BledCom

Public Relations and Public Risk and Crisis Communication

BledCom 2021

28th International Public Relations Research Symposium
July 2-3, 2021

**Book of Abstracts of the 28th International
Public Relations Research Symposium BledCom**

EDITORS: Dejan Verčič, Ana Tkalac Verčič and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh

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**Public Relations and Public Risk
and Crisis Communication**

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Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Welcome! Dobrodošli! Swagatam!

The fact that we are engaging in 28th edition of the International Public Relations Research Symposium (BledCom 2021) virtually (again) rather than congregating in beautiful Bled as we had done until 2019 is proof enough of the impact of a pandemic on every aspect of our lives. Perhaps now more than ever, risk and crisis communication have been thrust into the limelight. That prompted us to choose as this year's theme: **The role of public relations in risk and crisis communication**. Over the past 15 months, individuals, organizations, and nations have all become the sources as well as recipients of information intended to alter their behavior to combat the highly infectious Covid-19 and its debilitating impact on everyday life globally. Some nations have been lauded for their ability to manage the spread of the virus through effective communication whereas others have been targeted for performing poorly. National performance has certainly hinged on the ability of the leaders of these nations to communicate effectively about the pandemic. In the past couple of month, second waves of the pandemic in some regions of the world have also shone light on the need for consistent risk and crisis communication.

We welcome you to BledCom 2021, which has attracted papers on a range of topics from various parts of the world. We have managed to develop a program that will facilitate live presentations and discussions spread over both days of the conference. We hope this, more interactive, format will be interesting and informative to all participants.

Looking ahead, nothing can substitute for meeting in person in beautiful Bled. We hope over the next year we will have a handle on the pandemic and look forward to welcoming you in person for the 29th International Public Relations Symposium (BledCom 2022), scheduled for July 1 – 2, 2022!

Thank you! Lep pozdrav! Namaste!

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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 & partners Ltd. 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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Ana Tkalac Verčič, Ph.D., is a Full Professor of Marketing communications and Public Relations at the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zagreb, Croatia. She is a former Fulbright scholar and a recipient of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations diploma. Ana Tkalac Verčič has authored, co-authored and edited numerous books including Public Relations Metrics: Research and Evaluation (with B. van Ruler and D. Verčič) and is the author of the first Croatian public relations textbook. She has published more than a 100 papers in various academic journals and serves in various editorial boards such as International Journal of Strategic Communication, Journal of Public Relations Research and Public Relations Review. Throughout her career professor Tkalac Verčič has received numerous awards, most recently, GrandPRx, the award for the development of public relations as a profession. She is a former president of the Croatian Public Relations Association.

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Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, is Professor of Public Relations at the University of Colorado, USA. He is recognized for his scholarship on topics such as global public relations, culture and public relations, corporate social responsibility, and public relations for development. Over 30 years he has advocated the need to reduce ethnocentricity in the public relations body of knowledge and practice in 8 books, over 110 articles and book chapters, and over 120 conference presentations around the world. His rich teaching experience includes teaching at 10 universities on four continents while also delivering seminars/talks in over 40 countries. He has won several awards for teaching and research at different universities including the 2004 Pathfinder Award from the Institute for Public Relations (USA) for "original scholarly research contributing to the public relations body of knowledge" and the PRIDE Award from the National Communication Association (USA).

Adi, Ana *Quadriga University of Applied Sciences* (*Germany*) • She (www.anaadi.net) is a Professor of Public Relations and Corporate Communications at Quadriga University of Applied Sciences in Berlin, Chair of the Digital Communication Awards, and part of the core research team of the Asia-Pacific Communication Monitor. She is also part of the organising committee of MediAsia. She is the editor of the upcoming *Protest Public Relations*: *Communicating dissent and activism* (Taylor & Francis) and the co-editor of *#rezist – Romania's* 2017 *anti-corruption protests*: *causes, development and implications* (www.romanianprotests.info with Darren G. Lilleker) and *Corporate Social Responsibility in the Digital Age* (2015, Emerald with Georgiana G. Grigore and Alin Stancu). Originally from Romania, Dr. Adi obtained her PhD from the University of the West of Scotland. Prior to her studies in the UK, Dr. Adi has graduated from institutions in Romania and the United States, the latter as a Fulbright Scholar. Her research, teaching and consultancy focus on issues related to CSR and PR, looking in particular at storytelling and measurement.

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Barnoy, Aviv *University of Haifa* (*Israel*) • Aviv Barnoy studies the spread of news through journalism and social media. He brings together social communication theories, and epistemic philosophy, to explore how misinformation disseminates throughout society. Barnoy employs a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods including survey-experiments, reconstructions case-studies, big data analysis etc. In his current study, under a joint affiliation of Zefat Academic College and The University of Haifa, he explores normative measures to reduce the spread of "epistemically toxic content" online. Based on his professional experience before joining academia, Barnoy also teaches courses in PR, crises management and social marketing and more.

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Bowen, Shannon *University of South Carolina (USA)* • Shannon A. Bowen (Ph.D. Univ. of Maryland) is a full Professor at the University of South Carolina. Her research focuses on ethical decision making and issues management, as well as c-suite inclusion and contributions by public relations. Dr Bowen teaches and researches ethics across corporations, pharmaceutical firms, governmental entities, and the public relations industry. Her most recent book uses grant-based research to explicate "Excellence in Internal Communication Management" (2017; Business Expert Press) with Rita L. Men. Dr Bowen is one of three joint-editors for the journal Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics. She sits on the Board of Trustees of the Arthur W. Page Society and has won numerous awards for her research.

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3 AUTHORS

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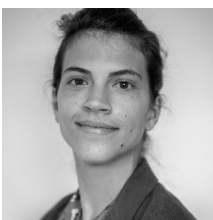
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3 AUTHORS

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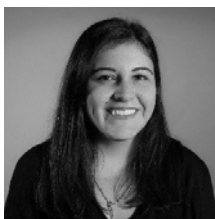
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Guhl, Anna *Macromedia Hochschule (Germany)* • In the end of 2020 Anna Guhl obtaining her Masters in Media and Communication Management with the specialization Brand Management. Her field of interest relates to marketing and branding particulary in the food sector. Especially the development in this area in terms of digitalization and the associated challenges with regard to brand communication and brand presence in the digital environment. In 2019 Anna Guhl started her career in the field e-commerce marketing for a well-known German grocer. She looks forward to sharing her research on the current use and unused potential of Social Media Guidelines in corporate communication at her first BledCom this summer.

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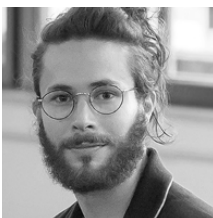
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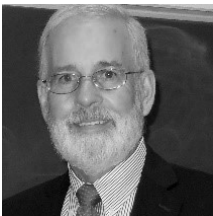
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Defining Novels as Public Relations Tools: An Analysis of Ahmet Mithat Efendi's Felâtun Bey ile Rakım Efendi

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Introduction and literature review

Apart from its being managerial practice, public relations has always been an ideological practice through which a specific worldview is indoctrinated and public opinion is shaped. Extant literature of public relations claims that public relations uses tools of mass communication such as television, newspaper, and radio to disseminate a specific worldview. However, the list does not include novel which is one of the oldest communication tools. In other words, public relations literature has been blind to see that novels are used as public relations tools to propagate political, cultural and religious ideas. In the same vein, in Turkey, public relations literature does not regard novels as public relations tools and the beginning of public relations practice is said to date back to the 1960s when public sector used public relations in a planned and professional way. However, there are also studies challenging the hegemonic historiography of public relations in Turkey claiming that public relations in Turkey dated back to the Ottoman Empire. Although these studies set forth that in Tanzimat Era (westernization era of the Ottoman Empire) newspapers were used to disseminate Tanzimat ideology, those studies do not consider Tanzimat novels as public relations tools, per se.

The Purpose of the study

In this framework, this study aims to conceptualize Tanzimat novels, through which Tanzimat writers and intellectuals convey their ideas about westernization and disseminate the ideology of the Tanzimat Era, as public relations tools. In line with the aim of the study, the study also seeks to conceptualize public relations as an ideological practice. In this respect, the research questions of the study are as follows:

RQ1: Can novel be regarded as one of the communication tools public relations use?

RQ2: Can Tanzimat novels be described as public relations tool for Tanzimat Era?

RQ3: If so, how do the novels serve such a function?

Methodology

In order to achieve that aim, the study analyzes Ahmet Mithat Efendi's novel titled *Felâtun Bey ile Rakım Efendi* (1875). Written during the Tanzimat Era, *Felâtun Bey ile Rakım Efendi* is one of the Tanzimat novels whose characters were created to present the writer's worldview. The novel is analyzed through textual analysis. Textual analysis is chosen as a research methodology because of its potential to reveal the text's main themes and characteristics.

Results and conclusions

The study concludes that *Felâtun Bey ile Rakım Efendi* can be positioned as a public relations tool used in the Tanzimat Era because the writer not only publicizes the ideology of the Tanzimat Era through the novel but also he disseminates his views about how the public should become westernized through the characters. Although the scope of the study is limited to only one Tanzimat novel, *Felâtun Bey ile Rakım Efendi*, the results can be applied to other Tanzimat novels whose aims were to promote the writer's ideology about westernation of the Ottoman Empire. In this respect, such position can offer an insight into future studies which include the practices ignored by corporate-centric views of public relations.

Keywords: *public relations, public relations history, ideology, Tanzimat Era, Tanzimat novels*

Managing internal communication during the COVID -19 epidemic: a study on private organisations in Saudi Arabia

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The Covid19 pandemic has caused economic and social disruptions and has forced companies and people across the world to rely on technology in order to communicate. This has happened due to the fact that companies have had to introduce new ways of working such as remote working. This change in communication has made companies rethink their internal communication strategies as communication has become vital not only in transmitting information, but also in maintaining an efficient work environment by keeping employees updated and connected within the business. This study investigates how private organisations in Saudi Arabia have communicated internally with their publics during the COVID 19 pandemic by examining the level of information transparency and effectiveness in communication.

Literature review

The research uses the internal communication theory framework and stakeholder approach developed by Jackson and Welch (2007) that was designed with the purpose of improving the internal communication within organisations by focusing on employee engagement and examining the receiver's point of view rather than the sender of the information. The goal of an internal communication strategy is to develop a sense of community and loyalty within the organisation while making employees aware of their organisations' decisions to their work environment.

In order to maintain an efficient internal communication, there is a need for transparency in communication. Research on transparency reveals that clear organisational transparency must contain positive and negative information that needs to be accurate, complete and relevant to decisions that organisations have made (Men, 2014, Stirton and Lodge, 2011). In addition, organisations have to be actively open for their employees to search and ask for information (Cotterrell, 2000, Rawlins, 2009), an act that will determine trust and credibility in the organisation. Studies show that overall transparent communication leads to a more active workforce, increased employee satisfaction and improved relationships between the organisation and its employees (Rawlins, 2009, Men and Stacks, 2014, Lee et al, 2018, Walden et al 2017).

Methodology

The study has used a quantitative methodological approach because this has been viewed as a suitable method of collecting data from a larger population and because quantitative research is considered a good foundation for producing generalizability. The data was collected from 111 respondents through an online survey from em-

ployees working in different positions at several Saudi private companies. The questions were structured in two themes in order to find out if the public relations departments at Saudi private companies communicated in a transparent way and if the public relations departments at Saudi companies communicate effectively with their employees during the pandemic.

Results and conclusions

The results reveal that in terms of transparency in communication, the mean score is high which means the PR departments at Saudi private companies were transparent when communicating with the internal public. In regards to the effectiveness in communication, the results have revealed that the mean score is average which means that the PR departments did not succeed in communicating internally in an effective way probably due to a weak communication strategy or lack of professionalism.

Practical and social implications

The practical and social implications of the results are that by providing transparency, a high level of trust is established between the stakeholders, the general public and the organisation. This contributes to employee loyalty, higher levels of productivity, higher employee engagement, and a positive public image. However, a weak communication strategy might affect the organisation's overall effectiveness and future productivity.

A limitation of this study is that it has only focused on employees of private companies and it has only investigated the receivers' point of view. The study suggests that future research should also examine employees in governmental institutions and to also investigate the public relations 'views on this subject.

Keywords: *transparency, effectiveness, COVID-*19*, internal communication*

The virus and its images - Metaphorical genealogy of the risk society

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The challenge of this study is to create a genealogy of images that represent the Covid-19 virus as a risk. From that goal, we ask. How can the possible relationships between the concept of risk and the studies of the imaginary provide an instrumental support for the growing field of risk communication?

