, the Research Institute of Modern Art and other domestic cultural bodies and agencies.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine has for the first time since the country’s independence created a public diplomacy strategy with a public diplomacy department and has set out an ambitious goal of creating over a dozen of Ukrainian Institutes abroad, promoting Ukrainian culture, language and art.

Unfortunately both institutions remain under-funded and prone to political nepotism.

In early 2017, the Ministry of Information Policy set up a dedicated working group to devise a nation brand for Ukraine. The primary focus was to foster Ukrainian export and help attract foreign investments into the country.

UKRAINE NOW branding campaign was approved by the Cabinet of the Ministers (Ukrainian government) on the 10th of May 2018. Ukraine has declared itself open for business and tourism with its new brand identity that set to present the country as a place of opportunity.
Whilst the agency BANDA that was behind the creative part of the campaign received an award by the Berlin based Red Dot Design Award in 2018 for its UKRAINE NOW logo, the campaign itself failed to take off.

The presidential elections in April 2019 brought a change of government with a former actor, co-median Volodymyr Zelensky winning a landslide victory and forming a mono-majority in the parliament.

Whilst the previous government has failed to create synergies between the various initiatives in a truly coordinated manner, it has shown some leadership and understanding in the importance of a wider narrative about Ukraine particularly in the area of Ukrainian identity and culture. The new government has for the most part abandoned the previous activities and initiatives and launched its new pet projects. The new team has mostly focused on promoting Ukrainian economy and attracting foreign investment.

On 29 October 2019, the new government under the personal auspices of the President, launched its first investment forum aimed at attracting large foreign investment to the war-torn east region of Ukraine, Donbas, under the logo: Re-think Investment Forum. According to the Office of the President, the government pitched 120 major investment projects and 12 important memorandums were signed, potentially paving the way for large scale infrastructure developments. Many seasoned investors attending the forum have warned that many obstacles in attracting investors remain such as rule of law, judicial reform and safety from raids sanctioned by the public remain.

In January 2020 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, the President promoted an additional initiative to underpin the investment opportunities that Ukraine offers by offering to potential investors an ‘Investor Nanny’ if they invest over USD 30 million in Ukraine. Legislation is being drafted to create a Nanny Corps, a group of 15-20 project managers. Aware of the low trust of investors, the president hopes to raise the confidence by assigning managers to individual investors to navigate them through the sprawling Ukrainian bureaucracy and the myriad of red tapes in conducting business. Ukraine ranks 64th in World Banks’ Doing Business ranking and 126th of the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index.

As late as October 2020, the Prime Minister Denis Shmyhal announced that the government is working on further promoting and assisting investors in Ukraine in developing a single investment window, Invest in Ukraine, and created a comprehensive guide for foreign investors called UkrainInvestGuide. The Prime Minister also noted that the government is working to improve the investment climate by curbing corruption simplifying doing business, raising Ukraine in international rankings, completing judicial reform and ensuring fair justice for investors.

At the same time, the country is embroiled in a constitutional crisis following several controversial rulings of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine aimed against pro-reform and anti-corruption bodies and legislation, reversing the modest achievements of the past six years. This is on top of the earlier firing of the Prosecutor General in February 2020 by the President, whom the Western international partners have viewed as a pro-reform minded, followed by a dubious selection process of the Head of the Anti-Corruption Court, dismissal of a Head of Central Bank of Ukraine and attacks against the National Anti-Corruption bureau and its Head, amongst many other controversies.
For several months the Western partners have voiced their concerns with the stalled progress on fight against corruption and independent judiciary. The current Constitutional crisis might lead Ukraine losing its life-line EU and IMF loans worth USD 3 billion and possibly even endanger Ukraine’s visa free regime with the EU.

At a conference in November 2016 organized by the Kyiv Post, an English speaking newspaper in Kyiv, John Lough, an associate fellow with the London-based think-tank Chatham House said that the basic lack of understanding about Ukraine in the West is rooted in three key issues that have yet to be overcome;

First, the West lacks trust in Ukrainian leaders.

Second, the tradition of communicating as an independent state is still absent in Ukraine, resulting in a lack of self-confidence in the nation.

Third, Ukraine’s image has been damaged by Russian propaganda on the internet and in the media.

Lough believes that Ukraine has to stop using the war as an excuse and begin to communicate positive messages. In the competition for the credibility in Western perception, Ukraine can beat Russian disinformation by providing quality evidence of positive changes.

The current news from Ukraine do not offer much optimism in overcoming the above stated obstacles to Ukraine’s more favorable perception abroad.

No Ukrainian leader has so far recognized that foreign investment, membership to international organizations, improved image and attractiveness of Ukraine don’t lie in catchy slogans and dozens of one-off initiatives but in a true commitment to important reforms and a long-term government led and fully coordinated nation branding strategy.

Brand – Singapore

There are many successful examples of nation branding in the world. The one that stands out is that of Singapore which has successfully branded itself over five decades as city-state always on the edge of innovation and openness. Whilst the comparison of small Singapore with one of the largest countries in Europe might be odd at first glance, it offers few useful lessons learned for Ukraine.

After Singapore gained its independence in 1965, it lacked almost everything—land, natural resources, skilled workers—and was encircled by bigger and more powerful neighbors. Its GDP per capita was USD 516, in 1965. Fifty years later, Singapore’s GDP per capita is a thousand times more, at USD 64,581 (2018 World Bank). It is a beacon of innovations, modern urban planning, attractive tourist and business destination and punches well above its weight on the international scene.

The success can be credited to Singapore’s first and long-term Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew who already in 1965 had the vision to strategically place Singapore as a destination and concurrently build Singapore into where it is today: a country with strong infrastructure that is modern, and politically safe.


One of the keys to Singapore’s success lies in the long-term vision of its government to make Singapore a hub of modernity and innovation. This goal was steadily pursued for decades in a coordinated manner across all government bodies and is underpinned by the Singaporean business and art community.
Singapore invested heavily in advertising and PR to support its nation branding. It is one of the best examples of a nation that boosted its country brand on the back of a sustained programme of investment of many years in advertising. It also combined advertising with clever PR techniques attracting third-party endorsement, influencing and engaging prominent media platforms and winning over key opinion leaders. Such heavy investment however works only if the underlying reality can support the slogans and colorful ads. It was the government-led policies of zero corruption, clean law enforcement and stability that ensured the flow of investment and the brightest minds around the globe.

Such strategies require time and long-term sustainable efforts. It is important to note here the heavy presence of the government in nation branding efforts due to Singapore’s rather unique political structure when for many decades the city-state has been mostly led by one party. At the same time, the government focused not only on external but also internal nation branding so to get a buy in from its citizens. This has helped to create a rather unique blend of government, business, and citizen efforts. Its nation-branding is based on more than just attracting tourism and investment but it’s rather a kaleidoscope of old and new, diverse and unifying, clean and green, surprising and solid.

As one Singaporean told me once: ‘We can never invite the same participant to a conference twice. We always needs to bring new people – we always need to innovate.’

The innovation has always been the building block of Singapore’s nation-branding. Projects such as Gardens at Bay [an unique project combining urban planning with greenery and innovative solutions such as artificial trees] toppled with the ‘first’ world Night Safari and integrated F1 One Grand Prix night racing circuit throughout the city itself are only a few of recent cutting edge innovations of the city-state. And whilst the technology and innovation are representing the ‘new’, Singapore is fond of its history of diverse Asian culture and cuisine as well that of its legendary Singapore Sling cocktail served ideally at the Long Bar of the colonial Raffles Hotel.

**Conclusion**

Every country is unique and there is no one template fits all. Whilst Singapore can offer few interesting lessons for Ukraine, Ukraine needs to find its own way in defining its nation-branding strategy based on its unique historical, geographical and cultural experience.

What experience however shows is that focusing merely only one aspect of nation-branding; such as to promote investment or tourism and to commission a great logo is not sufficient. A country and its people have to come together and create a buy into what they believe their country should represent to them and to the world.

The Ukrainian government would be well advised to build their nation-branding strategy around four key principles: 1. Creating a strong narrative for Ukraine; 2. Long-term and sustainable strategy going beyond one political cycle of five years; 3. Government-led strategy that unites all governmental units together with non-governmental and business sector and 4. Continue adopting difficult but necessary reforms with clear and real results.

Ukraine and its people deserve their country to be known for its brave and hard-working people and their quest for freedom and not for war, immigration, corruption and oligarchs.

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1 Author’s encounter with the organizer of a conference in Singapore, July 2018.
Barbora Maronkova², Former Director of NATO Information and Documentation Centre in Ukraine (2017-2020). With special inputs from Inna Basysta.

References


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² The views expressed in this article are of the author alone and don’t represent views or endorsement by the Nation Information and Documentation Centre in Ukraine.


Who needs public relations? A comparative analysis of two countries over public relations consultancy agencies

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Aydemir Okay Istanbul University (Turkey)
Pedja Ašanin Gole Doba (Slovenia)

Abstract

The increase in corporate public relations activities in the US and Europe has led to the expansion of consulting agencies. Since Bernays began providing similar services in the 1920s, the number of public relations consulting services has increased and become able to meet the diverse needs of its clients. However, economic turmoil and pandemics are leading to cuts in public relations budgets. Corporations often prefer to invest in advertising rather than in public relations efforts, as the results of public relations become visible in the long run. When hiring public relations agencies, corporations usually choose to work with more than one agency, depending on the agency’s specialized area of expertise. The main purpose of this study was to examine the Turkish and Slovenian public relations consultancies, namely, to examine how these public relations advisory agencies present themselves to their clients on their websites, especially in the light of dialogic communication, and to identify which sectors hire agencies. Paper based on the research by Wirtz and Ngondo (2013) on the website strategies of top fee-generating US-based public relations agencies and the research by Ki and Kim (2010) on ethics statements of public relations firms. To study the practices of Turkish and Slovenian public relations consultancies, we used a qualitative analysis of the publicly accessible content of the agencies’ websites.

Keywords: Public relations consultancy; presentation on websites; ethics statements; customers of public relations agencies; Turkey; Slovenia.

Introduction

The US historian Scott Cutlip identified “The Publicity Bureau”, established in 1900 in Boston, as the first public relations agency in the United States. “The Publicity Bureau” started with business clients and gained the account for the telecommunications monopoly American Telephone & Telegraph in 1903 (Watson, 2012). To date, numerous public relations agencies have been established to provide their clients with communication consultancy services. The USA appears
to be leading the list of the largest public relations consultancy agencies in the world. Table 1 shows that in the top “10 Global PR Agency Ranking 2019”, 7 out of the top 10 agencies are based in the USA, one in China, one in France and one in the UK (see Table 1).

It seems usual that no agency from Turkey and Slovenia is on the list, within such an industry in which the size of the market is so broad. Economic development levels and trade volumes of the countries are the basic determinants in this point.

All over the world, public relations consultancies have increased in number and became able to meet various needs of their clients. However, economic turmoil gives rise to cuts of public relations budgets being the ones given up by corporations in the first place in times of unstable economic conditions. Corporations often prefer to invest in advertising efforts over public relations efforts whose outcomes become visible in the longer run. Corporations prefer to hire a public relations consultancy agency more frequently than the cases in which they prefer to employ their own in-house public relations department. They usually opt for cooperating more than one agency as per their area of expertise. The main objective of this study is to examine closely the Turkish and Slovenian public relations consultancies, reveal their structures and evaluate their clients as well as their areas of expertise.