Literature review

The notion of risk will be observed from authors like Ulrich Beck (2010), Anthony Giddens (1996) and Mary Douglas (1996), among others, and the studies of the imaginary, from the perspective of authors like Gilbert Durand (1997).

Methodology

In our study, we will take a tour of images made to represent the invisible. The images will be described and analyzed using metaphors identified in their content for the construction of truths. The virus is visible only with the help of mediating devices between the eye and the conscience. It is interesting to analyze here not only the image that the virus produces in the body, its terminal object, but also what it produces in the spaces for creating subject forms. Thinking of subjectivity as a historical construction, the methodology, from a theoretical point of view, refers us to the Foucaultian genealogical view that considers the senses as mutants and dependent on the power relations for their formation in the processes of collective construction of the subject's forms. One of our hypotheses is that the image of the virus and the resounding speeches in the imagination optimize the visibility of the multiplicity of correlations of forces, solidarity, resistance, interests, intolerances, afflictions and weaknesses of each system. Power, that is, risk is everywhere, as Foucault (2001) says, and the virus and its images are the extremes of power relations that support discourses that also produce reactions contrary to the discourses themselves. The images analyzed are selections of significant visual metaphors for each stage of the pandemic and which in a way represent the spirit of the time of each moment lived broadcast on social networks or in the mass media from January 2020 until the moment of the announcement of the first vaccine in the end of the same year. We will look for images broadcast in the press, vehicles for scientific dissemination, governments and social networks (broadcast by a lay public) to reflect on the construction of perceptions.

Results and conclusions

From them, we will make descriptions, interpretations and inferences of the images to produce a kind of tension with the proposed theory and also with matrix narratives from the past that we can find in the representations of virus images that still concern and challenge communities such as HIV, Sars, H1N1 and Ebola.

Practical and social implications

Our hypothesis is that the power relations that influenced the production of images can be described from the study of these moments of risk perception. In this process, we will verify how it is possible to analyze the relationship between the imaginary and the risk to increase strategies, health prevention policies, practices and providing elements to think theories, methods and specific techniques for the research in risk communication.

Keywords: *Imaginary, risk, subjectivity, visibility, health*

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The Communicative Constitution of Organization and Internal Communication in the Coronavirus Pandemic

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Introduction and purpose

The aim of this paper is to analyze and explain internal communication in pandemic times, based on the theory of the communicative constitution of organization (CCO). We haven't had a pandemic like the coronavirus in over a century - ever since the Spanish flu, and therefore no experience of internal communication in such times. During the pandemic physical distance, many organizations were forced to organize remote work, others were forced to send some employees "on hold", and still others, otherwise rare, tried to reorganize work differently, adapt production and employment to the situation. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the communicative constitution of organizations, especially in terms of internal communication with employees and how organizations connect employees between different forms of "remote work" even in the conditions of this pandemic physical distance.

Literature review

Historically, the worst crises have been earthquakes and infectious disease pandemics. The 1918–1919 infuenza, or Spanish flu, pandemic is estimated to have infected 500 million people worldwide and may have resulted in more than 20 million deaths (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013, str. 2). Other pandemics, such as HIV / AIDS, SARS, or even N1H1, did not have the dispersion caused by the coronavirus in early 2020 virtually worldwide. In order to slow down the spread of the coronavirus, the governments of virtually all countries have taken various more or less severe measures to protect the population in order to reduce the physical social distance between people. Such government measures meant, among other things, the cessation of public life, the cessation of production and the provision of services.

The literature in the field of public relations is rich in examples, advice and theories of crisis communication of organizations, but in the vast majority, if not all researched organizations, the organizations were either the cause of the crisis or the victim of a (more or less) direct attack, mostly individually. The coronavirus crisis, however, is not one that would "attack" individual organizations, nor did individual organizations cause this pandemic crisis. Thus, the coronavirus pandemic has caused a whole new situation in virtually all organizations around the world: how should organizations that exist only through and through communication respond to it?

People use social interaction to understand the things we experience and by communicating as a fundamental tool of social interaction we give meaning to things and the world around us. For this reason alone, the term "social distance" is by no means appropriate. The greatest punishment for man as a social being is namely social (and communication) isolation. Communication, as a fundamental expression of social interaction, is the way in which we establish and maintain the existence of the organization itself, because people organize themselves through communication and only through communication do we act collectively. Organizations also make up the processes of interaction between its members, and communication establishes, maintains, develops and, unfortunately, also buries organizations. Namely, organizations are not just static objects, but fluid communication activities, they are a 'social fact' that is actively and constantly constituted through communication processes. Communication thus constitutes organizations thus keeping organizations in a constant, endless process of interactions. Without communication there are no organizations, they cannot exist (cf. Heath idr., 2018; Putnam & Nicotera, 2010; Sandhu, 2017; Schoeneborn idr., 2018; Wenzel & Will, 2019)

Internal communication is a systematic way of influencing the behavior, knowledge and attitudes of employees, and its basic purpose is to give instructions for work and obtain feedback on the course of work (cf. Karanges idr., 2015; Sinčić Ćorić idr., 2020; Thornton, 2019; Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020)

Methodology

This article will present a qualitative research conducted within the focus group of internal communicators of twelve large companies from four countries - Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Turkey. These organizations have a total of more than 50,000 employees, all operate regionally or as a part of an international network. As part of the focus group, semi-structured interviews were conducted, with twelve respondents answering each question in turn.

Results and conclusions

In general, respondents agreed with the findings of research by Edelman (Edelman, 2020a, 2020b) and the Institute of Public Relations (Institute for Public Relations & Peppercom, 2020a, 2020b) regarding internal communication during a coronavirus pandemic. Of course, there are differences in the use of communication channels and communication tools, depending on whether it is a production or service organization and whether their employees continued to work on the premises of organizations (salespeople, airport staff, etc.), or worked "from home" or they were "on hold".

Practical and social implications

Internal communicators and top managers met for the first time in more than a hundred years with a pandemic that forced people into physical distance. Most used crisis communication approaches and good internal communication practices. That is why examples of good practice collected within the focus group of twelfe organizations are welcome to understand the current coronavirus pandemic situation.

Research limitations/implications

The survey was conducted on the model of twelve organizations from four countries with a total of more than 50,000 employees, their examples of good practice are welcome, but the results of this survey cannot be generalized to the entire population.

Keywords: *CCO, internal communication, pandemic, crisis communication*

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Online comments versus news media framing of a crisis: The case of the "Corona Cruise Ship"

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Introduction, purpose and literature review

Framing theory holds that the media report on a particular topic through frames of reference, shaping public issues for the audience and influencing the way they understand the topic covered and formulate their opinions about it (Entman, 1993). News frames shape audience reactions to news messages through online comments, sometimes resulting in alternative framing or counter-framing of the topic discussed (Liu & McLeod, 2019). Framing a topic is especially important in times of crisis when the parties involved in the crisis use crisis communication to shape "dialogue between the organization and its public prior to, during and after the negative occurrence" (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 2). The present study explores how Israeli individuals used online comments during the "Corona Cruise Ship" crisis to counteract the dominant media framing of the crisis, influence public opinion and the government's actions.

In February 2020, The Diamond Princess, a cruise ship was isolated by the Japanese authorities in a Japanese harbor, after finding that several passengers were infected with the COVID-19 disease. It was soon discovered that fifteen Israelis were also on the ship, initiating a daily Israeli media update of their experiences on the isolated ship, later known as "The Corona Cruise Ship". During the coverage, contradictory voices among the Israeli public arose and thus began an online media controversy regarding the story's framing between two opposing groups. On the one hand, the passengers' families advocated the return home of their relatives and for the Israeli government to take responsibility. On the other hand, various Israeli individuals urged the Israeli government to leave the passengers aboard the ship and avoid "importing" the virus into Israel. This study explores how Israeli individuals used online comments to news articles to suggest an alternative frame of the "Corona Cruise Ship" crisis.

Method

The study was conducted using two qualitative content analyses. The first content analysis included all (N=47) the news articles published regarding the "Corona Cruise Ship" on the two most popular Israeli news sites: The News 12 Company Website (N = 24) and the YNET News website (N = 23). All articles were collected from the first day of coverage until its completion upon the return of passengers to Israel (5 Feb.2020 - 5.March 2020). The second qualitative content analysis included 342 randomly sampled, individual comments from the comments section of the news articles published in the News12 Company Website (n=112), and Ynet News (N=230). Both articles and the comments were analyzed qualitatively using a the-

matic inductive analysis, exploring main themes, subjects, expressions, and characters (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings and conclusions

Online news articles embraced the families' perspective, framing the crisis as a "life-or-death" situation that calls for immediate action by the Israeli government to return the passengers back home. The news articles described the daily life of the Israeli passengers aboard the cruise ship and their difficulties during isolation, emphasizing their fear of COVID-19 contagion. Some of the news articles referred to the passengers as "besieged" and to the "Corona Cruise Ship" as a virus spreading "hatchery".

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the dominant frame used by the passengers' families and the Israeli media was "Social Solidarity" -- a fundamental Israeli ethos calling for 'brotherhood' and mutual support. Here the Israeli public was called upon to support the safe return of the passengers.

Alternative voices appeared on the comment section of the news article. These comments served as a "backchannel" to present other perspectives and frames. Interestingly, these individuals also used the Israeli ethos of "solidarity", but instead of referring to **Social Solidarity** and advocating the passengers' safe return, they referred to **Health Solidarity**, asking the passengers to stay on the ship and demonstrate their solidarity with the Israeli public by not "importing" the virus into Israel.

In other words, this frame turned "solidarity" upside down; instead of asking many to save the lives of a few, the few were asked to save the lives of many. Some comments referred to the passengers as "pleasure hunters" (Ynet News, February 5, 2020) arguing that "*this is the price that hedonists have to pay for their pursuit of pleasure*" (Ynet News, February 5, 2020). In addition, the

violent discourse prevailing on social media and online comments in recent years (Sheleg, 2014) was also present with rough language and harsh accusations towards the passengers, their families and politicians.

To summarize, this case study demonstrates how individuals can use online comments in times of crisis as a 'backchannel' to reject mainstream media frames while suggesting alternative frames. That strategy directly addresses the public and decision makers with harsh language that cannot be used in the news-articles themselves.

Keywords: *Solidarity*; *Comments*; *Framing theory*

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Desperately seeking respect: public relations education during the pandemic crisis

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Public relations studies are still in high demand among young people who look for promising careers and decent salaries upon graduation. Since spring 2020, a vast majority of PR students in developed countries have shifted to online classes. Some PR scholars, consultants, and industry leaders have already expressed doubts about the effectiveness of the fully online PR studies (as opposed to in-person instruction), since now it has got even harder to show ethical and professional standards, set role models for aspiring PR specialists, and help them cope with reputational issues that PR profession has been experiencing since its inception.

On the other hand, PR students can now experience how communication is applied to curb the pandemic, influence behaviors, and educate about the vaccines. These factors should strengthen the PR industry's reputation and convince students that it is still worthwhile to study PR.

Research questions

Therefore, it is worth asking how PR students are prepared to work in the PR industry, especially during the pandemic, and whether their careers are affected by the PR field's public perception. Based on these assumptions, the following research questions can be posed:

RQ1 – How do PR students perceive the PR industry, and what do they expect from their careers when beginning their education?

RQ2 – Are the PR industry's reputational problems addressed in the PR schools' curricula at all (and how, if yes)?

RQ3 – What are the specific challenges that PR students and education face during the pandemic, mostly related to the online instruction methods?

Literature review

The PR function's recent visibility has not invalidated many critical opinions concerning the industry and its often-questionable practices. Staying in the limelight during the pandemic offers the PR industry an opportunity to show its key role in modern societies and PR contribution to open, democratic, and factual debates and to the promotion of responsible, empathetic, and healthy behaviors.

This situation makes it easier for scholars, practitioners, and professional associations to present the PR function's positive input to cope with the pandemic and bridge the gaps between perceptions of the industry among the general public, opinion leaders, and students. They especially deserve the solid curricula and commitment

from their teachers and instructors, whom they now meet online, and the industry's strong support to get ready for their careers.

It requires an ongoing dialogue among the industry, practitioners, and educators to develop a PR curriculum relevant to clients' contemporary challenges and needs, also in times of the pandemic. Many academic and professional experts have repeatedly called for PR studies' updated programs in scholarly literature and industry reports. Their recommendations addressed many aspects of PR education, including a list of courses, a required mix of theory and practice, teachers' skills and competencies, and organizational, technological, social, or international issues related to communication.

However, they do not show how PR students should prepare for their prospective occupation, especially during the pandemic. Therefore, PR students' opinions on their future careers need to be examined further and juxtaposed with the previous research on the subject.

Methodology

To better understand how PR students perceive their field and foresee their career prospects during the pandemic, we plan to conduct an online survey among undergraduate and graduate students. Respondents will be recruited by their instructors at several universities teaching PR.

The questionnaire will be internet-based, self-administered, and possibly short. Before the quantitative research, we will conduct interviews with PR students and educators to determine specific reputational industry issues to be measured, especially during the COVID-19 crisis.

Results and conclusions

The research will determine how PR students perceive their future occupation and their level of preparedness to work in the field, especially by the instruction received mostly online during the pandemic. It will also show whether PR schools and industry have made sufficient effort to teach effectively using online methods.

Practical and social implications

The research will shed light on how to prepare PR students (mostly online) for their careers, explain PR roles to different publics, clear misconceptions about the PR industry, and show the PR contribution to informing and educating the publics during the pandemic.

Keywords: *crisis, pandemic, PR education, PR students, reputation, trust in PR*

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An Island of Reliability in a Sea of Misinformation? Understanding PR-journalists relations in times of epistemic crisis.

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Introduction and purpose of the study

With technologies making sources more accessible than ever before, Journalists' prime concern is no longer obtaining data, rather sorting information out – potentially undermining the traditional role of information subsidies. The purpose of this paper is to explore the unique epistemic characteristics of journalists-PR relations, and test whether they can explain the relationship's paradoxical nature in our current age. Four specific objectives were set: to provide up-to-date empirical evidence that will either support or disprove previous studies' findings about the paradoxical relation (journalists' heavy reliance on PR, who are evaluated by them as non-credible); to juxtapose journalists' interactions with PR and non-PR sources, exploring the epistemic characteristics of these interactions; To test which factors can predict reliance on PR; and to explore journalists' own explanations for their decisions regarding reliance on PR.

Literature review

Amongst the numerous studies investigating the relationship between Public Relation and journalists, none seemed to have focused the epistemic nature of their interactions, although as knowledge professionals one of journalists' prime objectives is establishing knowledge about the stories they report. Epistemic challenges started mounting with the introduction of new technologies, which allow easier forgeries and digital manipulations and scholars' concerns regarding the quality of journalists' knowledge recently peaked with the spread of Fake-news and post-truth politics, accumulating to an "epistemic crisis".

At the same time a traditional challenge that journalists used to face, obtaining data, seemed to almost dissipate in the age of information overload. Instead, they struggle to sort the reliable, credible newsworthy information from the rest. Information subsidies may no longer explain by themselves the paradoxical relations between journalists and PR, manifested in journalists' willingness to rely on PR, though they evaluate them as inferior, non-credible source.

Methodology

To overcome popular methods' shortcomings this study relies on a mix of quantitative and qualitative reconstructions, a method uniquely designed to study newsmaking and sourcing. The study includes interviews with a represen-

tative sample of news reporters (N=70) from national news organizations, who were asked to recreate the newsmaking process behind specific sample of items they published in the days preceding the interviews (N=480) – accounting for all their sources – PR and non-PR (N=1,147). The second stage included qualitative follow-up interviews: 25 of the interviewees that underwent the quantitative reconstructions were chosen to reconstruct another 50 items, this time with open-end questionnaire.

Since this is not an exploratory study, the quantitative analysis takes the lead, with comparable data that can support or refute findings from previous studies. Correlations between reliance on PR and different factors were tested with Pearson's 2-tailed analysis, and logistical regressions model were built, including all the factors that the previous analysis found significant.

Results and conclusions

Findings show that: (1) journalists continue to rely very often on PR sources, which they evaluate as less credible than other sources – confirming that the PR paradox remains; (2) correlations show that messages delivered from PR sources are communicated in reliable and accountable manner, more than from non-PR sources – so journalists can rely on them with very little risk of publishing false information; and (3) a binary regression models demonstrates that it is the characteristic of the interactions with source, and not the type of story, that predicts reliance on PR.

Finding shed light on the PR paradox, suggesting the relationship is based on reliability rather than trust. Rather than deciding whether information is indeed true, journalists result to examining whether they can defend their decision to rely on it. These findings contextualize the common claim that trustworthiness a prime predictor of source selection, and calls to questions whether trust is the correct term to use, and not reliability. It reopens a normative debate about the implication of reliance on PR, as the paper shows that such reliance reduces the chances of false publications, but does not defend journalists from misleading messages, and can potentially strengthen elite sources' dominance, according to epistemic injustice theory.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

The study main shortcoming is that it relies on self-testimonies. Reconstructions do reduces self-reporting biases dramatically, yet they are not fully neutralized. This is especially true when we consider that reliance on PR is often perceived as shameful. Future studies could validate reporters' accounts with either a content analysis of the published items, or interviews with professionals.

Practical and social implications

Rather than suggesting each side use these findings to better their position in the power struggle between journalists and PR, we encourage a different symbiotic path. A dialogue between the professionals, in which they openly discuss their epistemic challenges and needs on the one hand, and tools of the other, could eventually lead to a more justifiably trusting relations.

Keywords: *Journalism*; *epistemology*; *mix methods*

Enriching Self-Reflection in Public Relations Education to deal with Pandemic Challenges

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Numerous studies have documented the benefits and positive power of self-reflection (SR) for professional and leadership development. Drawing from interviews with PR leaders and teachers and a review of some online educational resources, this paper argues for the need to enrich SR among PR teachers and students as a way to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic challenges.

By focusing on the primary pipeline for the profession (PR students and teachers), this paper argues for the need to enrich SR among them to better deal with the pandemic challenges, among others. SR is a primary way we examine ourselves and how others see us to increase self-awareness. Greek philosophers believed self-knowledge was the highest form of knowledge, and John Dewey, American thinker and educational reformer, claimed SR was the only form of thinking that leads to learning. Studies in communication, psychology and education confirm these and other benefits of SR, e.g., richer relationships and emotional IQ, enhanced leadership skills, and more engaged work teams. Overall, both teachers and students will benefit from developing and applying reflective skills to cope with pandemic challenges. Yet, as Mules (2018) found, SR is largely absent in PR research, textbooks, and the classroom. This paper addresses that deficiency and identifies specific approaches and exercises to advance the development of SR in the classroom.

Methodology, Results and Conclusions

This paper draws heavily from the researchers' SR study previously presented at a conference and recently published in a leading PR journal. That study explored SR in depth in interviews with 30 PR leaders in two countries to learn about the role, process, practice, and benefits in the workplace. It included a brief section regarding approaches that might be used to enrich SR in education, specifically during the pandemic.

With this research foundation, and new insights gained through informal conversations with PR teachers and a review of online educational resources, the researchers developed a model consisting of 10 building blocks and more than 50 practical exercises to enrich student and teacher SR. For example, take 10 minutes at the end of a/an (online) class to have students evaluate their performance in class, or their biggest learning. Then, prepare a tweet to describe it.

The researchers suggest building SR moments into most sessions, rather than a single class topic. This paper is rich in practical suggestions and tactics grounded in published research and serious researcher reflection.

Practical and social implications

During the current pandemic, the importance of SR multiplies. This paper offers a model that serves as practical guidance to develop and/or enrich self-reflection. PR students and teachers can mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning through self-reflection. For example, instructors can reflect on the ways to prioritize students' mental and emotional health and help the students do same. Teachers can also encourage learners to reflect on changes in class modalities (moving online partially or completely) and study routines such as maintaining motivation, dealing with distractions, and replacing normal activities like face-to-face participation in student organizations and intramural sports.

Numerous studies have documented the benefits and positive power of SR. Building this capability in students, our future professionals and leaders, will enrich the profession and infuse it with power, especially during these trying times. The sooner one begins meaningful SR, the better for them and their organizations.

Keywords: *Self-reflection, the COVID-19 pandemic, public relations*

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Engaging Employees through Corporate Social Responsibility Programs: Aligning Corporate Social Responsibility and Employee Engagement

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Introduction

The message is clear: people want to work for organizations where they feel they are engaged and learning. Recently, the organization Benevity in Canada stated that "Today's employees are expecting a greater sense of purpose in the workplace. In fact, 83% of Millennials say they would be more loyal to their employer when they feel they can make a difference on social and environmental issues at work," (Benevity, 2018). Companies that engage in social and environmental stewardship also benefit from employees who are more aware and involved.

Purpose

There is a strong case for corporate sustainability and better employee engagement. Knowing this, communication teams need to keep it in mind when creating and implementing their communications plans for corporate social responsibility programs to ensure appealing to employees with the right messages while also showing alignment to the business.

Research Problem and Questions

Studies have showed that corporate social responsibility has become an essential tool in captivating, recruiting and retaining top talent. "Employees and candidates want to work for a company that they feel is giving back to society. In fact, they expect their employer to not only be socially responsible, but to also provide them with tools to engage with the causes they care about," (Troup & Simon, 2018). This research study aimed to explore if this was true with employees in Canada and to answer the following three questions:

(1) Why should Corporate Social Responsibility programs take into account and include an employee engagement component?

(2) What are some examples of good Corporate Social Responsibility programs that include employee engagement?

(3) What are some of the measures used to determine Corporate Social Responsibility programs are engaging employees?

Literature Review

Why engage employees through corporate social responsibility?

According to an article from Dr. Hua Jiang, associate professor in S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University and published by the Institute for Public Relations (2020), "employee engagement through CSR

contributes to employees' perception of their organizations' reputation of 'doing good,'" (Ali, Rehman, Ali, Yousaf, & Zia, 2010). Furthermore, "employees can voluntarily share CSR information on social media, which will eventually help enhance their employer's reputation in the market place," (Kim & Rhee, 2011).

Methodology

An online survey was conducted between July 2 and July 24, 2020. Anyone in Canada working for a company, either in the private, public or non-profit sectors, and whether part time or full time, was asked to complete the short 10-question 5-minute survey on the platform Survey Monkey. The investigator approached friends and acquaintances through social media to complete the online survey and encouraged them to share it with their friends and acquaintances creating a snowball sampling. A recruitment message was also posted on the investigator's following social media accounts: Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. A total of 100 responses were collected.

Results

Online survey

Question 4, *Think back to when you applied to your current position*; *did you search the organization's corporate social responsibility strategy*? showed 2/3 of responded answered yes. Respondents offered many interesting comments to justify their answer. "*It was important to me to align myself with an organization that had strong values and a history of CSR*," indicated one respondent.

It is interesting to note the discrepancy for 30% of respondents at their current organization for more than 9 years which indicated not having thought about searching for information about CSR. Years ago, CSR was not part of an applicant's mindset.

Conclusions

3 *key learning points*

(1) Why should corporate responsibility programs take into account and include an employee engagement component?

- Increased motivation

- Creation of ambassadors/champions internally & externally

- Opportunity to develop skills (i.e. coordination, leadership) and/or educate (i.e. environmental issues)

(2) Examples of good corporate social responsibility programs that include employee engagement:

- Let employees choose causes to support.

- Make it easy by giving them time to get involved (i.e. volunteer days).

- Get leaders buy in (i.e. turning CSR actions into team building activities).

- Partner with non-profits for excitement and credibility.

(3) Measures to determine Corporate Social Responsibility programs are engaging employees:

- Participation rate

- Increased participation rate

- Repeated participation

- Post event comments and testimonials

Limitations

The generalization of this study is also limited as it involved only 100 respondents and no responses from Atlantic Canada.

Further Research

Repeat the online survey but with a larger sample size and target equally representation from every geographical region.

Another angle to consider is to survey employees at companies seen as leaders in CSR programs and initiatives and compare with companies not benefitting from such visibility, awareness and/or opinion.

Keywords: *corporate social responsibility, CSR, employee engagement, corporate reputation, purpose*

Responsible CSR communications: Avoid "washing" your Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports and messages

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Introduction

With the rise of Corporate Social Reporting (CSR) reporting, questions have emerged regarding its true utility; CSR reports may more closely resemble marketing materials than financial statements as much of the data companies provide can be cherry picked. For example in 2011, only 20% of S&P 500 companies published CSR reports vs 85% in 2017 and 90% in 2019 (Governance & Accountability Institute, Inc., 2020). These reports are also sometimes titled as corporate responsibility, citizenship, or ESG reports (Environmental, Social, Governance), adding to the existing confusion and lack of coherence.

Purpose

Why is this relevant for communicators? Because the responsibility of producing and promoting CSR reports very often falls under the responsibility of the corporate communications team.