**Literature review**

A very brief history of public relations in Turkey and Slovenia

Public relations first appeared to be practiced in Turkey in a later period compared to the USA and Europe. A major reason of this phenomenon is the failure of industrialization in the wake of hard periods (such as warfare and regime shift) in the transition process from Emperorship to Republic, which resulted in no need for public relations. Named as “public relations” by some scholar in Turkey, preliminary practices appeared basically in the 1960s in the form of public information through press within Turkish Armed Forces and Ministry of External Affairs (Okay

**Table 1: Top 10 Global PR Agency Ranking 2019 (PRovoke, 2020).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>HQ</th>
<th>Fee Income 2018 (USD)</th>
<th>Fee Income 2017 (USD)</th>
<th>Growth (Constant Currency)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Edelman</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>888,405,000</td>
<td>893,591,000</td>
<td>-0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Weber Shandwick</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>840,000,000</td>
<td>800,000,000</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>BCW</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>723,000,000</td>
<td>709,000,000</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>FleishmanHillard</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>605,000,000</td>
<td>570,000,000</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ketchum</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>545,000,000</td>
<td>550,000,000</td>
<td>-0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>MSL</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>450,000,000</td>
<td>460,000,000</td>
<td>-2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hill+Knowlton Strategies</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>400,000,000</td>
<td>400,000,000</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ogilvy</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>388,000,000</td>
<td>354,000,000</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>BlueFocus</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>336,372,995</td>
<td>321,849,607</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Brunswick</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>280,000,000</td>
<td>260,000,000</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Public relations in real terms started to be executed within multi-national corporations active in Turkey, followed by Turkish organizations that adapted these executions to them by incorporating public relations departments.

The first public relations course was taught in 1968 at the Press College of Political Sciences Faculty, Ankara University, and other schools followed. The first public relations consultancy agency was founded in 1974 in Istanbul, under the name “A&B Tanıtım”. The Public Relations Society was founded in 1972 in Istanbul, as the first professional body of Turkish public relations practitioners, which was then followed by other societies in other cities.

Today, a great many organizations in Turkey have public relations/corporate communication departments that are given services by public relations consultancy agencies (There is no data available regarding to the exact number of organizations incorporating public relations departments, and the exact number of public relations agencies giving consultancy services).

Although public relations are largely unexplored before the Slovenia’s independence in 1991, Slovenian authors link the establishment of modern public relations in Slovenia to the establishment of an independent state with an open society, political democracy, and market economy (cf. Ašanin Gole and Sraka, 2020; J.E. Grunig, L.A. Grunig and Verčič, 2004; Verčič, 2002, 2004, 2009, 2011, 2014). There was practically no professional literature in the field of public relations in the Slovenian language until 1990, but some forms of practice that would be considered as public relations existed before, especially in terms of internal communication, media relations and publishing, events management, and consumer relations.

The establishment of the first public relations agencies in Slovenia in 1989, and the Public Relations Society of Slovenia as well as the publication of the first booklet on public relations in the Slovene language in 1990 was important for the professional development and institutionalization of public relations. In 1994, the teaching of public relations was introduced for the first time as part of an independent course at the University of Ljubljana. Today, it is possible to study public relations at all three Bologna levels of study, and the professional literature in the Slovene language is also strengthening (Ašanin Gole and Sraka, 2020).

Slovenia was immune to the arrival of international public relations agencies (Watson, 2014), as the vast majority of Slovenian public relations agencies are domestically owned. The economic crisis in the past decade, as well as the current coronavirus pandemic, has left major changes in the market of public relations services in Slovenia. Most agencies continue to present themselves as an agency with a comprehensive range of services, some offer specialized public relations services in marketing niches, and public relations is also part of the regular offer of advertising and marketing agencies. Once large agencies are smaller today, some are no more, and new ones (mostly smaller ones) are trying to gain their place in the market by offering specialized services. Thus, currently the majority of agencies that provide public relations services in Slovenia are self-employed or regularly employ less than three experts (Tkalac Verčič, 2020). Agencies that would employ at least 10 public relations professionals can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

**Public relations agencies**

Public relations consultancy agencies are regarded as communication agencies able to provide public relations services needed by organizations, and that can offer solutions that can meet all needs thanks to their high level of profes-
In contrast to advertising as a discipline of study, agencies are an understudied topic in public relations research (Verčič, Tench and Tklač Verčič, 2018). Research on public relations consultancy agencies is growing in the last decades. A research by Sriramesh and Verčič in 2007 on global public relations consultancies is one of the major ones. Others include a research by Schauster and Neil (2017) on ethical situations at advertising and public relations agencies, a paper on public relations agencies within the progress of public relations discipline in respective countries (Wu and Taylor, 2003), a research on how consultancies respond to widespread digital trends (Triantafillidou and Yannas, 2014) and the one in which public relations practices under specific conditions are addressed (Erzikova and Bowen, 2019).

In 2012, Gallicano, Curtin and Matthews studied the status of millennials within public relations agencies, and their attitudes towards their work. In 2019, Place investigated how important “listening” in a global public relations agency was. In 2018, Xie, Neil and Schauster wrote an article on a comparative framework that addressed public relations and advertising agencies in China and the US, while Verčič, Tench and Verčič published, in 2018, a research on collaborations and conflicts between European public relations agencies and their clients.

This paper is based on the research by Wirtz and Ngondo (2013) on the website strategies of top fee-generating US-based public relations agencies and the research by Ki and Kim (2010) on ethics statements of public relations firms. Clients of top Turkish and Slovenian public relations agencies will be analyzed to query the following points in terms of both clients to which they render services, and their own organization / employees.

To examine the construction of public relations agencies in Turkey and Slovenia, a number of research questions were asked:

- RQ1: Do public relations agencies’ websites demonstrate principles of dialogic communication?
- RQ2: Are these agencies active in an international arena or are these local?
- RQ3: How and what is the information about agencies’ staff given to web sites visitors?
- RQ4: In which areas of expertise do the agencies render services?
- RQ5: What are the agencies’ statements regarding ethics?
- RQ6: Which sector works with which agency?

All these points were addressed based on data public relations consultancy agencies made actually available on their web sites.

**Methodology**

This research aims were to examine the Turkish (TR) and Slovenian (SLO) public relations consultancies, to determine which sectors hire agencies and revealing how these public relations agencies present themselves to their clients on their websites. Paper seeks to identify possible differences in the use of websites by public relations agencies in these two countries. We decided to compare public relations consultancies in Slovenia and Turkey due to cultural, historical, geographical, political and economic differences in the development of these two countries and public relations consultancies in them.

In this study, qualitative content analyses were used to better understand the ways the top public relations agencies in Turkey and Slovenia present themselves to their clients on their websites. Content analysis was chosen to examine
practices or publicly available website content of 43 public relations agencies in Turkey and Slovenia.

**Sampling**

The research involves the members of the Communication Consultancies Association of Turkey. The web sites of 27 members of the association between 15 and 29 May 2020 during which the research was conducted were taken as basis. In the period in which the research was conducted, the web sites of the 6 out of 27 members were either not live / available, or had outdated information. The web sites of the 3 out of the 27 members had only links to their international partners and those web sites have not got Turkish language. Therefore, 18 agencies were involved in the research.

As for Slovenia, according to their turnover, the 25 highest ranked public relations agencies were analyzed. In doing so, we took into account that the agencies in the sample were registered for the public relations activity, even though this is not a dominant activity in all the agencies considered (but is, for example, marketing, advertising, etc.).

**Coding procedures**

Coding was carried out by two researchers in Turkey and Slovenia. The research uses, in part, the coding list of Wirtz and Ngondo (2013), and the following categories of these scholars were addressed: 1) usefulness of information, 2) ease of interface, 3) conservation of visitors, 4) generation of return visits, and 5) dialogic loop. The types, number of employees and ethical issues of the agencies were examined according to research by Ki and Kim (2010).

Gephi was used to visualize the industries within which the agencies are active.

Due to limited number of the web sites researched, the findings were expressed in percentage terms.

**Findings**

72.2% of the web sites of Turkish agencies have an option in English, while this is the case for 80% of the Slovenian agencies. 27.8% of Turkish agencies and 28% of Slovenian agencies have international partners.

**Dialogic communication (RQ 1)**

The first research question was, “Do public relations agency websites demonstrate principles of dialogic communication?” Table 2 is based on Wirtz and Ngondo’s research.

Ease of interface concerns website features that facilitate site navigation (Wirtz and Ngondo, 2013: 14). None of the Turkish agencies has a site map, while most of Slovenian agencies have it. The web sites of most of the agencies from both countries have “major links to rest of the site” and “logo of organization on front page”. The availability of search engine boxes is low for both countries.

Usefulness of information relates to whether or not a website features meet the needs of its visitors (Wirtz and Ngondo, 2013: 14). Investigating into whether the web sites of agencies provide adequate information on their services and expertise for clients that visit web pages or potential clients revealed that the major difference between the Turkish and Slovenian agencies’ web sites is found to be whether the employees are clearly listed on web sites or not. Only 27.8% of Turkish agencies display their employees on web sites, while 72% of the Slovenian agencies do so. The ability to request information is lower in Turkey than in Slovenia.

Conversation of visitors implies, in a sense, whether or not a website explicitly invites its visitors to take a closer look into an agen-
The inclusion of important information on front page and the availability of quick links to the rest of the site are deemed important, while post time and date of last update are found to be overlooked to a large extent.

Given that public relations is considered to be a dialogic form of communication, public relations agencies rendering such services are expected to have structured themselves accordingly in order to sustain the dialogue. However, it is found out that either Turkish or Slovenian agencies fail to satisfy visitors of their web sites in terms of encouraging them to revisit their web sites recursively. The agencies’ corporate e-mail addresses are naturally available, but whether or not they are active remain unknown. E-mail newsletters are used more frequently in Slovenian agencies (35%). Only 16.7% of Turkish agencies are found to host a blog on their web sites, while Slovenian agencies use blogs at a higher rate. 83.3% of Turkish agencies host no blog, and bloggers on 11.1% are anonymous, while top executives are blogging in the remaining 5.6%. 52% of Slovenian agencies have a blog on their web sites, bloggers of 12% are anonymous, while top executives are blogging on 8% and other agency employees on 28%. No blogs of Turkish agencies are open to comments, while 20% of Slovenian agencies’ blogs are open to comments, 32% not.

It was determined that Turkish agencies use social media tools (Facebook, Twitter) other than blogging at a higher rate than Slovenian agencies do.

Table 2: Occurrence of dialogic features in public relations websites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Slovenia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ease of interface</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site map</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major links to rest of the site</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search engine box</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logo of organization on front page</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness to clients / potential clients</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency contact information</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special area for clients</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of employees</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area of agency expertise</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client testimonials</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity about current clients</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to request information</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation of visitors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important information on first page</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post time and date of last update</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick links to rest of site</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
International vs. local agencies (RQ2)

77.8% of Turkish agencies and 92% of Slovenian agencies were found to be local. 11.1% of Turkish agencies have multiple branches, while this is the case for only 4% of Slovenian agencies. 5.6% of Turkish agencies and 4% of Slovenian agencies partner global public relations consultancies. 5.6% of Turkish agencies have overseas offices. All these findings indicate that agencies in both countries substantially operate on local and national basis, with an exceptionally low percentage of cooperation with global partners.

Disclosed information about agencies’ staff (RQ3)

72.2% of Turkish public relations agencies disclose no information on the number of their employees on their websites, while this percentage is lower in Slovenian counterparts (40%). The number of employees of 11.1% of Turkish public relations agencies is between 11 and 20, and 21 and 50 in 16.7%. In Slovenia, 20% of public relations agencies have below 5 employees, while the number of employees in 20% is 5 to 10, 11 to 20 in 12%, 21 to 50 in 4% and above 50 in 4%.

89.9% of Turkish public relations agencies disclose no contact information of their employees on their websites. This is much lower in Slovenia (40%), which means that Slovenian agencies’ employees are more likely to be contacted than their counterparts in Turkish public relations agencies. Only 5.6% of Turkish public relations agencies provide e-mail contacts of their employees, while other 5.6% disclose certain contact information. In Slovenia, e-mail addresses in 16% of agencies and e-mail addresses, phone numbers and linked-in addresses in 44% are disclosed.