How to avoid "CSR- washing" and all the other "washing" incidents – green-washing, blue-washing, rainbow-washing, vegan-washing,...? How to focus on portraying the organization as a truly and authentic dedicated corporate citizen?

Research Problem and Questions

1. What is "washing" is the CSR space?

2. How can you be a responsible CSR communicator?

3. What are examples of best practices?

Literature Review

Opportunity for communication practitioners

Are communication professionals ready and equipped to communicate CSR and sustainability content in a responsible way? A recent article in the Canadian Institute of Mining (CIM) Magazine (Rolfe, February 2020) had an insightful title: "*Has sustainability reporting become unsustainable?*". "Environmental, social and corporate governance rating is a burgeoning industry, and not without its growing pains," states the article. The pain point is all the different acronyms and standards involved in CSR and sustainability reporting: ESG, GRI principles, SASB, TCFD, SDGs... and these are not only related to the mining industry but to any industry and organization producing CSR or sustainability reports.

Methodology

To further the reflection on "what is responsi-

ble CSR communications" and if communication practitioners are grasping what it means, 15 in-depth 30-minute interviews with senior communication practitioners in Canada with at least 15 years of experience in the field were conducted between July 3 and 24 2020 via telephone or videoconference with Zoom.

Results

In-depth interviews

Answers to Question 6 *When you communicate and promote your organization's CSR and sustainability efforts, do you worry about "washing" any aspect and are you concerned of being accused of "greenwashing" or any other type of "washing"? How do you avoid it?* demonstrated communication practitioners understand the meaning of "washing" CSR communications and clearly expressed how to avoid it. Answered included *"be attentive to authenticity and justifiable messages. Show humility and be humble,"* and *"what is important is to be transparent instead of putting a marketing spin to it; not be afraid to mention the issues,"* as well as *"a balance between acknowledging current aspects vs sounding authentic,"* and *"use data that is accurate and comparable to previous years or other benchmarks"*. Hence, they key answers to Question 6 were: facts, transparency and authenticity.

Participants were then asked Question 7 *When thinking about your CSR and sustainability communications, what does a "responsible communication" mean to you?* and again main answers heard were: authenticity, transparency and facts.

Overall, the responses demonstrate communication practitioners grasping the crucial role the communication function can play in delivering "responsible CSR communications" and how to do it, and understanding there are many different stakeholders interested by a company's CSR and sustainability initiatives and programs.

Conclusions

Answers to the three research questions helped determine what is "responsible communications" and how communications practitioners can avoid the trap of "washing" their CSR reports and/or messages:

(RQ1) What is "washing" is the CSR space?

Interviews with senior communication practitioners helped identify how to avoid the trap if "washing" CSR reports and/or messages: facts, transparency and authenticity. Breaking it down, this means: use and include facts, be transparent by not only communicating the positive actions but also discussing risks and misses, and show authenticity by showing the alignment with the business mission and values.

(RQ2) How can you be a responsible CSR communicator?

Same as for RQ1: show authenticity, transparency and facts.

(RQ3) What are examples of best practices?

What makes good CSR communications for reports: show authenticity, discuss progression, demonstrate transparency, don't omit relevant information and don't lie.

What makes good CSR communications for messages: show alignment & coherence with the business mission, show transparency & humbleness and show authenticity with *"walk the talk"*.

Limitations

The generalization of this study is limited as it involved only 15 communication practitioners.

Further Research

Explore more from private sector, non-profit and education and healthcare to draw stronger patterns. And look separately at industries whose DNA is a social purpose and how it affects their mindset when thinking about their organization's corporate social responsibility.

Keywords: *corporate social responsibility, CSR, greenwashing, authenticity, credibility*

Entrepreneurial leadership in crisis situations. Communicative implications

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Introduction and purpose of the study

At the beginning of the work I will define the term entrepreneurial leadership in order to bring clarity to the investigated phenomena (Nahavandi, Malekzadeh, 1998). However, would like to stress that integration of entrepreneurship and leadership is not an easy task and requires from the owner of the enterprise a huge dose of cleverness especially in crisis situations (Bolton, Thompson, 2004). What is more, I will present the various issues of entrepreneurship such as trait approach, social-psychological approach and behavioral approach that enhance communication. As my research involves the leadership aspect, I will show also the most important approaches to leadership that relates to communicative implications such as: trait approach, behavior approach, contingency approaches, the continuum of leadership behavior, leadership alternatives, strategic leadership etc.

Literature review

In the literature different perspective to the study of leadership were presented Flippo (1980), Dawson, Garvin-Kester, Vollmuth and Waglund (2001), Luthaus, Adrien, Anderson and Carden (1999). There is no doubt that entrepreneurial leader in order to achieve firm's objective needs to motivate virtual team members- achievement motivation theory was discussed by Winter (2004) and Koestner (2007). What is more, I will present the various issues of entrepreneurship such as trait approach, social-psychological approach and behavioral approach that enhance communication. As my research involves the leadership aspect, I will show also the most important approaches to leadership that relates to communicative implications such as: trait approach, behavior approach, contingency approaches, the continuum of leadership behavior, leadership alternatives, strategic leadership etc In addition, I created the entrepreneurial leader orientation to characterize precisely the constituents of entrepreneurial leader orientation for crisis situations. The five components of ELO includes: focus, time focus, ego, courage and team.

Methodology

The main aim of empirical part of my work is to show the researches related to the topic of entrepreneurial leadership in small and medium sized enterprise. In order to narrow the scope of the investigated phenomena, I have chosen one survey carried out on the regional scale and the second one conducted on the national level. Moreover, I have chosen the Asian region due to the fact that I wanted to stress the similarity with Polish enterprises and to prove that the small and medium sized enterprise in Taiwan can also benefit from introducing the strategic leadership into practice.

Results and conclusions

The entrepreneur is able to build successful organization thanks to leading by example (D.A.

Kirby 2003, p. 177). The significance of entrepreneurial orientation among franchisees was studied in the literature (P.A. Maritz, G.H. Nieman 2006, p.1-17). Moreover there exists life themes ascribed to entrepreneur and the set of life themes associated with the phenomena of successful leader (B. Bolton, J. Thompson 2004, p. 289). According to Arain and Tipu (2008), there is an interdependence between leadership style and the size of the business.

The main research question was to indicate if entrepreneurial leadership positively influences firm's growth, conducts successful business and achieves firm's goal and performance. In relation to that I wanted to prove if presented variable measurements attributed to leadership influence achieving the success. Moreover, I wanted to identify the most influencing team leader's competencies. My target group consisted of the owners of small and medium sized enterprises. The target respondents were involved in different sectors.

To sum up, according to my own research framework and results and results of three former studies I identified the most influencing leader's competencies for crisis situation.

Practical and social implications

For the purpose of communicative implications and from a praxeological perspective, the functioning of an organization depends on the effective operation of the leader. Especially very important at the development phase of a firm are leading and controlling features (Lowden 1998, p. 7). Through my work, I would like to show that entrepreneurial leadership is of great importance in gaining competitive advantage, success and prosperity of organizations in globalized team management. I will begin my reflection on the issue of leadership by presenting the profile of the effective leader.

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Gossiping as a tool of functional and dysfunctional leadership: negative and positive sides of an organizational grapevine in crisis situations

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Taking the postmodern perspective into consideration, the companies of our times are not fixed entities since they exist in a fluid environment (Bauman, 2003) and their performance is shaped by media images, techno-images, finance-images and idea-images (Appadurai, 2005). Dynamics belongs to the key issues studied in management (Czakon, 2010). Moreover, since organizations are an important part of complex reality (Mruk, 2004) they must continuously react to changes, creating new behaviors and attitudes (Nogalski, 2008), being places of contradictions and paradoxes themselves (Pocztowski, 2007). The above-mentioned multidimensionality and diversity of stimuli the organizations are exposed to have both advantages and disadvantages. As far as the positive sides are concerned, the multifactoral aspect of modern entrepreneurship allows diversified workers and stakeholders to benefit from various resources, products and services that are available in the corporate reality. However, the multidimensional nature of modern organization makes it simultaneously more prone to potential difficulties and dangers. Taking the issue of stakeholders into account, an organization of our times is a theatre of interest conflicts (Ferrari, 2003), an entity often torn between contradictory rights and demands.

As far as the diversity of internal and external factors is concerned, companies have to adapt to new and dynamic conditions on a daily basis.

Thus, the leader of the twenty-first century who performs in a changeable environment should pay attention simultaneously to hard issues, such as structure, system and technology, as well as to soft notions, such as people and culture (e.g., Kets de Vries, 2011b; Koźmiński, Jemielniak & Latusek-Jurczak, 2014). However, not always are both hard and soft elements treated in the proper way. Consequently, potential dysfunctional behaviors may concern both the misuse of structural, systemic or technological systems as well as the improper management of people and culture. However, it is difficult to highlight some sets of features representative of dysfunctional behaviors. The reasons for such a state are as follows. First of all, there are no strict criteria determining a pathological organization since the boundaries between abnormal and normal states are subjective (Gabriel, 2008). Secondly, the types of dysfunctional behaviors are varied, depending on remarkable individual and group features. Thirdly, there are diversified terms denoting this type of organizational behavior that differ in terms of semantic fields and cognitive impact. For example, apart from the term dysfunctional leadership, there are other names to

denote the negative side of leadership, such as destructive, exploitive, abusive, tyrannical, bullying or toxic leadership (Pelletier, 2010; Walton, 2008). Although they all focus on the darker side of managing organizations, the scope and types of unacceptable behaviors differ.

Literature review

Both gossip and rumors belong to the most popular channels of informal communication (Sias, 2009), to the oldest forms of human interactions (Livolsi and Volli, 2005).

Moreover, since an important part of communication, including the organizational one, is related to the diffusion of information among individuals, especially the data related to their reputation (Ferrari, 2003), attention will be concentrated on gossip.

Taking into account the definition of gossiping, gossip can be understood as "idle talk to disseminate information" (Coskun, Ok and Ozdenizci, 2012, p. 141), of a factual or fabricated type (Tebbutt and Marchington, 1997). Moreover, gossiping involves some verbal exchange about other people (Kimmel, 2004), with the ones being gossiped about not knowing actually how many individuals take part in gossiping (Grote and McGeeney, 1997). It should be stressed, however, that most definitions of gossip stress its negative aspect, defining gossip as "a particular kind of communicative activity that typically involves the sharing of unfortunate, savory, or unflattering information about the private affairs of others not present" (Robinson, 2007, p. 252). In the latter part of this paper, this perspective is enriched with a discussion on the functional dimension of gossiping.

Moreover, attention is paid to the relation between crisis and gossip, stressing how the latter shapes communication and relation when difficult situations take place.

Methodology

As far as methodology is concerned, one way of looking at the darker side of leadership is by concentrating on either a personal or a group level. Starting from the individual dimension, personal destructiveness is related to all the negative actions that leaders do to themselves, such as reprimands, criminal records or bad reputations. Organizational destructiveness, on the other hand, is related to the situation in which leaders cause misfortune among their workers and stakeholders (Padilla, Hogan and Kaiser, 2007). As far as other organizational phenomena are concerned, organizational toxicity can be observed at different levels, taking into account toxic leaders, toxic managers, toxic culture and toxic organization (Appelbaum and Roy-Girard, 2007). In other words, toxic leaders can be described as the ones who, by performing destructive actions and possessing dysfunctional personalities, exert a negative effect on their subordinates and the professional environment (Goldman, 2006; Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Since people are not likely to admit that they gossip, the methodology mainly focuses on desktop studies. To exemplify the phenomenon, different examples of grapevine in crisis situations are presented.

Results and conclusions

The discussion on gossip in organizations has focused on the concepts of relations and communication. It has been shown that various factors underlying organizational relations and communications determine whether gossiping has a functional or dysfunctional character. Thus, such organizational facets as trust, attitude to different communication channels, type of information, information sharing, community cohesion and hierarchy issues determine relations and communication that consequently influence gossiping. The mentioned factors can be grouped into information—related factors (e.g. channel, type of information) and community-related factors

(e.g. trust, community characteristics, hierarchy notions) and they influence both relations and communication in organizations. It should be stated, however, that the relation between all the mentioned concepts is dynamic and the possibility of feedback appears. Thus, gossiping is not only shaped by the already mentioned organizational factors and the notions of relations and communication but its dysfunctional or functional character influences the notions that have shaped its character.

Practical and social implications

The paper highlights the role of gossip in organizations. It stresses how organizational grapevine functions in different types of social groupings and stresses how it shapes organizational communication and relation especially in crisis situations.

Offer the potential implications both for practice and society

Apart from the organizational dimension, the characteristic features of gossip are also important for the society as such. Such papers facilitate understanding about the way gossip determines communication and relation in different types of settings.

Keywords: *leadership crisis gossip*

Importance of closer collaboration between emergency risk and crisis communication professionals to prepare for the "next one"

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We all understand that the present COVID-19 pandemic demands for effective crisis management to decrease the spread of disease, reducing fatality rates. We need sustainable behavioural changes to mitigate the impact of the virus through three simple rules; good hand hygiene methods, physical distancing and wearing a face mask.

However, a phenomenon which came up parallel with this pandemic is that emergency risk communication and crisis communication did not happen collaboratively.

Crisis communication, which is activated by the private sector to handle a crisis in which they are an active player, did not show competency in emergency risk communication on a health topic with widespread public interest.

Emergency risk communication which is real time exchange of available information was rolled out by public authorities with a lack of coordination among themselves and new complex stakeholder environments.

To achieve a high success rate in curbing a pandemic, it is important that both emergency risk communicators and crisis communication professionals collaborate, learn from each other, and integrate best practices.

The social and cultural aspects of managing communication should be considered by the private sector too, showing a willingness to improvise crisis strategies, like reaching out to communities via their respected leaders. This step helps to pass the right message to a clearly defined audience with a high impact during a pandemic.

The lack of emergency risk communication and crisis communication specialists working together was, and is, a missed opportunity to deliver comprehensible strategies and tactics in safeguarding the multitude of audiences and stakeholders.

Aim: The aim of this study is to show how professionals from emergency risk communication and crisis communication management could collaborate in order to optimise the control of a pandemic situation. The research question studied is "How risk communication professionals and crisis communication professionals can reduce COVID-19 positive cases during the pandemic by optimising strategies while working in collaboration".

Method: During desk research, I qualitatively analysed the content available globally from journals, web content and newspapers on how different communities have responded to the

pandemic based on emergency risk communication and crisis communication strategies.

The study - informed by on the ground experiences as an Emergency Risk Communication professional fighting this COVID-19 in West Africa and Asia and, as an ex-corporate crisis communications manager, shows how collaboration between emergency risk communication professionals and crisis communication professionals can increase the long-term effectiveness of communication during an emergency and crisis. Although the roles of these two professions vary, there is much similarity, and it is important to pool knowledge, experiences and methods together.

Expected Results: COVID-19 has shown how shortcomings in communication can lead to higher positive cases and even deaths. What I would expect to see from this study is how information dissemination can be made more effective during a pandemic when both risk communication specialists and crisis communication specialists work hand in hand. As there is a gap in current research on the professions of emergency risk and crisis communicators, I hope to organise a public platform to bring these two diverse yet similar professions together with the aim to share information, learn from each other and create sustainable collaboration and capacity building.

Keywords: *Emergency Risk Communication, Crisis Communication, Similarities, Differences, Collaboration*

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Crisis Response with Ethical Advantages: Flexibility, Adaptation, & Resilience

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Introduction/Purpose

The public relations function should perform an ethical role in organizations, and can provide a competitive advantage through ethical crisis management. Yet, very little research to date has framed the ethical role of crisis management or the moral responsibilities during crisis, especially in axiology, or academic terms based on theory and empirical research (e.g., Jin, Pang & Smith, 2018). The global pandemic offers an unprecedented look into how organizations responded to the crisis, how they managed employee relations and external stakeholder relationships, as well as the role ethics played in pandemic response.

Literature

What has been published is anecdotal or largely pragmatic rather than based on moral philosophy. This study seeks to offer a framework to fill a lacuna in the body of knowledge for guiding ethical crisis planning, response, management, and communication, even on a global level. An ethical framework is needed for crises because the moral nature of the commonly-discussed crisis response strategies resides in how they are implemented, and the duty and intention of their use, rather than in the implicit nature of the SCCT crisis response strategies themselves (e.g., Coombs, 2007).

Another lacuna in the literature exists in the fail-ure to explore *a priori* theory in applying moral philosophy to crisis management. Much of crisis management is case study based and *a posteriori*, based on experience, rather than based on predictive problem solving (Coombs, 2020). Therefore, we apply deontological ethics for a sound *a prioristic,* analytic, moral-philosophical perspective; as an added benefit, this will offer a strong lexicon with which to understand the ethics of crises.

Our literature to support a conceptualization of ethics in crisis communication is based on public relations theory, situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), ethics and moral philosophy, attribution theory, excellence theory, research in public relations ethics, and deontological ethics.

Method/Rationale

Our research is based on two qualitative methods: virtual focus groups with public relations industry leaders who had the title of Chief Communication Officer (or equivalent) and were members of the Arthur W. Page Society (industry-leading, billion-US dollar-plus organizations generally understood as "*Fortune*® 1000" companies). One focus group has been conducted and others are planned. A second approach is to conduct a Delphi study with public relations industry leaders to ask them about the findings from the focus groups (flexibility, adaptation, and resilience) and hone in on ethical beliefs, crisis

strategies during the pandemic, and other issues related to enhancing ethical crisis response.

Results/Discussion/Conclusions

We discuss ways to enhance organizational effectiveness in crisis response through using ethical theory emphasizing moral approaches to flexibility, adaptation, and resilience in the face of crisis. Deontology and the SCCT are used in understanding crisis situations, the strain of a global pandemic and workplace changes, stakeholder relationship stresses, and the ethics of adaptive response. We make normative recommendations for ethical planning and response for future crises of a large-scale magnitude, and we offer suggestions for practical implementation.

Keywords: *crisis*; *ethics*; *risk*

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Reversible or irreversible user engagement behavior changes during COVID-19 pandemic: a case study of a top restaurant brand in Taiwan

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Introduction and purpose of the study

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people tend to spend more time on social media than normal time due to work from home and lockdown policy (Kaya, 2020). Given the situation, Donthu and Gustafsson (2020) argued user engagement behavior on social media would be changed. To verify these observations, this study aims to quantitatively examine user engagement behavior on social media platforms during the pandemic and track media usage change.

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, Taiwan has maintained less than 1,000 positive cases in Year 2020 and no local cases from late April to Dec 2020. Hence, using Taiwan as an example to investigate the pre-, during, and post-pandemic impacts on user social media behavior change would be appropriate. The social media penetration rate in Taiwan is 88%, while Facebook is one of the major social media platforms used. A top premium restaurant chain brand in Taiwan was selected as the case study.

Literature review

Engagement behavior is composited of four categories (the number of views, likes, comments, and shares a post) with equal weight (Facebook, 2019); however, the amount of views and likes is usually larger than the number of shares and comments (He, Zha, & Li, 2013). Ángeles Oviedo-García (2014) indicated different engagement categories are supposed to have different efforts; it implies that the pandemic impact on the four categories is different. Considering the data limitation, the engagement category in this study focuses on posts and comments to quantify the user engagement behavior changes in the different stages of the pandemic.

Methodology

Web crawler was utilized. We reviewed all engagement categories of Facebook fan pages from the premium restaurant chain, including the posts and comments from Jan 1, 2019 to Dec 31, 2020, in order to observe the engagement variation before, during and post the pandemic. The engagement includes posts (numbers of

likes, comments, and shares within a post) and comments (numbers of likes, replies within a comment, and the daily number of comments) respectively.

Border control (Feb 6, 2020) and no local positive Covid-19 case (April 13, 2020) are the two key dates to differentiate pre, during and post pandemic period. Wilcoxon rank-sum test was used to calculate the engagement changes between the Year 2019 and Year 2020. A total of 168 posts and 17,950 comments were collected.

Results and Conclusion

Before the pandemic period, the engagement level of posts and comments in the Year 2020 were similar to the Year 2019. During the pandemic period, the results indicated that the engagement to comments significantly declined, but notably increased after the pandemic. In the post pandemic period, the overall comment engagement (numbers of likes, replies within a comment, and the daily number of comments) went back to the similar status as the pre-pandemic period. As a result, we found that the engagement of comment is much more sensitive in terms of user behavior changes.

Practical implications

According to our finding, the engagement behavior changes mainly occurred from the Restaurant's Facebook fan page, particular in the comment level. It shows "comment" plays an important role in social media conversation and sustains the engagement behavior. Hence, the Restaurants may consider creating posts (i.e. food delivery service, food tips, longer incentive, etc.) that can stimulate more comments during and after the pandemic periods. Another critical point is that the engagement behavior is reversible after the pandemic but the engagement level is not reached back to the pre-pandemic period.

Our study focused on the Facebook posts and comments and excluded other types of engagement, such as like and share, that can be explored in the future.

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Relationship Cultivation, Social Capital, and Breaking Through Barriers: Exploring the Use of Social Media by Female Transnational Entrepreneurs in the Silicon Valley

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Introduction and Purpose of Study

This study explores how female transnational entrepreneurs (FTEs) use social media to cultivate relationships with their publics, build and strengthen social capital, and consequently break through barriers to grow their businesses. Drawing on interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks including relationship management in public relations, social capital in social psychology, and transnational entrepreneurship in business, this study proposes the following research questions: (1) Who are the key publics for self-employed FTEs? (1) How do self-employed FTEs use social media to cultivate relationships with their key publics? (2) What social media strategies do FTEs use to build and strengthen social capital? And (3) How does the use of social media help FTEs break through barriers? This study defined FTEs as female-identified transnational immigrant entrepreneurs whose public identities are associated with more than one country (Lee & Lee, 2020).

Literature Review

This study fills several prominent research gaps in the extant public relations and business management literature regarding startup and entrepreneurial communication. First, although public relations research in recent years have given more attention to the instrumental role of social media for startups and small-to-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), most focused on message-based strategies, rather than relationship-based public relations strategies (e.g., Chen et al., 2017). Second, while research on startup and entrepreneurship have been growing in public relations research, most focused on the high-tech and high-growth sectors and largely ignored self-employed entrepreneurship for SMEs. Given the large scale of SMEs and the limited resource they have, it is even more critical for them to develop effective public relations practices. Third, historically, female immigrant entrepreneurs possess neither networks nor resources and face challenges and barriers to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities (Wang, 2019). As such, they must find creative ways to integrate their multiple social and cultural identities in their entrepreneurship.

Methodology

We conducted 20 in-depth interviews with Korean FTEs in the San Francisco Bay Area and Silicon Valley in the United States, one of the most well-recognized entrepreneurship eco-systems in the world. The participants are SME owners and regard social media as the basis of a business model to create and deliver values for their businesses.

Results and Conclusion

Data from the in-depth interviews have revealed some major themes. First, FTEs identify their key publics based on the strengths of network ties they have with them (e.g., customers and prospects in the Korean community and Asian American immigrants in the region, other related businesses/vendors, investors). Second, FTEs largely use personal relationships, authentic communication, and networking strategies to cultivate their relationships with the key publics, and such strategies are also intertwined with their strategies to build and enhance social capital. Third, FTEs not only use social media to enhance bonding social capital with their primary publics such as customers and prospects via posting and direct communication, but also use them to create bridging social capital by engaging potential strategic partners via tagging and outreach. Importantly, our findings also revealed that FTEs' unique, multi-dimensioned identity played a key role in influencing their social media use, which in turn lowered their barriers to entry and helped them overcome cultural and social biases.

Practical and Social Implications

Practically, by exploring the use of social media from the perspective of relationship-based public relations efforts, this study casts insights on the use of social media for FTEs and SMEs not only from a messaging perspective, but also relationship cultivation perspective through the lens of social capital and transnationalism. At the societal level, this study illuminates the roles of public relations and relationship cultivation not only as means to make organizations' communication management more effective, but also as tools to empower a traditionally overlooked population in our field—self-employed FTEs who own small-to-medium sized businesses. Such unique context is especially important to the globalized society where businesses and communication activities are practiced transnationally.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial public relations, relationship cultivation, social capital, female transnational entrepreneurs, social media*

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Boris vs. Corbz #GetBrexitDone: An analysis of Labour and Conservative tweets on the 2019 General Election campaign

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Today's hyperconnected societies with ubiquitous digital media have altered the political landscape so that campaigning encompasses the use of social media, which in turn contributes to how we view and share information about political ideologies.

This study explores the intersect of UK politics, democracy, and social media: specifically Twitter.