With regard to gender of their employees, 72.2% of agencies provided no data. As for the ones that share gender of their employees, 87 wom-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Slovenia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Return visit encouragement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicitly invites users to return</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAQ/Q&amp;As</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request to “Bookmark now”</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downloadable information</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogic loop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for user response</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to vote on issues</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey to voice opinion</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email newsletter/e-newsletter</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website hosts blog</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook page</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter handle</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other social media tool/s</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
en and 49 men disclosed on their web sites are working in them. These findings show that the majority of employees in Turkish agencies are women. It is found out that Slovenian agencies are open to disclose gender of their employees to a larger extent than Turkish agencies. Only 28% of Slovenian agencies disclosed no data on gender, while 80 women and 55 men are working in the rest of them. The distribution of male and female employees is similar in both countries. In Slovenia, the majority of public relations agencies’ employees is also female practitioners.

Table 4: Agencies’ areas of expertise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>areas of expertise</th>
<th>TR (%)</th>
<th>SLO (%)</th>
<th>areas of expertise</th>
<th>TR (%)</th>
<th>SLO (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media relations and content management</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk, crisis, and issue management</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Art communication</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event and project management</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Integrated communication</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal communication and change management</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>Marketing public relations</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability and corporate social responsibility</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Strategic communication management</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate communication</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Visual communication and design</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing communication</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>B2B communication</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital communication</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Business and/or management consulting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media coaching</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Content marketing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Digital advertising</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising and sponsorship</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Digital marketing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader communication</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Employee branding</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation management</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Government relations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media management</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>Inbound marketing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand communication</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>Investor relations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative solutions</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>Lobbying</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial communication</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Media buying</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public affairs</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Neuro-marketing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising and publicity</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Public relations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate publishing</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Public speaking</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design and film</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencer marketing</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Agencies’ areas of expertise (RQ4)

In a comparison of the top 10 services given by Turkish and Slovenian public relations agencies, “event and project management” and “sustainability and corporate social responsibility” are found to be on the top. It is found out that “public relations” is not included among the services rendered by Turkish public relations agencies, but this is one of the top services in Slovenian agencies, which is worth noting. Besides, Slovenian agencies render marketing-based services (content marketing, digital marketing, etc.) at a higher rate. In particular, content marketing is one of the most rendered areas of expertise for Slovenian agencies, which is not in the scope of services of Turkish agencies at all. The research revealed that Turkish agencies are rather inclined to render public relations-related areas, while Slovenian counterparts predominantly offer a wider range of marketing-based services.

In an era of digitalization and social media urging public relations agencies to offer such kind services, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube accounts of the agencies sampled for this research have also been investigated. Turkish agencies have more social media account that Slovenian agencies do.

Besides whether or not sampled agencies have a social media account, it is also significant to have a deeper look into how up to date these accounts are or not. So, the research included an investigation in how up-to-date the posts on agencies’ social media accounts were in the period in which this research took place (See, Table 6). It is found out that Slovenian agencies use social media accounts more actively, although they are less in number than Turkish counterparts. A total of 142 videos are embedded on YouTube accounts of Turkish agencies that uses YouTube more actively (24% of total Turkish agencies), while Slovenian agencies that uses YouTube actively (which are 28% of the total Slovenian agencies) embedded 340 videos on this outlet. Activating social media accounts is not sufficient for effectiveness of communication to stakeholders, as these tools should be utilized more frequently.

Public relations agencies’ approach to ethics (RQ5)

Based on research by Ki and Kim (2010), agencies’ approaches to ethics expressed on their web sites were assessed (Table 7). The fact that an agency explicitly articulates its approach to ethics and related statements when it presents itself to a client can be regarded as an assurance for such client to select such agency, as well as reflects such agency’s perspective. This research revealed that only 10.5% of Turkish agencies post an ethical statement on their web sites, while this percentage for Slovenian agencies is much higher than Turkish agencies, which is 79.2%.

In Turkey, “Code of ethics” and “Culture” are used as a term at an equal rate (5.3%). In Slovenia, “Mission statement”, “Why us”, “How we

Table 5: Social media accounts of Turkish and Slovenian public relations agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Accounts</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Slovenia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency official Facebook account</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency official Instagram account</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency official Twitter account</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency official YouTube channel</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
think” and “Points of difference” are used more frequently at an equal rate (12.5%).

Sectors for which public relations agencies provide services (RQ6)

For this research, all available sectors within an economy were taken from the list of sectors of the Vocational Qualifications Authority of Turkish Republic’s Ministry of Family Labour and Social Services (Mesleki Yeterlilik Kurumu, 2020). These sectors were addressed to locate the sectors to which sampled Turkish and Slovenian agencies serve. The major aim in doing so is to identify which sectors mainly cooperate with public relations agencies, and find out whether or not any agency serves to more than one organization from the same sector. The agencies’ websites were scanned to create a grouping of sectors agencies’ clients are actively operating.

16 out of all 18 Turkish agencies sampled for this research listed their clients on their web sites. A total of 544 organizations found were examined.

Table 6: Social media activities of Turkish and Slovenian public relations agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Every day</th>
<th>2-3 at the week</th>
<th>3-4 at 15 days</th>
<th>3-4 in a month</th>
<th>1-2 in a month</th>
<th>Not active (if there are nothing in the posts in a month)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook Activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram Activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter Activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Ethic statement titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethic Statement Titles</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Slovenia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>89.5 %</td>
<td>20.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Statement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why us</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How we think</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Points of difference</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>5.3 %</td>
<td>4.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code of Ethics</td>
<td>5.3 %</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
19 out of 25 Slovenian public relations agencies sampled listed their clients on their web sites, which account for a total of 261 organizations grouped into sectors.

It was found out that some Turkish agencies serve to more than one organization within the same sector. For example, the agency X, may be rendering public relations services to brands A, B and C owned by different business groups within the same sector, which seems like an issue that should be questioned by clients. This is because an organization decides to cooperate with an agency; it should make any information about itself available to such agency. Whether the agencies that do not disclose any ethical statement will share such information with competitors or not should be questioned (see Table 8: Sectors, by countries, served by public relations agencies).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Slovenia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>13.42%</td>
<td>9.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>9.01%</td>
<td>8.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and personal services</td>
<td>8.09%</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>7.90%</td>
<td>9.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automotive</td>
<td>7.54%</td>
<td>3.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry, petroleum, tire and plastic</td>
<td>7.35%</td>
<td>8.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and social services</td>
<td>6.99%</td>
<td>3.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism accommodation, food &amp; beverage services</td>
<td>6.62%</td>
<td>6.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi sectoral</td>
<td>5.70%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>4.04%</td>
<td>3.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textile, ready-made clothing, leather</td>
<td>3.49%</td>
<td>1.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity and electronic</td>
<td>3.31%</td>
<td>3.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media, communication and publishing</td>
<td>2.57%</td>
<td>0.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation, logistic, and communication</td>
<td>2.57%</td>
<td>8.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information technologies</td>
<td>2.21%</td>
<td>7.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>2.02%</td>
<td>4.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodwork paper and paper products</td>
<td>1.29%</td>
<td>0.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
<td>3.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass, cement and soil</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports and recreation</td>
<td>0.92%</td>
<td>1.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and management</td>
<td>0.74%</td>
<td>6.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cement</td>
<td>0.74%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture art and design</td>
<td>0.37%</td>
<td>0.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice and security</td>
<td>0.37%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mine</td>
<td>0.37%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>0.18%</td>
<td>0.38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the result of a scanning of sectors, the “food” industry is found to be the first-ranked sector served by Turkish and Slovenian public relations agencies, followed by the “commerce” and “social and personal services” sectors in Turkey, and by the “chemistry, petroleum, tire and plastic” sector in Slovenia in which the “finance” sector is served at an equal rate with the “food” industry. One of the notable distributions on the comparative table of both countries (Table 8) is the fact that the “transportation, logistic and

Figure 1: Sectors for which Turkish public relations agencies provide services
Note: Color tone differences on the graphic represent agencies
communication” sector has 8.81% share in Slovenia, but only 2.5% in Turkey. Moreover, it has been found that multi-sector enterprises tend to get public relations consultancy services in Turkey, while they avoid such services in Slovenia.

Discussion and conclusion

The total number of public relations agencies in both Slovenia and Turkey remains unknown. Especially in today’s Covid-19 pandemic conditions, many agencies have great difficulties to survive, and even close up. Some of the criteria

![Figure 2: Sectors for which Slovenian public relations agencies provide services](image)

*Note: Color tone differences on the graphic represent agencies*
of Wirtz and Ngondo (2013) intended to help assess agencies in terms of dialogic communication were found to no longer apply today. For instance, agencies are not using search engines frequently. Considering the situation for Turkey, no agency embedded a site map on their web sites, while it was found out that a high number of Slovenian agencies are still using site maps. While agencies usually post big news and important information on their web sites’ front pages in order to make themselves closer to their clients, Turkish agencies were found to be reluctant to share case studies. Opportunity to vote on issues is out of questions for both countries. And they are similarly not open to any voting about their work. Moreover, “survey to voice opinion” is inexisten in Turkey, while Slovenian agencies have it but at a pretty low rate.

Within this research, a whole list of services was made in order to examine all services agencies in both countries render to their clients because public relations agencies now offer a wider range of services. In Turkey, the “media relations and content management” is placed of the top. Although what media relations covers began to be evolving from conventional into social media, the media relations concept is maintaining its importance. In Turkey, a country of continuous occurrence of some types of crises, the “risk, crisis and issue management” that is one of the primary fields of application for public relations ranks no 2 at the ranking of services agencies are providing. The “event and project management” is among the top 3 categories of services. In Slovenia, the “social media management” is placed on top, which is followed by the “event and project management” and the “content marketing” as the top 3 categories of services that public relations agencies provide. This can be explained by the fact that the sample of Slovenian agencies (in terms of turnover) included all agencies that are also registered for public relations, but there are many of them for whom this is not their main business activity. The “event and project management” is found to be among the top 3 categories of services for public relations agencies in both countries. Considering that agencies are shaping their services according to their clients’ demands and expectations, the top 3 categories of services found means clients have demands related to having media coverage, organizing events to do so, and solving crises rather than getting help to formulate an integrated and holistic public relations strategy.

In their research, Ki and Kim (2010) found that 74.9% of the US public relations agencies are local and only 6.6% is global. This research found that 77.8% of Turkish agencies and 92% of Slovenian agencies are local. According to Ki and Kim (2010), the US agencies having 5 to 10 employees account for 33.8% of the total (no #1 at the ranking). The percentage of the Turkish agencies whose number of employees could be identified is 27.8% in which the agencies having 21 to 50 employees account for 16.7% (no #1 at the ranking). It was found out that in Slovenia, the percentage of the agencies whose number of employees could be identified is 60%. 20% of Slovenian agencies are found to have below 5 employees, and other 20% 5 to 10 employees.

According to research by Ki and Kim, only 38.7% the US public relations agencies post any ethic statement on their web sites (2010, p. 229). Only 10.6% of Turkish public relations consultancy agencies are found out to have embedded an ethical statement on their web sites, while such percentage in Slovenian agencies is even higher than the US agencies’, being 79.2%.

The consultancies sampled for this research are top-notched agencies in both countries. It was found out that although such agencies’ services are mainly based on “communication”, they fail to effectively utilize such a communicative process to their benefits. The fact that some Turkish agencies do not have their own social media accounts or cannot use them effectively while they
offer social media management services to their clients clearly appeared to be another contradiction.