Literature Review

Politicians themselves have become like celebrities (Davis, 2010) therefore, their elevation to power through votes depends on their ability to promote a positive brand on social media, or perhaps damage the credibility of their opposition. The nature of social media has amplified the move of the focus from the political party to the politician as an individual, opening a wider arena for debate and personalised campaigning (Gunn and Skogerbø, 2013). Thus, a politician's autonomous and dialogical use of social media may controvert the strategy of the political party, yet the need to communicate a personal – and perhaps approachable, or not least voteable – image as a politician pervades.

A goal of any campaign is to strengthen relationships with target publics. This is not possible if political public relations do not operate in a completely ethical and open environment; communication that does not appear organic or engaging will not yield results (Strömbäck and Kiousis, 2011). Reputation is critical as a strategic objective of a company (Cornelissen, 2014) and how a political candidate is presented can affect this.

Methodology

This paper analyses how the Conservatives and Labour Party used Twitter in the campaign period prior to the General Election of 2019. Using inductive methods to explore qualitative data and thematic and discourse analyses across a corpus of 4402 tweets and four accounts (@ BorisJohnson, @JeremyCorbyn, @Conservatives, @UKLabour), it reviews the political brand and ideology embedded within lexis. It considers the political brand communicated by each party as well as the personal brand of leaders Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn and posits that using party promotion, negative portrayal of the opposition, grassroots movements and calendar events, Johnson was able to secure a win by engaging and persuading key publics.

Results and Conclusions

With just over 2000 tweets from the @UKLabour and @JeremyCorbyn accounts, and slightly more from @Conservatives and @BorisJohnson over the 41 days of campaigning, at an average of 48 tweets a day, clearly it is a channel that is seen to have value in British politics.

The Conservatives simple, often triplicated phrases in their tweets, were easy to turn into a hashtag and therefore shareable, allowing virality. Their views capitalised on the anti-immigrant sentiment - borne of years of austerity for which they are responsible – by promoting a United Kingdom that invokes an 'us and them' narrative. Jeremy Corbyn was represented as the impalpable outsider and enemy with an intangible socialist manifesto that will destroy society. Whilst the Conservatives perpetuate a divisive rhetoric, with financial growth at its heart, Labour celebrates diversity and roots its manifesto in the growth of society and human rights. Labour's focus on empathy and caring was not enough to compete with the personal brand of Boris Johnson - as humorous and affable – and the political brand of the Conservatives, who were the party to #GetBrexitDone.

Practical and Social Implications

Discourse does not exist in a vacuum, with analysis designed to reveal the intersections of language, power and ideology (Waring, 2018) and as such, to appreciate a full overview of communication via social media, an analysis of external factors, such as contexts and other channels, would have been pertinent.

An opportunity does arise however, to analyse the communication between the government/ the Conservatives and their stakeholders, mitigated by the threats of both Covid and their chances of re-election.

Additionally a number of reports have highlight-

ed the inequalities in society experienced by people of colour (Khunti et al., 2020). This raises the question: How was right-wing populism used in campaigning and has the narrative damaged race relations in the UK?

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Silent dialogue: Problematizing open dialogue as a precursor to relationship building in conflict contexts in the Middle East

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Introduction

Most theorizing and empirical work in public relations scholarship has been centered in Euro-American worldviews and elides the nuances of various concepts in public relations such as dialogue that can take on varied hues depending on cultural, political, economic and social contexts of practice. One such divergent context is offered by the Middle East wherein assorted cultural, political and social milieus challenge traditional notions of dialogic relationship building between organizations and their publics. Significant political, economic, social, and cultural similarities and differences among countries in the region imply the need to examine specific contextual factors that could impact the practice of public relations in the region. Situated within the global public relations framework (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2019), this conceptual paper discusses the dialectic influence of local cultures as well as strategic interests on public relations theorizing, particularly on the dialogic approach to relationship building (Kent & Taylor, 2002). It problematizes the broadly accepted idea of open, transparent dialogue that engenders relationships between organizations and their publics and proposes the notion of silent dialogue, particularly reflecting the influence of local cultures in conflict situations in the Middle East.

Literature Review

The review of literature will (1) review research on public relations in the Middle East using the global public relations framework (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2019) (2) highlight the influence of culture and diversity in the Middle East on public relations practice (e.g., Magen & Avidar, 2019), and (3) discuss mainstream understandings of dialogue as a precursor to relationship building and highlight its major tenets and critiques (Chen et al., 2020; Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Main proposition

This paper argues that due to various cultural, political and social factors, amongst them a lack of formal diplomatic relations between various countries in conflict, dialogue may not be equated with the classical idea of dialogue wherein interactants engage in open and transparent give-and-take discussions that are integrative or represent dual concern strategies of building relationships through collaborative advocacy. Instead of foregrounding antecedents of OPR such as openness, access and networking, we argue that organizations caught in conflict situations engage in silent dialogue, leveraging existing per-

sonal networks of *wasta* and social connections encapsulated in the personal influence model (Sriramesh et al., 1997), and promote informal dialogue and interaction out of strategic and/or economic motives. These silent dialogues help to maintain transparent traces of relationships in the absence of formalized relationships. Silent dialogue is essential to formalizing relationships. Silent dialogue is used mostly in situations of conflict/change. The paper will offer specific examples of contexts where silent dialogue might occur.

Theoretically, this paper enhances public relations scholarship by exploring the role of culture in shaping the critical public relations practice of building relationships through varied hues of dialogue. It problematizes mainstream understandings of open and transparent communication as a precursor to building relationships and offers the concept of silent dialogue to build OPRs in contexts of conflict.

Practical and social implications

Offering the concept of silent dialogue broadens practitioners' understanding of dialogue, particularly for those working in situations of conflict. It offers them a conceptual tool to produce traces of relationships when more formalized relationships cannot be established due to conflict.

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Role of internal communication in enhancing employee engagement during remote work in times of crisis - Remote internal crisis communication (RICC) framework

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Introduction

When the pandemic disrupted face-to-face work in 2020, companies such as Facebook and Google announced work-from-home programmes. Although research has examined drivers of virtual/tele/digital employee engagement, and internal crisis communication, little is known about keeping employees engaged when organizations face a global crisis and employees are abruptly thrown into remote work. Public relations research with its focus on internal relations can contribute much to this issue. Connecting literatures on employee engagement, remote employee engagement, and internal crisis communication, this study created a conceptual framework, the Remote Internal

Crisis Communication (RICC) framework, and conducted an empirical study to examine how twoway symmetrical communication, internal crisis communication (ICC), and new ways of working (NWW) predicted three dimensions of employee engagement and how social connection mediated the relationship between NWW and employee engagement. Findings have strong theoretical and practical implications.

Literature Review

This study conducted an extensive and thorough review of literature on (1) drivers of employee engagement from applied psychology, organizational behavior, human resource management and public relations (Ruck et al., 2017; Vercic & Vokic, 2017) (2) drivers of remote work engagement from business and human resources management literatures (Larson et al., 2020; ter Hoeven & van Zoonen, 2020), and (3) internal crisis communication (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015). The substantial research on these topics exist in silos with limited work on the interplay of variables, which could enhance understanding of the role of internal communication in engaging employees working remotely during a crisis. Accordingly, connecting these literatures, we proposed the Remote Internal Crisis Communication (RICC) framework (See Figure 1). Further, as a starting point to test the framework we empirically tested the effects of two way symmetrical communication, ICC content and objectives and NWW on three dimensions of employee engagement, as per the following hypotheses and RQ:

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION　　　　　　CONTINGENCY FACTORS　　　　　　EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Communication Direction:
-Two-way symmetrical communication
-Employee voice
-Senior management's receptiveness to employee voice
-Horizontal vs. Vertical communication
-Feedback to employees

Internal Crisis Communication:
-ICC Content
-ICC Objectives
-Crisis auto communication

Communication Frequency

Communication Channels
-Media richness

New Ways of Working (NWW):
-Control over time
-Control over work
-Control over media
-Access to organizational knowledge

Employee characteristics:
-Personality traits: Agreeableness; Openness to experience; Extroversion, Conscientiousness
-Motivational disposition: Need for affiliation and power
-Cultural background: Individualism and low uncertainty avoidance

Social connection

Employee Engagement:
-Cognitive
-Emotional
-Social

Figure 1 Remote Internal Crisis Communication (RICC) Framework for Employee Engagement

H1: Two-way symmetrical communication will predict employee engagement when working remotely during a crisis

H2: NWW, particularly control over (a) time and content of work and (b) use of communication media will predict employee engagement when working remotely during a crisis

H3: Social connection will mediate the relationship between NWW and employee engagement when working remotely during a crisis

H4: ICC content (informative, identification, factual) will be positively related to employee engagement while working remotely during a crisis

H5: ICC objectives (security, belonging, activating behavior) will be positively related to employee engagement while working remotely during a crisis

RQ: Which among these factors -- two-way symmetrical communication, NWW, and ICC - contributes the most to remote employee engagement during a crisis?

Methodology

We conducted a quantitative online survey because a survey can generate large amounts of quantifiable data that can be analyzed for patterns of association. The target population were fulltime employees, over the age of 18, working remotely due to the pandemic. An international market research company YouGov recruited the sample (N=304) from its research panel of employees from the United Arab Emirates. The survey was offered in English and Arabic. Simple and hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted to examine relationships and Baron and Kenny's (1986) steps for mediation were followed to test mediation.

Results and Conclusions

The three dimensions of employee engagement (cognitive, affective, social) showed significant and positive relationships with the independent variables (two-way symmetrical communication, NWW, ICC content and objectives) and social connection mediated the relationship between NWW and employee engagement. However, after controlling for demographic variables, two-way symmetrical communication was the only statistically significant predictor of employee engagement, when considered in conjunction with the other factors.

Theoretically, the paper has added to literature on employee engagement by proposing a conceptual framework for remote ICC, and by offering empirical evidence for the role of communication in engendering remote engagement during a crisis. A limitation of the study was that we tested only a few variables in the conceptual framework, to ensure a parsimonious survey instrument. Future research could test other variables such as horizontal vs. vertical communication or moderators such as open-mindedness, and cultural background.

Practical and Social Implications

Practitioners could provide opportunities for two-way symmetrical communication that will allow employees to share their concerns, particularly when they are away from their physical workplaces during crises. Practitioners should also ensure that communication media include technological affordances that can bolster social connection and provide opportunities for employees to connect with each other remotely. Most importantly, practitioners can use these findings not just during the coronavirus pandemic but can apply these findings in similar situations, such as when organizations have to move into remote work during say, a natural disaster.

Keywords: *Employee engagement, internal communication, remote work, crisis, internal crisis communication*
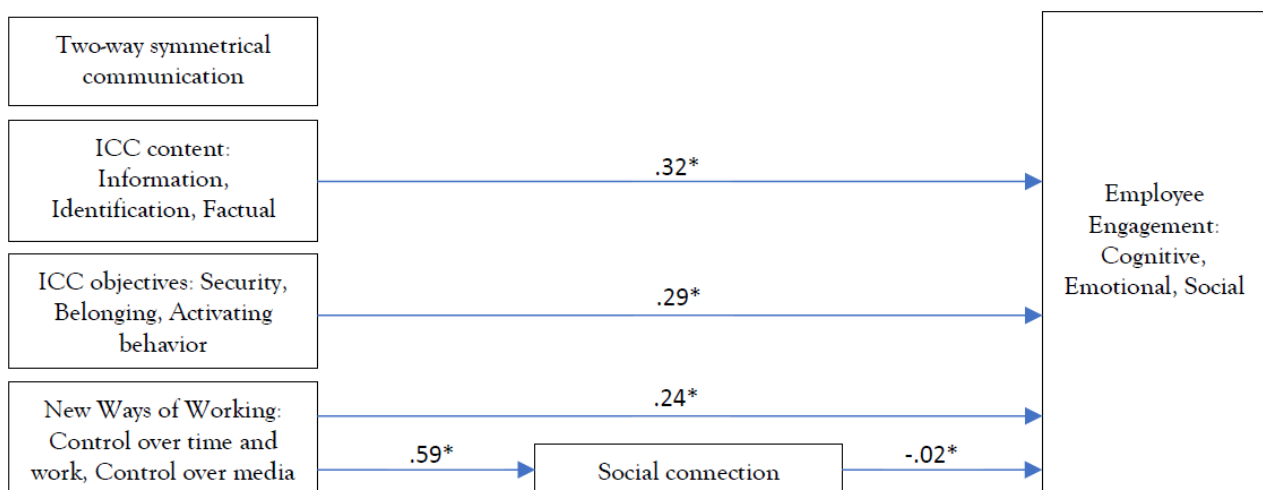
Figure 2. Standardized regression coefficients for the relationship between the independent variables and employee Engagement

Social interaction and the customer service

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The Public Relations literature on the importance of knowing the customer in order to adapt the communication to him and offer an excellent service is vast. However, the analysis of interactions seems to be being neglected by organizations. This research seeks to show how interactions with the customer can teach about their needs and the best way to approach them to make sales. To this end, it uses data from a doctoral research carried out at a popular fair in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which focused on the analysis of interactions with customers established by a merchant who has worked on the site for over 30 years and developed a series of strategies to keep his business alive and healthy.