Which sectors feel rather the need for public relations were identified by grouping existing clients of agencies into listed sectors. Agencies may easily analyze these data to formulize appropriate strategies for respective sectors. What is notable regarding sectors agencies are rendering services to is the fact that an agency consults more than an organization within the same sector.

In conclusion, although both Turkey and Slovenia do not have a deep-rooted history in public relations practice, they both have successful agencies trying to provide superior supports to their clients. The situation determination in this research is mainly based on the agencies’ self-presentation on their web sites. In-depth interviews with executives and employees of agencies would certainly provide a more comprehensive insights in this issue.

References


Public Relations for Public Relations Professionals: Relationship Management of Public Relations Professionals

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T. Serra Gorpe University of Sharjah (U.A.E.)

Abstract

This study aims to understand how public relations professionals form, maintain, and evaluate their relationships with their public audience on social media. How does this relationship work when it is not for the organization but for the public relations professional for herself/himself? Twenty semi-structured interviews with public relations professionals in Turkey were carried out to observe their use of Twitter and Instagram and to assess their motives. The findings of the study confirm that Turkish public relations professionals do not use Twitter and Instagram for their personal public relations or to form relationships. Instagram is mainly used on a personal scale, and Twitter is for news and following agenda. They rarely post on Twitter, and they have different views on using Twitter and Instagram. The majority of the participants state that they would use Twitter and Instagram differently if they were not communication professionals because they feel restrained and pressured by their work responsibilities.

Keywords: Public relations professionals, relationship management, Twitter, Instagram

Introduction

The many definitions of public relations highlight the relationship building between an organization and its public. Public relations creates interactions for organizations, and this role has to be neutral so that organizations do not lose their multi-stakeholder perspective (Gregory and Willis, 2013). Public relations professionals within the relationship-building paradigm is engaged in many activities, which can range from strategic planning to execution and assessment. From the organizational point of view, establishing relationships between the organization and the public are important, and such relationships have been among the core aspects of public relations; however, methods on how they are initiated, built, and maintained remain unclear (Rhee, 2004). The reputation of an organization develops from the type and quality of relationships that the organization forms with its public. The value given to reputation should be attributed to relationships, and public relations can cultivate the organization's ties with the public to maintain its image (Grunig, 2006). The management of relationships is becoming more and more important in an era where multi-stakeholder perspectives can be heard on many platforms, real
or even fake.

One side of the coin represents the function and responsibilities of public relations and public relations professionals. The other side of the coin is the public relations professionals themselves. What do they do on social media? How do they manage their relationships specifically on Twitter and Instagram? Do their visibility and management online have a strategic focus, and what is the value of these platforms for them? We are interested to know whether public relations professionals are seeking any gains out of social media. If so, we determine how they evaluate these platforms. Through semi-structured interviews with Turkish senior public relations professionals, we explore why and how they use Twitter and Instagram. The literature review discusses the relationship management and the importance of social media for public relations and public relations practitioners.

**Literature Review**

**Relationship Management and Public Relations**

Relationship management focuses on balancing the interests of institutions and the public by maintaining the relationship between institutions and the public (Lee and Park, 2013; Ledingham, 2003). Relationship is an important part of public relations work. According to Broom et al. (2000, p. 4), “Many scholars and practitioners say that public relations is all about building and maintaining an organization’s relationships with its publics.” Institutions are bombarded with the demands coming from inside the organization and outside as well. Thus, they depend on experts to communicate and develop relationships with stakeholders (Grunig and Dozier, 2003). Public relations professionals have long understood the power of relationships and how they foster trust and loyalty (Kent, 2010). By identifying the strategic public and by implementing communication programs, public relations experts develop and maintain long-term relationships with the public and the management. This strategic management process results in making the organizations more effective (Hon and Grunig, 1999). The relationship between the organization and the public affects the perception, evaluations, and intentions of the public (Bruning and Ralston, 2000). Relationship management refers to the practices of public relations aimed at determining mutual interests, values, and benefits among the client/organization and the public (Hutton, 1999).

Public relations can maintain the reputation and relationships by managing the behavior of an organization through strategic management (Grunig and Hung, 2002). Breakenridge (2012, p. 4) stated that one of the eight vital tasks of public relations practitioners today is serving as the “relationship analyzer.” Public relations professionals should not only limit their work to observing and analyzing how audiences connect with their favorite brands but also how they create ties with their peers. As stated by Kent and Li (2020, p. 6) “public relations is reified by engagement with internal and external individuals, groups, and publics.”

The concept of relationship between stakeholders and institutions are related to the process of creating and maintaining the relationship, thus allowing organizations to align their behaviors with the expectations of their stakeholders (Navarro et al., 2017). When the communication of public relations becomes more interactive, the goal of public relations is to shift the development of organization and public relations that benefit mutually from communication management (Bruning, 2001). The value of public relations is that it can help an organization build solid relations with its external stakeholders and diminish the possibility of conflict or crisis (Hung, 2005). Public relations professionals establish relationships by improving commu-
ication among the subsystems of the institution and with the public within and outside the organization (Grunig and Dozier, 2003). As stated by Kent (2013), public relations professionals know that reaching to stakeholders and gatekeepers and conducting research on public issues, economics, and in other areas are the center of effective public relations. From the relationship management perspective, the role of public relations professionals is not to transfer information but to support and manage organization-public relationships (Bruning, 2001). Kent and Li (2020, p. 6) argued that “modern public relations professionals co-create meaning and shape reality via an interactive research and communication process conducted for the mutual benefit of individuals, groups, organizations, and the stakeholders and publics with whom they have social, cultural, intellectual, economic, and communicative relationships.”

**Public Relations and Social Media**

The Internet provides unlimited solutions for important functions of public relations, such as issues management, relationship management, and environmental scanning (Porter et al., 2007). Digital platforms facilitate organizations in identifying their customers and users, analyzing their needs and behavior, creating valuable content, and establishing emotional bonds. By using these platforms, organizations can effectively increase loyalty, satisfaction, and positive perceptions about the brand (Navarro et al., 2017). From the strategic communication perspective, new communication platforms have revolutionized the dynamics of communication between organizations and their stakeholder groups (Zerfass et al., 2011). Scholars conducting research on public-organization dialogue in general have focused either on the interaction of the public and the organization or the debate between them (Bruning et al., 2008).

As stated by Valentini (2015, p. 174), “Social media are conversational media, and as such they require users’ interactions and active participation in order to remain ‘alive.’” Social media offers numerous opportunities for public relations practitioners to interact with the public as they adopt new forms of technology and integrate them into their daily lives (Curtis et al., 2010). Social media is changing how public relations practitioners communicate and develop relationships with the media and other audiences (Robson and James, 2011). Public relations in social media can refer to both the rhetorical content production and relationship management functions of the profession (Valentini, 2015). Kent (2010, p. 654) stated the importance of social media and what it may mean for other professions in these words: “All professionals need to understand new media and social media so that they can make good decisions, but not all professionals actually need to use social media.” People positively acknowledge that social media has helped public relations build the foundation of relationship management (Avery et al, 2010, p. 337). Social media has significantly changed the relationships between organizations and their stakeholders with the ability to disseminate content, interact, and develop long-lasting relationships. (Navarro et al., 2017). Social media is not just a channel of communication but a tool that has the potential to create relationships and public engagement (Men and Tsai, 2014, p. 418). Bridgen (2011, p. 62) stated that a difference exists between the traditional media and the social media because social media channels enable the sharing of different types of topics among interested audiences “who are niche, global or both and across traditional demarcations.” Thus, boundaries can be blurred, and personal and professional discussions may have no distinct difference.

The rise of social media and its impact on the general practice of public relations can be understood by the thoughts and perceptions of public relations leaders (Sweetser and Kelleher,
With the advent of social media, public relations practitioners have learned to use social media to build relationships effectively in the digital world (Kinsky et al., 2016). The new skills of public relations professionals consist of “visualizing and mapping the connections for better strategic engagement and higher-level interactions” (Breakenridge, 2012, p. 4). Kent and Li (2020) explained that the prominent public relations approaches on social media are “engagement,” “social presence,” and “conversational human voice.” Content creation and sharing are important parts of engagement and conversations, and these conversations create online dialogues (Valentini, 2015).

In their study, Wright and Hinson (2013) found that public relations practitioners believe that social media continues to improve itself in terms of accuracy, reliability, honesty, trust, and veracity. A study conducted by Porter et al. (2007) concluded that public relations practitioners who write blogs feel they have more expertise and prestige. Bridgen (2011, p. 64) stated that public relations practitioners’ personal representations online are similar to their “self” and “work self.” Interactions can take place anywhere, at work or elsewhere. Here, we see technology blurring the distinction between what is work and what is not.

**Method**

A total of 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted from May 2020 to July 2020 with senior public relations professionals in Turkey. The sample consisted of public relations professionals from the agency side and the corporate side. The participants of the study were from Istanbul and İzmir in Turkey. All interviews took place through Zoom during this period, except for one, which was a phone interview. The sample consisted of three males and seventeen females. They had at least 10 years of experience. Nine of the participants had more than 20 years of professional experience. Overall, the seniority of public relations professionals were 10 to 33 years. Three people were from agencies, and the rest (seventeen) represented the corporate setting. The minimum age of the participants was 30, and the sample included participants who were over 50 years old. The interviews lasted from 40 minutes to 100 minutes. All correspondences were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The research questions are as follows:

- **RQ1:** How do senior public relations professionals use Twitter and Instagram?
- **RQ2:** What principles are emphasized by senior public relations professionals in using Twitter and Instagram?
- **RQ3:** How important is Twitter and Instagram for personal relationship management from the perspective of senior public relations professionals?

The interview instrument consisted of questions about when the participants started using the platforms and their frequency of use. The motives behind using these platforms and whether differences and similarities existed between using Twitter and Instagram were also addressed. We were also interested to know whether the participants had any guiding principles and/or “dos” and “do nots” when using these platforms. We also asked whether they had an overall strategic intention/approach to their presence on social media. A thematic analysis was made, and the findings were grouped under four subthemes, namely, motives, similarities, differences, and principles in using Twitter and Instagram. The findings also presented the concerns of the participants related to using Twitter and Instagram.

**Findings**

The majority of the participants stated that they use both Twitter and Instagram because these platforms became active in Turkey. Out of the 20 participants, only two individuals mentioned...
that they do not use Twitter. The reasons for not using them included the nature of the medium, which demands more care, and also its dynamic nature. Even the participants who use Twitter commented on these aspects.

The participants use Twitter and Instagram for a minimum of one hour, and their usage can reach five hours a day. They did not state any important time differences between these platforms, i.e., they did not disclose whether they use one more than the other. Their usage time changes according to their specific needs. However, their activities in each platform vary greatly from each other.

Motives for using Twitter and Instagram

I find it very wrong if a communication specialist does not use a communication channel that is available out there, whether this person is an academic, a student, CEO of an agency, or an employee. If you do not drive a car, then you cannot be considered as someone who knows how to drive a car. If you do not use something, then you cannot manage it. This is my belief. (Aylin)

Figure 1 illustrates the uses of Twitter and Instagram.

As seen from the table, two major differences from these accounts is that Twitter is not used for personal reasons. Using Twitter and Instagram has more differences than similarities. The participants are generally cautious about using of Twitter, and it is mostly used for retweets and likes rather than opinion sharing. One participant, Ezgi, stated, “My sharing activities are limited on Twitter. On special occasions, I retweet company messages.”

Twitter is not used for personal activities for two reasons. One is related with its speed. Duygu expressed, “The content is dynamic, and at the same time, Twitter is energy-consuming. One has to invest time and energy there. I do not...
use it because it is fast-paced.” Meanwhile, Idil believed that “Twitter is faster, and Instagram is more private.” Aylin shared, “I am not someone who tweets a lot. All these activities consume time.” In addition, Ece remarked that “when people try to shred you on Twitter, you need to give all your energy and focus there.”

Another reason for avoiding Twitter for personal use stems from the fact that this medium is seen as more politically driven. Sevgi explained, “I find Twitter very political and out of control. I think there is information pollution.” In addition, Ece elaborated, “I am among the first who used Twitter, but I do not use it actively now because Twitter is a toxic space and you have to spend a lot of time for Twitter. You have to manage it properly. You need to give all your energy and focus to make your Twitter usage meaningful.” The participants’ perception of Twitter will be explained when we discuss the differences and similarities between two of them. The participants who have Twitter accounts mentioned that what they do on the platform and with whom are different. They also avoid sharing content. In the words of one participant: “Even if I have ideas on issues, I do not think this is of interest to other people. I do not react. Therefore, I do not use Twitter for sharing” (Duygu). Another participant explained, “I do not use Twitter because it is very political” (Umut). Meanwhile, Nur shared, “I use Instagram very actively, but I fear platforms like Twitter. If you write what you think, I think you should be afraid. I do not create content, but I use Twitter.”

Twitter has been used mostly for news. According to the participants, one can find all the news at one place, and it is constantly being updated. For example, Hakan stated, “I use Twitter for news mostly. You know the situation of our media. I am able to reach information fast.” In addition, Nur explained, “I use Twitter for news. I do not use it professionally.”

Twitter is also used to follow professional news. The participants are interested to know about what is happening in their sector and what the current trends are. As Idil stated, Twitter is used to “follow the business world, follow sectoral publications.” In addition, Batu shared, “On Twitter, I exclusively follow content about the sector and my profession. I follow, like, and retweet.” Hakan also shared, “Twitter helps me with my profession. I am able to check what other universities have done.”

Twitter helps participants follow agendas as well. Ezgi expressed that “Twitter is for following the agenda,” while Deniz stated, “to follow the agenda. I see it as a news site.” Moreover, Nur elaborated, “What is the agenda? In public relations, we have started to explore emotional states and the reactions of the world to issues. I use it like a media outlet, but I also know that it is not a trusted source. I follow accurate and credible sources. On Twitter, I also follow branded media.” Nuray expressed, “I feel I get the pulse of everything.”

Twitter is also used to facilitate research needs and gain general knowledge. Umit explained, “I learned many things from blog writers. Then, Twitter evolved, and I learned from these people there… I follow presidents, prime ministers… I believe that I gain from following them.” Ebru also said, “By learning how to use it, I improve myself…not professional development but by learning how to use this platform, determining the target audiences of this medium, and learning how to reach whom and where.” Moreover, Aylin expressed, “I use it to update my knowledge. If it is not on Twitter, then it did not happen.” Meanwhile, Duygu shared, “As a communication professional, I continuously research on the ethical issues of journalists and the media.” Moreover, Ozlem believed that Twitter “expand[s] my knowledge span.”

Participants also mentioned what specifically
they were following on Twitter. These accounts ranged from media people, to news from associations, foundations, important people such as politicians, and opinion leaders. The participants stated that they follow prominent figures in the public relations and communication sector. Nur shared, “I am interested in many sectors. I am a follower of all these categories. Public relations, world global publications, local—I follow them.” Ezgi also explained, “Associations, foundations, I want to look at the labels. I use it for professional and personal development.” Meanwhile, Deniz revealed, “I do follow brands and news in both of them. The difference is that I share less on Twitter. On Instagram, I share something every day.”

“I do my best to share good things, not things that make us depressed. If we are gloomy, I try to share uplifting things...People are trying hard to do something on social media especially on Instagram. ‘Let me do something. I should now say something’ I am refraining from this. I should not react to all. I do not live there. I do not want to be addicted to it...I want to manage...I want have rules.” (Nur)

As stated earlier, Instagram is used for very personal activities. Very few of the participants mentioned that they were on Instagram for professional purposes, and this trend is less prominent. Few of the participants mentioned that they want to follow some “private accounts,” which they do through Instagram.

They are also on Instagram for shopping, viewing images, checking out recently opened places, and relaxing. They share “beautiful things, celebration photos of families and friends” (Duygu). They mentioned that they also post pictures of cats, children, family, hobbies, food, and travel. Ozlem explained that “Instagram is a communication channel both for professional and personal purposes. I believe that not only posts but short videos are retained in the minds of people. In addition, Batu said, “On Instagram I am a gour-

met. I follow my hobbies, such as eating or traveling.” Meanwhile, Deniz expressed, “Instagram for me is to be in communication with people, to keep my ties with my friends. I find the answers for ‘who, where, and with whom.’ I share nice quotes and also share about myself a lot.” Fatma explained that Instagram is used to check “what others have done and what the novelties are.” Moreover, Ezgi believed that “Instagram is the face of life, it is life itself... Instagram is my life, and Twitter is my job” Ece indicated finding “personal things on Instagram...Closed profile.” Nur made associations regarding the platform: “Instagram entertainment. Free time. I also look at what the brands are doing professionally.” Meanwhile, Aylin explained, “Instagram is a lifestyle, sharing lay lay lay. Events, social sharing on where you traveled, what you ate. It is more of a social area.” Duygu also asserted, “Instagram should express me. When someone says, ‘Who is Duygu?, then there she is.’

The participants described their work-related activities on Instagram, and they also claimed that their Instagram accounts can help their companies. For example, Duygu explained, “I share from the company’s Instagram the things that are meaningful to me. For example, Women’s Day and COVID. I share the messages of the group of the companies that my company belongs to. For example, 10th of November [10th of November marks the death anniversary of the founder of Republic of Turkey]” Deniz also explained, “Because I am a brand on Instagram, this aspect is reflects positively to my company. It has worked well for my image and to make myself known.” Even though Instagram is a very personal platform for them, most of the participants highlighted that they care about how they present themselves on Instagram. Idil shared, “I also pay attention to what I post on Instagram because my account is followed by my workplace.”
Similarities and differences on usage of Twitter and Instagram

Everyone thinks that they can say whatever they want to say. I do not see this communication tool for us and for Turkey. The brands also do not want to be open for discussion there. They share topics that cannot be commented on. This is like a marketplace. Everyone thinks they know, and everyone writes what they want. It’s like a neighborhood fight. In Turkey, the platform that I dislike the most is Twitter. (Ece)

Twitter and Instagram have a strong distinction. One is for work, and the other one is for pleasure. “Twitter is for my career development, but Instagram is completely for my pleasures. If I do not do this, I will create clutter,” Umit shared. Sedef also explained, “Twitter is for business purposes, and I use Instagram to fulfill my social and soft news needs.” Meanwhile, Batu expressed, “Twitter is exclusively for corporate communication. On Instagram, yes [meaning corporate communication], but there is also traveling, eating, and sharing. I do not interchange the use of these platforms.” (Batu).

Twitter is also found to be more serious, less fun, and more complex than Instagram. For example, Ozlem revealed, “I find the perspectives on Twitter more complex.” Aylin believed, “Twitter is not something humorous, you are sharing an opinion there. You should not make fun of people. You need to respect everyone’s opinion, I think.” Moreover, Ebru explained, “Instagram is more entertaining. We upload our photos. Instagram is where we look at what other people are doing—light content. I think all people use it in this way. Twitter has political issues circling there; people share their opinions and feelings…I think the profile of Twitter is more upscale than Instagram.” Aylin added, “This part [Twitter] is serious for me, this is a serious topic. I look at it many times. You cannot revise; you have to delete your posts on Twitter. However, deleting is not a concept on Twitter. In the other [Instagram], you can edit your posts.”

In terms of similarities in using these platforms, not much was mentioned except for a few of the participants who expressed that they use both platforms interchangeably for personal and professional use. Duygu explained, “In both platforms, I share the things that I enjoy supporting. I tweet the opinions I respect. Then, I post them on Instagram.” Aylin also elaborated, “If I make a speech or if I attend a meeting, I use it on both platforms. A social event on both. An agenda, such as the celebration of the foundation of the Turkish Republic, on both. In Twitter, we do not celebrate birthdays. On Instagram, we do. This side is more individual, social, and activity-oriented.” (Aylin)

Given the perceived nature of Twitter, the participants shared their concerns on how they think they should behave there. They claimed that they feel the pressure of their corporate identity especially on Twitter.

Twitter Pressuring the Public Relations Professional

When I moved to the public sector, I moved out of Twitter. I use it as tablet news. Before I moved to the municipality, my profile was public. I was giving information about my private life. Then, I set my profile to private. I put a glass to protect my personal life, and I do not want to give a wrong impression to the public. (Tulin)

The majority of the participants claimed that if they were not working in the communication field, they would act differently on both platforms, especially on Twitter. Only four people said that their occupation would not have made a difference. Participants also stated that what one does in social media is not independent of the nature of any work. Nuray believed, “If I had not been a communication specialist, people whom I would follow would have changed. If I had been a manager of human resources, I would
have followed people according to my line of work…” Ezgi also expressed, “If I had not been a corporate manager, I would have used the platforms the same way, but maybe not Twitter. I think this factor is also related to age.” Moreover, Ebru elaborated, “I pay attention to what I share there. Me especially. I work for an association… Maybe what I do is not something that others would do as well, but because of this position, if I share something or if I retweet, I regulate my activities. I cannot be that comfortable. At least, this is like that for me.”

One of the participants stated that on Twitter, he uses a fake name, thus making him more comfortable: “I am opening up on Twitter, but this is an anonymous account… Nevertheless, you still need to do this properly” (Hakan). Another participant compared the communication professional with a journalist, but an “independent” one: “If I had been an independent journalist, I would have used this independence in a different way, but I do not feel this independence when I am at the seat of a corporation” (Duygu).

The concerns are not only about Twitter. They are also carried to Instagram. For example, Sevgi shared, “I manage the corporate communication of one company. Every word that I share affects my corporate identity… They do not differentiate between your personal and institutional work. Therefore, I do not use Twitter. When I use Instagram, I pay attention. I have employees, I have colleagues.” Duygu also explained, “I try to do my best in managing my personal account, thinking of my corporate identity in the background. At the end of the day, I am part of an institutional structure where I hold a very important position. If I had been another person or if I was retired, I would have engaged in other type of uses. I do not want my posts to be too politicized or to go to other extremes because of my position.”

Participants strongly feel that they are on these platforms with the institutions they work for, and they have difficulty in separating these aspects. Deniz expressed, “I behave without forgetting my identity as a corporate communication manager… Because I am a communicator, this identity is more important.” Nuray also revealed, “I am in the corporate communication department, and as one of the faces of the company, I behave accordingly. This is my strategy. I also do not share anything from my personal life that I might later regret. I do not have any other strategy.” (Nuray)

In addition, Ebru elaborated,

“If say something on Twitter, I should predict its consequences... Because I work at...... I pay further attention. Otherwise, I could have been one level harsher on what I share... A lot of communication specialists are on Instagram and Twitter. I see what they share. I know that the majority of them pay attention. They do not share things randomly, and I see clearly that they do not share their real opinions... Soft content. Of course this adds to their brand... I openly feel that they do not articulate their true opinions.”

Although we have seen how restricted public relations professionals could be on these platforms, except for a few, they all mentioned that they are not there to promote themselves. Batu asserted, “My reason at the beginning in using these platforms was to create name recognition.” Meanwhile, Duygu explained, “I do not use these platforms to polish myself. I think that these will not be beneficial to me. My friend uses it, and I feel uncomfortable about it.” Umut expressed, “I want to pursue my career through signing successful projects, and I do not approve of gaining followers through creating empty content. To take part in CSR is more meaningful for me.” Ozlem also shared, “Not image creation for me, this [Instagram] is for private use with your son and with your company, representing team spirit. What matters for me is that it is related with my life. I am representing myself as a human being, not my roles.”
In their view, all media have a function, and the function of Twitter and Instagram is not to create a brand for themselves. They mentioned LinkedIn instead for this use. Idil said, “LinkedIn. I do not use them for professional reasons.” In a similar vein, Hakan expressed, “LinkedIn is professional. Every medium is for another type of awareness.” Ece also added, “If I could, I would use LinkedIn actively.”