Literature review

The work has as theoretical references the contributions of Waldyr Fortes (2003), who highlights that the service is a process of relationship with the public, making the diagnosis of audiences essential for the elaboration of specific and efficient actions in the approximation between public and organization. Fábio França (2008), who explains that the communication planned and developed by public relations professionals will only be efficient if it is directed to their specific audiences, meeting their demands and needs. Nanci Pilares (1989), who defends conquest and loyalty as ways of dealing with a market full of similar offers, emphasizing that the way services are provided will be decisive for the organization's success. Roberto Corrêa (2006), who suggests that the professionals involved in the service have a global view of the organization and good knowledge of marketing to be successful in satisfying the customer and boosting the company. Finally, Margarida Kunsch and her contributions about the relational aspect of communication, which results in a variety of interferences and conditionings within a complexity difficult to diagnose, given to the volume and the different types of existing communications, which operate in different social contexts.

Methodology

The data were obtained through site visits, participant observation, conversations in different environments and with different interlocutors, analysis of digital environments, photographic records, notes in a field diary and audio and video recordings, these analyzed according to the Conversation Analysis, proposed by Harvey Sacks (1972). The study was guided by ethnomethodology, a perspective that defends the knowledge of social configurations through the understandings expressed by the members themselves, which was developed by Harold Garfinkel, 1967.

Results and conclusions

The analysis of the interactions established by the merchant shows the appropriateness of the approach to the customer, defined in a matter of seconds, which includes the use of common sense knowledge; the valorisation of products; storytelling to make the sale; the justification regarding less favourable aspects. In short, they show the importance of interactions for making a correct diagnosis and the consequent adequacy of communication with the clients.

Practical and social implications

The study highlights the importance of analyzing interactions with customers to obtain better results by organizations and, on a broader scale, highlights the relevance of accessing the knowledge developed by people on a daily basis to deal with everyday situations.

Keywords: *Public Relations*; *popular commerce*; *social interaction*; *ethnomethodology*

The mediating role of crisis history on the relationship between crisis response strategies and organisational reputation among South-Soutth Nigeria Universities during Covid-19

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Introduction and purpose of the study.

Crisis cuts across all organizations and no organization is immune to crisis situation. The outbreak of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), imposed several detrimental potential and or significant immediate and long term impact on organizational reputation globally This study is aimed to investigate the crisis response strategy and the mediating effect of crisis history in restoring and maintain organizational reputations in the face of covid19 crisis situation in the Nigeria context.

Literature review

According to Coombs, (2007), Situational Crisis Communication Theory provides a mechanism for matching crisis response strategies and anticipating how stakeholders will react to a crisis considering its crisis history, in terms of reputational threat posed by the crisis situation. To protect organizational reputation during a challenging crisis, four crisis response strategies should be examined: denial, diminish, rebuild and bolstering. Hence, Coombs, (2007 & 2013) found that organizational crisis history has indirect effect on organizational reputation during and after a severe crisis. Thus, according to Coombs, (2007), Coombs and Holladay (2010), the crisis response strategies employed by an organization in a present challenging crisis situation has the potential of creating a sense of reflection on organizational crisis history "whether positive or negative" thereby influencing organizational reputation. Based on this established evidence, this study will look into the mediating role of crisis history on the relationship between crisis response strategies and organizational reputation among south-south Nigeria universities during and after COVID-19.

Methodology

This study will adopt the quantitative design deductively. Online survey and random sampling will be employed. The population of the study is derived from four selected universities in the south-south Nigeria, with the population of 141,999. The targeted samples size will be 384 respondents. The calculation was based on 5 confidence interval or margin of error, 95% confidence level. This study, before the actual data collection and analysis will be made, the measuring instrument (questionnaire) will be tested in a pilot study targeting at least 30 respondents (Hair & Anderson, 2010; Rodrigues, Hair, Neiva, Teixeira, Cid, & Monteiro, 2019; Drost, 2011).

The main objective is to ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument, its application to the targeted population and response rate to the online survey. Exploratory factor analysis will be used for the pilot study while confirmatory data analysis will be used for the actual data. The confirmatory factor analysis will be used to establish the goodness of fit of the hypothesis. This study will only retain items loaded on the variables at 0.5 cut-off criterion (Hair et al, 2010). However, in checking reliability, the Cronbach's (1951) coefficient alpha value of the variables should be above the acceptable threshold of 0.70 to be considered reliable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Composite reliability value (the degree to which the variable indicators indicate the latent variable) should be above the recommended level of 0.7 Hair, Anderson, & Tatham, 1998). Data will be analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and other statistical methods. Five hypothesis will be tested in understanding the impact of crisis response strategy: deny, diminishing, rebuilding, bolstering and the mediating role of organization's crisis history, its outcome on organizational reputation.

Finding and conclusion

The finding shows that rebuilding crisis response strategy and positive crisis history redeem and protect organizational reputation in times of sticky crises.

Theoretical and social implications

This research will add to the body of existing literature and further strengthen Situational Crisis Communication Theory in examining the impact of crisis response strategy and the mediating role of crisis history in protecting organizational reputation during crisis. Findings from this study will also be used to support the SCCT, that making references to crisis response strategies, and crisis histories would enable organizations to firmly retain their reputations during COVID-19 crises periods and other related organizational crisis.

It would also help other corporate organizations by applying the findings of this study towards enhancing their reputations and sustain their existing clients during crisis periods

Keywords: *crisis response strategies, crisis history, organizational reputation.*

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An exploratory perspective on mental readiness as a requirement for crisis leadership

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Coombs, Frandsen, Holladay and Johansen (2010:343) acknowledge that there are profound gaps in the knowledge and any type of further investigation will not only add to the body of knowledge, but also allow for different perspectives to be examined.

Garcia (2017a:23) proposes that the mental readiness of crisis leaders is an essential requirement for effective crisis communication. The purpose of this paper is to report the findings of an exploratory investigation into the mental readiness of crisis leaders in the South African context.

Literature review

Communication goes a long way in crisis leadership as often the communication from the leader eliminates fear and worry which are often felt during a crisis. Fener and Cevikb (2015:698) explain that a leader is not merely a manager which often focuses on a continuation of the present, whereas a leader is focused on the harmony and creativity of an organisation.

Garcia (2017b) defines mental readiness as "the persistent ability to remain calm, to think clearly and to understand other people's concerns even as conditions deteriorate and as panic begins to strike all around the leader". Each of the three elements of mental readiness stand alone, but all three are needed simultaneously in order to harness mental readiness effectively.

The first element is deep knowledge, which refers to "having a significant understanding of the patterns that drive effective and ineffective crisis response" (Garcia, 2017a:31).

The second element is emotional discipline, which has four main characteristics (Garcia, 2017a:27-31). This encompasses being forthright, calm, assertive and bold. A leader should acknowledge the realities of a crisis and name it correctly to enhance the organisation's ability to manage the crisis. Remaining calm is critical for clear thinking and sound decision-making. Assertiveness allows a leader to act quickly rather than shutting down during a crisis. Boldness improved a leader's ability to make the best decisions based on what is most productive rather than what is most appealing (Garcia, 2017a:27-31).

The final element is intellectual rigor, which is associated with "strictness in judgement or conduct" (Collins Dictionaries, 2020). Garcia (2017a:41) argues that it "begins with clarity of thinking". Leaders should not suddenly throw

rigor out the window once a crisis occurs.

Methodology

A generic qualitative research design, as described by (Plano, Clark & Creswell, 2015:4), guided this exploratory study. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. Purposeful sampling was used to select the thirteen interviewees in a variety of South African organisations. The sample size was limited both due to the exploratory nature of the study and the struggle to recruit participants amidst the national lockdown.

The discussion guide encompassed five topics, including Garcia's (2017a) three elements of mental readiness and key questions pertaining to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Data analysis was accomplished through the use of Atlas.ti 8 software for thematic analysis. Guba and Lincoln's (1985:289-331) four criteria for trustworthiness of qualitative research governed the study. This study was approved by the University of Pretoria and all stipulations regarding informed consent were observed.

Results and conclusions

Industry knowledge was confirmed to be a critical requirement for crisis leaders. Without it, a crisis leader will be overwhelmed. Experience was regarded as the best source of professional learning. Real-world situations teach crisis leaders to anticipate and respond to situations. This experience affects organisational culture, organisational learning and the use of good judgement during crises.

Crisis leaders cannot afford to let their emotions trigger secondary crises. Logial thinking and planning are needed to ensure a profesional organisational reaction. Destructive emotional behaviour during a crisis often cause rifts between leaders and followers at a time when an organi-

sation can least afford it. Greater self-awareness is required of crisis leaders to employ forthrightness, fierceness, boldness and humility appropriately.

Crisis leaders must face crises head-on and avoid focusing on superficial symptoms and they should act in a manner which instils trust between them and other role players. Clear thinking and honesty are key requirements for guiding organisations prior to, during and after crises. Intellectual rigor further enables helps organisations foresee and avoid crises.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how organisations can improve communication and adapt operations to changing circumstances. Crisis leaders should have the ability to help organisations respond effectively to both of these key areas.

The most important conclusion of the study is that both formal and informal education /training should focus even more explicitly on developing the mental readiness of crisis leaders. Garcia's (2017a) framework can be the basis for such programmes.

The limitations of the study include the small sample size and that qualitative research cannot be generalised. Further research should include a larger sample and other research designs like focus groups and surveys in order to investigate dimensions of mental readiness in crisis leadership in greater depth.

Keywords: *Crises leadership, crisis communication, mental readiness, Covid-19 pandemic, South Africa*

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Strategic Role of Public Relations in Crisis Management in Ethiopia: The case of Burayu City Displacement Crisis

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In recent times, Ethiopia has experienced different crisis situations. But, it seems that little attempts have been made by different stakeholders including the government in using scientific and strategic crisis communication efforts to avert crisis and work on reputation and good relationship with publics. The study aims at exploring a crisis scenario occurred at Burayu town particularly, in the displacement crisis in September 2018. The main objective of this study was to examine the relevance of crisis public relations practices at all phases of crisis. In this study, the crisis event was assessed through scientific approach and best practices on crisis communication. Qualitative research approach was employed to collect and analyze data generated through in-depth interview with key informants selected through purposive and snow ball sampling techniques. Relevant data collected through qualitative contents analysis method and FGDs were analyzed accordingly. The study describes in detail about the concepts of Public relations, Crisis management to demonstrate the strategic role of public relations in crisis management. According to the research finding, people were displaced for three reasons from Burayu City in September 2018. The first one was the clash between youth of different ethnic groups; the second one was due to the disseminating wrong information; and the third one was the prevalence of fear. Consequently, Public relations practitioners should be work to manage such kind of crisis to protect the relationship between organization (Government) and publics. But, the findings of the study show that there was poor understanding on public relations profession and a huge gap in using strategic public relations to manage such crisis. In short, Crisis is often a result of poor communication between organizations and its publics, and consequently more focus should be put on the pre-crisis phase and on building and maintaining long-lasting relationships

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A research on the effectiveness and factors in Government refuting rumors on social media - examining the rumor refutal texts on Sina Weibo in the early stage of COVID-19 in China

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Introduction and purpose

With the superiorities in fast transmission speed, extensive transmission scope and high user coverage, social media play a key role in public health emergencies. Many medical institutions and public health administrations have recognized the importance of social media that they actively use social media to release information, monitor disease trends and communicate with the public when emergencies occurred. After the outbreak of COVID-19, the Chinese government and public health administration like Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention released information through diverse social media platforms when the whole country is locked down. Social media allow them to respond to the public concerns in time and save the communication cost.

However, rumors are easily triggered and distributed online, so that social media have become one of the most important tools for the government and the public administration to dispel rumors. Sina Weibo finally became the dominant platform where local governments and public health administration (e.g. Chinese CDC) refuting rumors due to the wide use, timeliness and interactivity of Weibo as well as the authoritativeness of these official accounts. Government administrations actively debunk rumors through their official Weibo accounts with the formation of matrix propagation and harmonic resonance to some extent. From the perspective of the dissemination effect, whether the matrix propagation contributed by local governments produce positive results and what factors influence the final dissemination effectiveness will be the main topics of this study.