Principles of usage

All the participants are guided by principles on how to use these platforms. One participant mentioned the power of these platforms and the need to be cautious of one’s words: “You can follow what others are saying. You track where the messages can go. The message can make you a king or vice versa, you see it.”

We can categorize the emphasized principles into four. One of them is related with politics. The others are related with a vulnerable group, children, and concern for other people. In addition to politics, participants mention some other topics that they would not touch upon. They also elaborate on the subjects that are not culturally appropriate.

Regarding his social media activity for work, Sedef explained, “I pay attention to what the CEO shares. I manage the account of the CEO. I am concerned if the shared content is interpreted as political.” Nur also stated, “I work for the boards of non-profit organizations. Therefore, I do want to share politicized content.”

Fatma shared, “I do not share things that are related to other people’s lives. I do not share things about children—I am sensitive. I do not have any concerns about myself and the people who know me from work. When they add me, they are surprised to find out that I can do other activities.”

In addition, Ebru revealed, “I share things on Twitter according to my own principles. I do not share violent content…I pay attention to political opinions. My activities on Twitter and Instagram are similarly based on my principles. I do not want to share my child’s photo or images of dad and mom…There are people who do not have parents or children and who may be sad about it. Therefore, I am one step behind there. I use empathy. I ask myself if I might hurt others and make another person sad.” Meanwhile, Aylin shared, “I pay attention to cultural codes.” Moreover, Hakan explained, “I pay attention to how I use Turkish. Not foreign words. If I share someone else’s work, I mention the account. This is digital footprint.” As seen from the comments of the participants, the use of the Turkish language is seen as important.

Participants also mentioned the care they give to visuals given that they are related to how they present themselves: “I pay attention to the photos I post and what I wear” (Idil).

I pay attention to my hat. I am someone who works in corporate communications and brand reputation management. I feel the responsibility of the reputation of the brand on my shoulders, and I pay attention…I use these platforms with awareness of this responsibility. (Nuray)

Conclusion

Senior public relations professionals have a clear perception of Twitter and Instagram. Instagram is personal. It is social, entertaining, and fun. Some of the activities they do on Instagram are posting travel, food, and celebration photos and sharing nice memories of their families and friends. They also use it for special celebrations that they find to be of value. Very few participants mention that they share their company
events on Instagram. Posting is more frequent on Instagram. Shopping, checking what is new, checking what others are doing, looking for entertainment, and relaxing are the driving forces in using Instagram.

Meanwhile, Twitter is used for following news, news about the sector, agenda, and for research purposes. Professionals believe that Twitter broadens their knowledge. On Twitter, they are very cautious about what they say. Therefore, they mostly “re-tweet” and “like” posts, and content creation is non-existent. They are extremely concerned about political issues. They also claim that their identity is associated with the organizations they work for. Thus, these professionals have to pay attention to what they do and say because they are not representing themselves only. They are also concerned about Instagram in this respect. However, their caution is more pronounced on Twitter. They also think that Twitter requires more time and energy, thus needing devotion to the platform. On Twitter, they follow journalists, news media outlets, and accounts related to their profession and interests.

The majority of the respondents use these two social media platforms for purposes other than to promote themselves. As public relations professionals, they are not interested in creating awareness and building a brand of their own there. They do not think these factors will help them become a celebrity and enhance professional promotion. Instead, they recommend LinkedIn. However, some participants mentioned that among these platforms, Instagram helps them earn recognition even though they are not specifically aiming for it.

The participants claimed that they are not on these platforms for any of these reasons: to accomplish certain goals, to be liked, to earn a promotion, to create awareness on behalf of their organizations, and to reach out to the public. Instead, they use Twitter for news updates and Instagram for relaxation. However, they have very clear guiding principles for being on these platforms. They do not consider these principles

![Figure 2: Principles on Twitter and Instagram](image-url)
as strategies, though. Some of these participants even mentioned that they develop strategies for their employers/clients, but they will not apply these methods for themselves.

Figure 2 explains their principles on Twitter and Instagram.

All the public relations professionals who participated in this study use Instagram, but some are not on Twitter. Thus, we cannot definitively conclude that public relations professionals are passive on Twitter—just as followers and observers with little action. They mention the concerns underlying this behavior. However, in terms of the roles of public relations professionals, especially when the study sample comprises senior professionals, our expectations of what they should be doing is different than what they do in reality. Thus, the leadership role of public relations experts are not seen on social media.

These professionals feel obliged to their organizations. As the voice of their respective corporations, they forget about their individual voices. They think that their identity on these platforms is not too independent of the organization. To what extent is this belief related to culture? What about other professions? Do other driving forces besides the ones they mentioned exist? These questions need further investigation. However, we can observe that these “image makers,” public relations practitioners, care about their public image and representation.

In conclusion, Turkish public relations professionals do not use Twitter and Instagram for their personal public relations or to form relationships. They are not interested in creating a personal brand, managing their image, explaining what they do, and reaching out to potential employers. Very few public relations professionals mentioned that they use Twitter to create awareness on the activities of the organization. They do so mostly by retweeting the activities of the companies they work for. Instagram is very personal; it is a lifestyle. Their Twitter usage does not reflect their organizational and professional identity strongly. They do not think that Twitter visibility is important for their professional work. Some even claimed that they do not need the platform. They use Twitter because it helps them with their profession in terms of keeping track of what is happening in general. Moreover, the information they need can be easily accessed and updated. Content creation is almost non-existent on Twitter. They are afraid of being misunderstood. They have witnessed what could happen in this platform, and they are very cautious about carelessly putting themselves in this risky situation. Most of them stated that if they were not communication professionals, they would use Twitter differently—without thinking of the consequences of their actions. As public relations professionals, they are concerned about their impression management and the organizations that they represent.

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Cultural Intelligence and Strategic Partnerships: Examining communications protocols in emerging markets

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Abstract

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is an asset for executives embarking on strategic partnerships abroad. The ability to work with people from diverse backgrounds is crucial in today’s global economy. Public relations and communications experts have a unique role brokering relationships in a new environment which significantly impacts how barriers, risks, and challenges are managed. This research is a combination of nine in-depth interviews with experts involved in emerging market partnerships, and a content analysis of 21 articles from two business magazines. Results show that cultural awareness and business processes, protocols and channels for relationship building are keys for successful partnerships.

Keywords: Cultural intelligence, Strategic partnerships, strategic communications, emerging markets, cross-cultural ventures.

People from diverse cultures and backgrounds are making decisions at the business round table creating a dire need for Cultural Intelligence (CQ) as an integral skill set. In today’s global economy, the stakes are higher for executives to manage brand and reputation using appropriate communication channels, informed, and creative spokespersons to broker local authentic relationships. Most importantly, managing across cultures is crucial due to “global sourcing, global mobility, global marketing, and global wisdom and collaboration” (Solomon & Schell, 2009, p. 12). CQ is a “must have” tool to connect and venture into new markets.

Kingston (2012) said of today’s leadership skills, “They demand a combination of cultural dexterity, curiosity about the country, and sensitivity to working with partners” (p.1). CQ is more than gaining a “market share,” it is also about gaining a “mind share” and being immersed in a new way of thinking (Markova & McArthur 2015).

In May 2016, Facebook CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, visited populous Nigeria in Sub-Saharan Africa, “primarily to promote the penetration of “fast and cheap” internet connectivity, Express-wifi that would help people create online businesses and reduce poverty” (Nwabughigu, 2016. p1). Arguably an iconic global tech giant, Facebook is leaping into the African market. Also, feeding on the rise of the middle class and a craving for western products and services, global brands like KFC, Google, Microsoft, Pizza Hut, Dominos Pizza, Netflix and many have opened shops
in emerging markets of Africa, Asia, and South America (Burke, 2013). Like never before, the US and India are strengthening pharmaceutical partnerships to develop vaccines for various global diseases (Matthew, 2013).

Undoubtedly, the global economic work space has opened doors for professionals to function beyond geographical boundaries. Whether for profit or not-for-profit, the need to understand human behaviour using Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is vital to foster global partnerships. In addition, with remote employees, organizations are managing talents across cultures in a decentralized workplace, challenging the authentic enterprise (A.W. Page 2007). Cultural Intelligence and its role in global expansions cannot be over emphasized.

This research was conducted in late 2016 and engaged organizations with one or multiple partnerships in India, China, Brazil, Malaysia, Bangkok, Senegal, Burkina Faso, South Africa, and with enormous prospects of exploring other regions.

**Understanding Cultural Intelligence (CQ)**

Cultural Intelligence is “the capability to function effectively across national, ethnic, and organizational cultures” (Livermore, 2010, p.4). CQ is intertwined with emotional intelligence as both share a “propensity to suspend judgment—to think before acting,” according to psychologist, Daniel Goleman (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004, p.1). As businesses expand abroad through strategic partnerships in emerging markets of Africa, Asia and South America, it is important to have a basic knowledge of how to integrate and function in a culturally diverse landscape. According to Lavinsky (2013), “A strategic partner is another business with whom you enter into an agreement that aims to help both of you achieve more success” (p.1). How executives behave and adapt in a new region plays a crucial role in promoting a partnership venture and persuading people to buy into your brand.

A core aspect of CQ is cultural awareness because "an understanding of culture develops credibility, nurtures goodwill, inspires workforce, and helps companies develop marketable products” (Solomon & Schell 2009, p.46). Organizations embarking on cross-cultural ventures have a duty to study, understand, and respect the national culture. It is mandatory that people are trained before sending them abroad for strategic partnership opportunities.

**Understanding Communications Protocols**

Protocols are a set of rules guiding information sharing or transmission. When it comes to communications protocols in human relations, first impressions and gestures are important signals that set the stage for building a relationship. Mannerisms can make or break a deal. Communicators should be trained on messaging, delivery, and appropriate communication channels during a crisis and relationship building (Livermore, 2010). In addition, communication could be planned and key audiences identified to guide staff on messaging (Sobel, 2009), (Campbell 2009). Interpreting and communicating important information in the local language inevitably helps to avoid misunderstanding.

Consequently, communicators should be ‘humble’ and ‘flexible’ to adopt local protocols that show respect and understanding of how things are done in emerging markets. Respect for social gatherings, lifestyle, and time is paramount. It is important to note that businesses must extend their tentacles into emerging markets because, “The fastest engines of global growth for several years to come will be the emerging markets of India and China” (Radjou & Prabhu 2012, p.1). Emerging economies are countries that have undergone political, economic, and social instability but in recent times attracting global
investments with, “prospect of high returns, as they often experience faster economic growth as measured by GDP” (Investopedia.com 2016, p.1). For brands to be truly global, they need to open shops abroad and be visible in markets beyond North America, Europe, and Australia.

**Theoretical context of research**

Three theories formed the framework for exploring the concept of Cultural Intelligence and Strategic Partnerships;

**Excellence in Management**

Grunig (1992) posited that, “An excellent organization can be successful or unsuccessful for reasons outside of management’s control… national policy and culture” (p.246). An excellent organization will be influenced by national culture and must prepare to integrate local values or disintegrate by not respecting the people and their way of life. National culture is a powerful force that organizations must be aware of as they engage in CAGE (Cultural, Administrative, Geographical, and Economic) analysis, before embarking on a partnership. An excellent organization does it’s “homework” before launching and investing capital in a new region.

**Relationship theory**

Are emerging markets partnerships Communal, Exchange or Exploitative relationships? Hung (2005) in in-depth interviews with multinational executives in China, Taiwan, Japan, the US, and Canada, observed that “these types of relationships affects an organizations choice of relationship cultivation strategies” (p.394). It emphasizes “interdependent relationships” as key for success in organizational public relations and hinges on the five dimensions of relationships identified by Ledingham and Brunig as “trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment” (as cited in Hung 2005, p.394). For public relations professionals, motives for building relationships will always be crucial to the value added to the community and their public perception.

**Community building**

Valentini, Kruckenberg, & Starck (2014) proposed that community-building is, “both a process and an outcome” (p.284). In cross-cultural ventures, communication processes are amplified as both parties align their goals and objectives for mutual understanding. Communications experts have the opportunity to contribute to society not just for their reputation and brand but to add value to the community through initiatives that earn goodwill. Organizations should have social capital to operate and engage the community to help define its goals, objectives, and partnership deliverables. It is even more meaningful when an organization hires locals or source for local products to show that it is truly committed to building and empowering members of the community. Partnership is hinged on commitment to the community.

**About the research**

This research set out to study the communications complexity involved in identifying and engaging in strategic partnerships with emerging markets; the different stages of project communications and localization of communications channels. For methodology, in-depth interviews with nine executives including CEOs, Business Professors, and International Development Directors provided the qualitative results. A content analysis of 21 articles on market expansions in the Canadian Business and Bloomberg Business magazines provided the quantitative results. A combination of these methods and the researcher’s analysis developed the three pronged approach to “converge (data) in a triangular fashion” (Yin, 2009, p. 18), giving substance and validity to the results.
Results and Discussion

Content Analysis

Articles were identified in sections on Global economics, Companies and Industries, Markets and Finance, and Technology. Key words noted include: strategic partnerships, cultural intelligence, culture, emerging markets, global outreach, and localization. The content analysis asked two questions; Which companies and industries are looking for opportunities in emerging markets and why? What terms are used to describe their entry model, cultural awareness, communications or adaptation process?

Articles identified reflected expansions into China, India, Malaysia, Thailand, South Africa, Kenya, Ivory Coast, and Brazil. Industries identified include, Entertainment (Hollywood and Theme Parks- notably Disneyworld), Fashion, Food and Beverages, Technology, Social Media, Music, Finance, Sports (National Basketball Association, NBA), and Education. Most of these companies sought opportunities and initial contacts through trade shows, referrals, franchising, local advertisements, and multiple visits to the region.

In depth interviews


Cultural Awareness and Business Processes

All interviewees agreed that culture affects how business is done and CQ mandatory for today’s complex global economy. Explicitly noting that “Culture is a powerful force that shapes thoughts and perceptions” (Solomon & Schell, 2009, p.46). International development directors noted “Cultural sensitivities” especially with humanitarian work, and a demand to engage with emerging markets to explore new cultures for innovative and community building purposes.

Executive at Common Purpose UK noted succinctly, “when you have CQ, it goes beyond the pleasantries of partnership into the depth and ingrain detail of why organizations and people come together” (personal communications, October 23, 2016). Minds are “rubbing” together to bring solutions to global problems and sometimes these cultures “collide.” Experts also noted the need to “banquet” with locals; know their values, beliefs, and lifestyle before delving into business matters. One noted, “Understanding people and their culture from a “psychographical” context of issues beyond language (personal communication, October 11, 2016). In emerging markets, people want to see the “person” behind the product or service. In fact, sharing a sumptuous spicy meal with influential locals could make you more acceptable and help close deals faster.

Protocols and channels for relationship building

Solomon & Schell (2009) said, “Communication style is the confluence of several cultural values and reflects elements of hierarchical beliefs in society through body language and level of politeness” (p.142). All experts agreed that frequent traveling and face-to-face communication is the preferred and most effective channel to build initial trust. Also for signing contracts and verifying website claims. Other communications channels notably emails, video conferencing, VoIP (voice over Internet Protocol), Wechat (China), Slack, Skype, etc. were add-ons that cemented and helped to monitor, maintain, and mature the relationship. For initial entrance or awareness in the region, some used local advertising, attended trade shows or got referrals from other organizations already doing business in the region. NGOs used all available channels notably radio, television, storytelling, door to door, and town halls to engage the community.
Participants also highlighted that for sustainable partnerships, parties must be aware of their differences, flex, and try to merge or adjust the pace of business activities. Professor at Alberta School of Business noted that “Westerners like documents and due process, but this might clash with the laid back culture of relationship brokers in emerging markets” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). Westerners must be aware of time zones, special holidays and taboos in their new environment.

Also paramount is the need to study the leadership structure in the region. Is it egalitarian or hierarchical? This will affect the choice of communication channels for information flow, how stakeholders are reached and how to establish an organizational management structure in the region.

**Keys for successful partnerships**

Success stories of organizations with ideal “marriages” in emerging markets abound. While some have blended and adopted the culture, new entrants are eager and growing. However, with prospects of growth and profits, come challenges of barriers to entry. *Booster Juice* executive believes companies must “innovate or stagnate” and despite the difficulties, partnerships present opportunities to innovate (personal communications, August 10, 2016). According to Soko (2016), “Lessons on doing business in emerging markets include; the importance of carrying out detailed market research, undertaking thorough due diligence, executing the right market strategy, choosing the correct acquisition target and finding a suitable local partner” (p.2).

Participant from Schulich Executive Education said “companies are naïve when entering the US and it gets even worse to enter China or Indian markets which take time to understand, as patience is vital to succeed” (personal communications, August 24, 2016).

All participants re-enforced the definitions of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) posited by Livermore (2010) as a skill acquired through interactions with people from diverse backgrounds. In personal and professional experiences, they confirmed the literature on partnerships with community and local businesses leaders. In addition, the content analysis showed that a strong point for a successful venture is having partners who understand the language, can navigate cultural sensitivities, and help localize brand offerings.

Interestingly, interviewees differed on strategic communications and how it unfolds abroad. They highlighted that cultural interactions differ and might not allow for orchestrating and planning ahead. Instead, relationships and networks could be unplanned, happen through other webs of interactions, and in informal settings. Experts also mentioned the need to anticipate change which most Western organizations often overlook. Managing expectations and return on investment were emphasized. There was caution for prospective organizations seeking opportunities abroad to do their homework on the region and not just follow statistics on growth opportunities.

Humanitarian experts noted that communities often decide channels of communication to adopt based on the technology accessible in the region, especially where there is little or no internet penetration or access to television. Organizations should not waste money on fancy websites or mass media adverts because “understanding the “media landscape” is crucial for two-way symmetrical communication allowing for feedback and interaction with stakeholders, (personal communication August 16, 2016). The literature mentioned the importance of international exposure and interactions but one expert said,

People can be mismatched for their role if they have no ambition to embrace the partnership
and make it work. Academic qualification is no guarantee for an executive to succeed abroad. Personal creativity and understanding one’s own culture are vital before embarking on cross-cultural ventures (personal communication, August 24, 2016).

Furthermore, CQ means knowing and adjusting thoughts as opportunities and interactions present themselves. Cultural Intelligence is a skill that requires learning, and global executives should embrace it as a working concept to build social capital. In fact, it should become a mantra.

See appendix A and B for interview questions and participants.

Conclusion

People irrespective of race, ethnicity, and culture, are more alike than different; they all desire good things. A strategic partnership is an earnest pursuit of good things. Cultural intelligence equips professionals especially in the field of communications with “cultural capital” in a new market space abroad as they become a vehicle for bringing good products and services to meet needs. This presents an opportunity to impact the community and build authentic relationships.

Multinationals, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in strategic partnerships can be global examples as they adapt and engage through culturally defined communications channels vital in reaching key stakeholders. This research had nine executive participants which is a small sample and does not represent diverse business partnerships existing globally. More time and resources to travel could have added new perspectives to this project. Future research using a case study model to study an organization and monitor the impact of cultural intelligence on its partnership ventures will provide valuable insight to the field of communications.

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What Impact Can Internal Social Media PR Have on Organisational Culture?
Results from three consecutive interview studies concerning internal social media within 500 German companies, 2013-2019

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1. Introduction

The impact that Public Relations can have on society in general and even more on organization internally in special, has not been examined sufficiently in the past. According to Verčič et al. (2020, p. 11), “that our field has not adequately addressed this aspect of our existence, which has led to reputational issues such as public relations being construed mostly as “spin doctoring” on behalf of corporate or similar interests”. In this context, the following paper invites to take a small look on the precise impact that Internal Social Media PR can have on organizational culture.

Internal communication can undoubtedly have both a positive and negative impact on the culture of an organisation. It is also obvious that social media also plays a more and more important role within organisations. The Internet and Web 2.0 have fundamentally changed corporate communication in recent years; similarly, an equally far-reaching revolution is currently taking place with the introduction of internal social media in more and more companies, resulting in its considerable growth in importance in recent years. With fully integrated enterprise social networks (ESN) in part, many companies expect more efficient processes and faster innovations through greater levels of exchange and improved collaboration. Yet the provision of technology alone is not enough to achieve these goals. Additional conditions for success such as an authentic culture of trust, the influence of internal opinion leaders, the applicability of tools for management tasks and ongoing evaluation are vitally important.

For this paper, the authors want to examine one question: what is the exact impact that social media PR can have on organisational culture? The paper will analyse these issues by focusing in particular on the question of how, and to what extent, trust, as one of the foundations of modern organisations, can be built and destroyed via internal social media PR. This will be done via a particularly long-term survey of up to 500 German companies.
2. Theoretical Foundation

*Internal Social Media*

When dealing with social media, it seems reasonable to also use such a medium as a research basis for an initial definition. Wikipedia (2020) understands the term as “interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks.” A more succinct definition, as offered by expert Lon Safko, is that “(s)ocial media is the media we use to be social. That’s it.” (Safko 2012, p. 4).

Michelis (2012) has developed a clearly more academic three-level model of social media which distinguishes between individual, technological, and sociological aspects. Common to most definitions is the strong emphasis on user-generated content (UGC) as the fundamental element of social media, in contrast to classic media or Web 1.0, in which content is primarily predetermined centrally. It is precisely this strong user involvement that is at the same time both the greatest benefit and challenge for social media when used within a company. Already Smith and Mounter (2008), with their motto “listen and learn”, refer to the dialogical character of Web 2.0 in internal communication, while Sievert and Nelke (2013) have described and examined the topic in terms of change management.

Following to Huck-Sandhu (2016), new possibilities for collaboration, participation and dialogue communication in organisations stem from social media applications. In a study by a well-known management consultancy (see Chui et al. 2012), such effects are even estimated at leading to a 20 to 25 percent increase in productivity among knowledge workers. In contrast, another consultancy (see Lee et al. 2013) warns that 20 to 30 percent of employees often completely refuse to use comprehensive internal social media with multiple functions, e.g. enterprise social networks.

*Organisational culture*

When it comes to organisational culture, there are many definitions which are more or less broad and comprehensive in their understanding of the phenomenon. According to Schein (2010), “[o]rganisational culture consists of behavioural patterns, values and the relationship with environmental factors” (Schein, 2010, p.16). By this understanding, it is a complex and almost all-encompassing factor for entrepreneurial success.

Miroshnik (2013, p. 11), Gagliardi (1986), Smircich (1983) and Hamada (2008) closely observe organisational culture and define it as “shared mental models, norms, symbols, ideas, feelings and images”. One of the most limited definitions can be found, among others, in the work of Ouchi (1981) and Pascale & Athos (1981). Here, the notion discussed is framed as “the formal philosophy or mission of the organization from which the behaviour of the organization emerges”.

For the analytical context of this paper, organisational culture should be understood in the broad sense of Schein’s definition. Only with this definition can aspects such as interaction between hierarchies, trust in the impact analysis and current communicative issues also be included.

*Trust*

According to Niklas Luhmann (2014, p. 27), trust can be understood sociologically as a “mechanism for reducing social complexity”. Trust is therefore seen as a necessary basis for any cooperative action, something which specialist literature in both business management (e.g. Dasgupta, 1988; Meifert, 2003) and organizational sociology (e.g. Malik, 2006; Covey, 2009) has addressed. In communication studies, Bentele
(1994) and Bentele & Seidenglanz (2008) developed a “theory of public trust”, while Hoffjann (2013), for example, dealt somewhat with the issue of trust in PR research. After all, according to Safko (2010, p. 4), “[b]uild[ing] trust” is one of the core aspects of social media in general. As an interesting side aspect, Corporate Influencer or “Ambassadors” are becoming a more and more important success factor for internal trust building (cf. Lewinski, 2018).

With regard to internal social media, one the authors of this paper first described the topic of trust in the context of social media, based on empirical findings, at another conference in Bled in 2013 (as a result of an evaluation of the qualitative preliminary study for the larger survey at that time) and later on many other confererence and papers (cf. most comprehensive Sievert & Pütz, 2016). In this model, trust is therefore both a prerequisite for the successful implementation of internal social media and its effect, and this applies equally to employees and management (cf. Figure 1).

3. Methodology

Study design in a three-year comparison

The three underlying survey studies were each conducted in January 2013, 2016 and 2019. In all cases, the link to the survey was distributed principally within the areas of communications and management via the Macromedia University of Applied Sciences address list, partners and editorial references. The study is not representative but illustrates a good selection of German companies. It is quite comparable in terms of development trends due to the similar composition of distributors and participants for all three years (see Sievert/Pütz 2013, 2016). The quantitative survey methodology was used to collect information via social intranets in German companies, while the focus was on aspects such as previous and future usage behaviour as well as opinions, value systems, motives, behaviour and basic socio-demographic data of the target group. Various topical aspects were examined in the questionnaire, such as organisational culture, usability and design, trust and internal influencers and leadership and evaluation. Based on this material, 21 questions were formulated. The focus of this paper is the topic area “Trust and

Fig. 1: Trust as prerequisite and effect of Internal Social Media PR (Pütz & Sievert, 2016)
Internal Influencers”.

**Description of the sample**

In 2019, a total of 352 representatives of German companies took part in the web-based survey. Between 211 and 223 of them also answered the questions relating to demographics. The majority of those surveyed (61.4 percent) are currently working in companies with more than 250 employees. In terms of sectors, Information and Communication (18.5 percent) leads the way, followed by Manufacturing and Other Services (11.6 and 11.1 percent respectively). Seven other sectors make up between 5.1 and 8.9 percent. A large proportion of those surveyed stated that they had been with their company for between one and five years (35 percent). The respondents are mainly between 20 and 29 (24.7 percent) and 50 and 59 years of age (26.5 percent), but the other age groups (except for those over 60) are also represented with about one fifth each. However, functional management dominates internal and external communication with shares of between 22.3 and 26.5 percent. The gender distribution is balanced (49.2 percent female, 50.8 percent male).

The study concluded that external communication is an essential component of the business concept at a majority of companies (61.7 percent). This represents an increase of 4.3 percent compared to the results of the previous year’s study. While internal communication on the same hierarchical level is increasing in importance, less importance is attached to internal communication across different hierarchical levels. The importance of internal communication at the same hierarchical level increased significantly compared to the previous study with a jump of 20.4 percent to 33.9 percent being recorded. Another 30.9 percent of those surveyed also use social intranets across hierarchical levels, representing an increase of 10.1 percent on the 2016 figure. However, it should be noted that compared to the role of external social media, internal use was rated relatively weak. Moreover, internal communication for small companies (those with up to 9 employees) plays a less important role than for medium-sized and large ones. In addition, internal communication, regardless of the size of the company, appears to be increasingly promoted primarily at the same hierarchical level and only medium-sized companies with between 9 and 49 employees make greater use of internal communication across different hierarchical levels (26.9 percent). However, a comparison with the results of the preliminary study from 2016 clearly shows that the importance of internal communication has increased significantly at all hierarchical levels.

**Hypotheses**

Based on the theoretical consideration made in chapter 2 of this paper, the following five hypotheses regarding the impact of internal social media PR on organisational culture will be examined:

- **H₁** Internal Social Media PR is getting more and more important for organisations and their culture
- **H₂** Internal Social Media PR and an Organisational Culture of Trust are closely related
- **H₃** The more important open interaction within the organisational culture, the more developed is a trust culture within Internal Social Media
- **H₄** The clearer the hierarchy of an organization, the less Internal Social Media PR is used for cross-hierarchical communication
- **H₅** Corporate Influencer increase the organisational culture of trust in Internal Social Media PR

The following chapter will present the explicit results for each of this (hypo-)theses including a presentation of the data found in the survey as
well as a short interpretation of it.

4. Selected Results

This chapter will present some selected results of the study, mainly based on the five hypotheses mentioned in the previous chapter. Therefore, this part will be also structured in line with the hypotheses.

\( H_1 \): Internal Social Media PR is getting more and more important for organisations and their culture.

One of the most important results shows that the importance of internal social media in German companies continues to grow considerably but has still nowhere nearly permeated all organisations on a sustainable basis (cf. Figure 2). Compared to the previous study in 2016, an increase from 20.4 percent to 34.6 percent was recorded for internal communication on social media at the same hierarchical level. In 2013, only 12.2 percent of the companies surveyed even considered that social intranets assume an important or particularly important role. Yet this time slightly less importance, in relative terms, is attributed to internal communication based on interactive media across different hierarchical levels (31.4 percent). Nevertheless, an increase of 10.6 percent compared to the results of three years ago can be observed, increasing to 19.5 percent when viewed in terms of the six-year comparison.

However, the relevance of social technology in communication internally still lags far behind its importance externally: 60.9 percent or respondents state that Facebook, Instagram, Twitter et al. are either very or especially relevant to them here. However, the increase of only 3.5 percent on the most recent prior study is significantly lower in both absolute and relative terms, while almost a doubling of value was observed between the first and second surveys. Clearly a certain saturation has occurred in the external use of social media. Another reason for this is that, depending on the customer group and product, it is not uniformly relevant for all business areas (for detailed results, including company size and organisational culture, see Sievert & Osterbrink, 2019).

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**Fig. 2: Importance of Social Media in a six year comparison (top boxes).**

\( n = 579 \) (2013), \( n = 555 \) (2016); \( n = 352 \) (2019)
Internal Social Media PR and an Organisational Culture of Trust are closely related

The building of a foundation of trust is a key element of Social Media (Safko, 2010). Therefore, it could be assumed that an organisational culture of trust also plays an important role in internal social media PR. But analysing the question about the importance of trust as a basis for it, the results paint another picture. The number of respondents taking a neutral position decreased slightly from 42.0 percent in 2016 to 38.8 percent in 2019, whereas the number of people who consider a culture of trust as unimportant or very unimportant in this context even increased slightly (cf. Figure 3). With 28.1 percent in 2016 and 31.3 percent in 2019, those numbers are nevertheless quite comparable to the respondents who consider a culture of trust as an important or very important basis for internal social media PR, with 30.0 percent in 2019 and 29.8 percent in 2016 respectively. Therefore, a relationship between an organisational culture of trust and internal social media PR cannot be found.

The more important open interaction within the organisational culture, the more developed is a trust culture within Internal Social Media

For most of the respondents, the importance of open interaction is seen as a relevant factor for internal social media PR. In terms of the issue of trust, it could be suggested that organisations which place a high importance on open interaction also have a stronger, more developed culture of trust in their internal social media PR. Surprisingly, organisations with a strong culture of trust consider open interactions as a basis for internal social media PR slightly less important (24.4 percent) than organisations with a weak culture of trust as a basis for internal social media PR, where 26.9 percent agree on the importance of open interaction.

The clearer the hierarchy of an organization, the less Internal Social Media PR is used for cross-hierarchal communication

Hierarchies can be seen as boundaries, especially in the context of internal communication. The assumption arises that the clearer the hierarchy of an organization is, the less internal social media PR is used for cross-hierarchal communication. Yet, surprisingly, the opposite is the case.
Organisations with a clear or very clear hierarchy (top-3-boxes on a scale from 1 to 10) tend to use internal social media PR significantly more for internal cross-hierarchical communication with a total of 60.3 percent (cf. Figure 4). Compared to that, only 3.2 percent of organisations in which a clear hierarchy does not exist (bottom-3-boxes) consider the role of internal social media PR for cross-hierarchical communication as important or very important. This difference grows even further when separating the respondents into two groups. In the group of organisations with a medium to strong manifestation of hierarchy (top-5-boxes) 80.7 percent consider the role of internal social media PR as very important, whereas the figure is only 19.4 percent in the group with a weak to medium manifestation of hierarchy (bottom-5-boxes).

5. Corporate Influencer increase the organisational culture of trust in Internal Social Media PR

The study analysed what influence corporate influencers have on an organisational culture of trust. It was assumed that corporate influencers would grow the organizational culture of trust in internal social media PR, something which can be confirmed. 16.0 percent disagree and 15.0 percent strongly disagree when asked if corporate influencers increase their trust in internal social media PR, whereas the majority of respondents tend to agree (31 percent) or even strongly agree (20.0 percent) with this statement. To sum up, 51.0 percent in total (top-4-boxes) agree or totally agree while 31.0 percent (bottom-4-boxes) disagree. 18.0 percent neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.

5. Summary and outlook

Social intranets are instruments for creating transparency and giving employees a voice. Thus, a corporate culture built on trust becomes a key success factor in digital transformation, and trust-based communication the central driver of successful social intranets. It is the view of

Fig. 4: Manifestation of hierarchy crossed with the importance of Internal Social Media PR for cross-hierarchical communication. n = 269; Cramer-V=0.208; Significance=0.116
the authors of this paper that trust-based communication is thus not only the key component when implementing internal social media but is so when aiming to develop companies more as learning organisations in general. Taking this into account, internal social media (both PR-related and in general) can indeed have a strong impact on organisational culture.

However, the results of the 2019 study show that although internal social media is becoming increasingly important in German companies, in comparison to the two previous surveys from three and six years ago respectively, a real breakthrough in development, overall, is still a long way off. This is mainly due to the fact that while on the one hand cultural changes take time, there is often a lack of a truly systematically planned and particularly well-assessed approach on the other; instead of being part of a systematic and clearly communicated change process, social collaboration tools are far too often simply “handed out” to employees. But the very difficult and regrettable developments in the last few months concerning COVID-19, with lockdowns and many people working from home, might now accelerate this development more than all the years of rational convincing and academic research ever could have done.

At the end of this paper its limitations should also be mentioned: this study only concerns the case country, Germany (the situation in other countries was already quite different before the Corona crisis), and is — like many company-related studies — not fully representative since many large companies are in the sample and there is an over-representation of communication functions. Also, the study is not focused on the impact of internal social media PR on organisational culture — this is only one aspect out of several. Therefore, it would not be desirable to repeat the study after a time interval of another three years in order to further show development concerning the corporate use of internal social media, but it would be if focused even more on the impact of organizational culture. In preparing this new study round, feedback on this paper is most welcome.

Nevertheless, the authors of this paper are sure that they were able to show some interesting effects that internal social media PR can have on organisational culture. Internal social media is by no means a “panacea” for, for example, bad management, but it can, with appropriate support, accomplish much more than it often does currently. Above all, it is a genuine component of real corporate strategic digitalisation. And, as already mentioned, COVID-19 will accelerate this development, which also means that PR research and practice should be focussing more on these issues in the future.

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