Research question and hypotheses

We proposed one research question and three hypotheses in this study:

RQ What was the effect of government refuting rumors on Sina Weibo during the outbreak of COVID-19 in China?

- H1: Fact-checking included in the government rumor refutal posts has positive associations with the effect of refuting rumors.

- H2: The narrative mode of the government rumor refutal posts has positive associations with the effect of refuting rumors.

- H3: The presentation form of the government rumor refutal posts has positive associations with the effect of refuting rumors.

Literature review

Different from other disasters, the epidemic disaster is directly related to people's life safety, and the demand for the related information has also explored correspondingly. Social media has become a gathering place for rumors worldwide after the outbreak of the COVID-19 (Ali, 2020). It is reported that social media accounts verified by government entities in emergencies have 34 times advantages than other sources of information in refuting rumors (Guo & Zhang, 2020). Rumor refutal from governments and other authorities have positive impact on changing people's cognition of the event, transferring negative emotions (Zeng and Zhu, 2019).

As to rumors circulating on social media platforms during the outbreak of COVID-19, scholars from overseas focus more on the source of disease transmission, the means of prevention and treatment of disease, disease awareness, and the means of specific management in response to the epidemic (Islam, et al, 2020).

Methodology

This research positions 80 government accounts on Sina Weibo as the research object, examining 501 effective rumor refutal posts of these accounts via data mining which posted during the first stage of the outbreak of the COVID-19 in China (from 18th Jan. 2020 to 29th Feb. 2020). This research investigated the effect of disprov-

ing rumors by conducting attitude evaluation on the comments of these posts, and examined the associations with the effect of refuting rumors from three factors: content elements, narrative mode and presentation form.

Results and conclusions

From the perspective of the attitude evaluation towards the rumor refutal Weibo posts, people who shared neutral and negative attitudes account more, which indicates that the posts against rumors released by governments have not been accepted by Weibo users from the emotional dimension and have not played a positive effect during the early time.

Form the texts of comments, users' negative expressions are not only about the information generated by these government accounts, but also about the one who generated these information— the government administrations and their staff.

In terms of disproving strategies, it shows that information related to fact-checking directly affect the results of rumor retutal posts.

Research limitations

This research focused only on the early outbreak of COVID-19 in China, new data deserves to be examined over the development of the epidemic. Other dimension of evaluation except the user attitudes evaluation can be applied and some other factors would be dig in related research.

Practical and social implications

Suggestions for the government and public administration effectively refute rumors during public emergencies.

Keywords: *rumors, social media, COVID-19, government, China*

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Crisis Strategy in the CEO Statements: An Analysis in Three Industries, Aviation, E- Commerce and Food

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Although crises are considered as normal in the lives of organizations, they can pose a significant risk to the profitability and even to the survival of organizations (Barkley, 2020, p. 244). Undoubtedly, CEOs play a critical role in managing crises in an effective way, establishing good relations with the publics, and overcoming the crisis with little damage to the organization. CEOs are in front of the media during the crisis and every word spoken by the CEO, every act they make, every message they share are paid attention to by all the public groups. What they say are spread rapidly, determining the public's trust in the organization, or making them act against the organization. The stress and the uncertainty environment created by the crisis make the overall communication process more difficult to handle as well as how the CEO communicates. Therefore, it is a necessity for the entire organization to be prepared for the crisis, and this also includes the preparedness of the CEO: the CEO should be a good crisis communicator.

The purpose of this study is to analyze quantitatively and qualitatively CEO statements made during the crisis. The analysis of the statements will be done by looking at the use of language of CEOs, the crisis strategies mentioned and the tone of the messages. At the same time, the study will investigate whether the statements of CEOs differ from sector to sector and with different types of crises.

Literature review

Crisis is a decisive moment for an organization: it is a turning point where the institutions need to take important steps to protect their good image and reputation in the eyes of their public (Murray and Shohen, 1992). Crisis management professionals often focus on techniques to minimize the damage and help management overcome the crisis as quickly as possible (Turk et al. 2012, p. 574). Leadership communication, establishing and maintaining crisis networks of rescue operations and officials who coordinate and communicate information to protect the publics are important during crises (Johansson and Bäck, 2017, p. 324). A crisis provides an opportunity to assess the role of the communication and reputation management both during and after the crisis (Turk et al. 2012, p. 575).

Methodology

In this study, a content analysis will be made on CEO statements of Turkish companies that had been hit by a crisis. The content analysis will be done both by qualitatively and quantitatively. Three industries are selected to study. These are aviation, e-commerce and food industries. All these industries have recent crises that

they faced with and will be easily studied. In the analysis; type of the crisis, the response strategy, words, length, and the tone of the statements will be done. The study will be important in the sense that it will highlight the role and leadership of CEO in crisis management literature as well.

Results and conclusions

A detailed analysis will be made regarding the crisis statements of Turkish CEOs. The data obtained will be useful in understanding the current situation and also will be helpful to further understand the role of CEO in dealing with crises. The study has some limitations of which one is that it takes into consideration a specific time frame, and secondly it examines the CEO statements in three sectors only.

Practical and social implications

As stated earlier, the CEO statements made in crisis situations affect the entire society. Therefore, CEOs should carefully work on every word they choose and the sentences they make in their statements and these texts should be prepared with great care. Statements should be prepared more carefully in crisis situations where human beings lost their lives or there is a big risk. The data obtained from the study will present a picture regarding the subject matter and help us to come up with recommendations.

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Presentation of current research / social media guidelines for risk and crisis management

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The new, countless possibilities on the social web create numerous advantages for companies and organizations of all kinds, but also some disadvantages. One of the biggest risk factors is the behavior of employees. If they express themselves in social media in the context of their own company, they inevitably become company spokespersons and representatives. In order to protect the company's reputation from damage from within and to train employees, social media guidelines are created by companies as part of social media governance. In addition to protection, an important aspect of reputation management is reputation enhancement. Although social media guidelines are among the important success factors in the context of reputation management, reputation expansion is rarely associated with them in scientific literature.

This is the point at which this paper starts and deals with the question of the extent to which social media guidelines are used by companies as a reputation management tool. Specifically, the two research questions are:

1. What differences and similarities can be identified in social media guidelines?

2. To what extent are social media guidelines used by organizations as a strategic instrument for reputation management?

Literature review

There are only a few scientific studies that deal in depth with the topic of social media governance and social media guidelines. Important works are the survey studies by Zerfaß et al., 2012 and Linke & Zerfaß, 2013 as well as Rauschnabel, Mrkwicka, Koch & Ivens (2013). More recent work comes from Mellinghoff (2019) and Kruse & Kordyaka (2020).

However, no study has yet explicitly addressed the link between social media guidelines and reputation management, although reputation is considered the intangible asset of a company most worthy of protection according to Ivens (2018) and Schaarschmidt et al. (2019).

Theoretical approach

Social media guidelines can be considered as one of three components of the social media governance model (Babka, 2016, p.20). In addition, they are one of the four most important success factors in higher-level online reputation management (Kinter & Ott, 2014, p.20).

Methodology
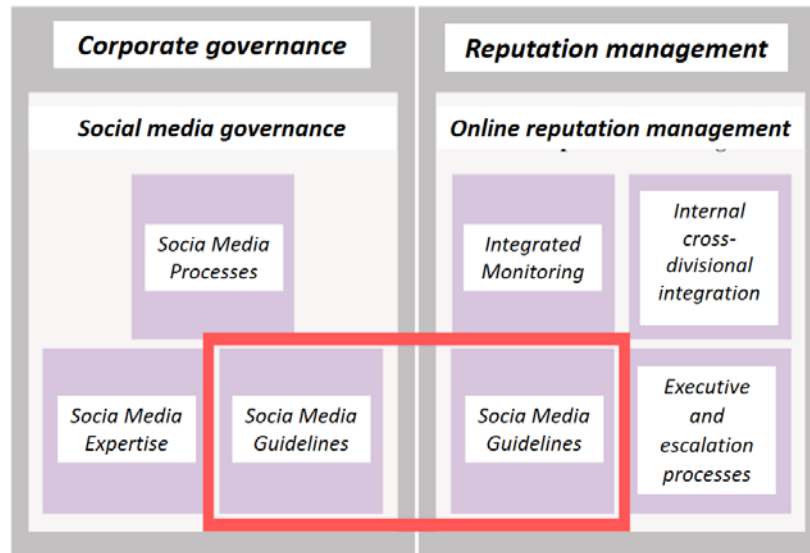
Figure 1: *Overview of the functional areas of social media guidelines* (*Own representation,* 2020, *based on Babka,* 2016, *p.*20).

In order to examine whether organizations use social media guidelines exclusively as a preventive, regulatory tool or also for reputation building, a specific three-part research framework was developed based on Kraus & Kordyaka (2020) (see Table 1)

Quantitative content analysis was used to collect the data. Only social media guidelines published as of 2017 or confirmed as still current in 2020 in the event of an earlier publication date were analyzed. Only social media guidelines from organizations operating in Germany that were available in text form were considered. A total of 208 companies (30 DAX, 50 MDAX,

50 SDAX and 78 family-owned companies) were asked by mail to send their social media guidelines. Others were researched online. As a result, 63 social media guidelines were examined. In addition to six formal criteria, the codebook contained 41 content-related criteria for recording significant text elements (see Table 1).

Results and conclusions

The various organizations could be assigned to eight different industries. The commonalities predominate in terms of a formal approach to employees, a low level of communicated commitment and a length of over 800 words.

The results clearly show that the social media guidelines are primarily preventive in nature. Not only in practice, but also in the literature, social media guidelines are almost exclusively assigned this role, although it would be obvious to use such a document for an additional purpose, reputation building. In public relations, employees are an important means of conveying credible information about the company to the relevant stakeholders. People place more trust in others at eye level than in the organization itself. Employee testimonials can thus make an important contribution to building a positive reputation among stakeholders. This added value could be generated without much extra effort by adding to the already existing social media guidelines.

Figure 2: Frequency distribution of the elements Strategy & Goals, Reputation Protection and Reputation Enhancement of the coded social media guidelines (SPSS analysis, 2020).

Table 1: *Categories of the reputation framework (Own representation, 2020).*

Strategy & Goals
• Explanation of social media
• Relevance of social media
• Explanation of strategy
• Explanation of goals
• Presentation of the social media channels relevant to the organization

Reputation protection	Reputation enhancement
• Discretion • Restrictions in the workplace • Transparency of the author • Longevity of content on the web • Respect for privacy • Professional communication (adherence to business etiquette) • No public criticism • Observance of ethical & moral values • Consequences of violations • Reporting of violations & content relevant to the organization • Data protection • Copyright law • Code of Conduct • Employment contract • Responsibility/Liability Committee • Contact Person	• Encouraging the use of social media • Encouragement to express positive opinions • Encouraging disclosure of employer in private profile • Encouragement to follow, like, comment on and share content created by the company • Encouragement to use specific hashtags • Encouragement to engage in dialogue with stakeholders • Encouragement to recommend the company • Encouragement to provide positive reviews • Attention to the culture & values of the company • Responding quickly • Correcting errors • Handling complaints, criticism & discussions • Credible & authentic communication • Dealing with the competition • Corporate design guidelines

Distribution of reputation management elements

Strategy & Goals: No manifestation 6,3%, Low manifestation 11,1%, Medium manifestation 66,7%, Strong manifestation 15,9%

Reputation protection: Low manifestation 4,8%, Medium manifestation 57,1%, Strong manifestation 38,1%

Reputation enhancement: Low manifestation 54,0%, Medium manifestation 44,4%, Strong manifestation 1,6%

n = 63

■ No manifestation   ■ Low manifestation   ■ Medium manifestation   ■ Strong manifestation

Practical and social implications

The social media guidelines should not stand alone, but should be integrated into the governance structures of the respective company. It is recommended that employees be given specific activities that can lead to an expansion of the company's reputation. In this way, the employee knows exactly what actions he or she can take to support the employer.

Limitations of the study

With a size of n=63, the sample is not very large. However, since social media guidelines are mostly internal documents, the public availability of these documents was severely limited.

Suggestions for future research

Expert interviews could be used to find out whether controllable, visible changes in corporate communications can be observed as a result of the strategic alignment of social media guidelines.

A survey could also be used to investigate how employees perceive social media guidelines. It would be relevant, for example, whether employees adhere to the recommendations of the social media guidelines and whether these motivate them to become active as brand ambassadors.

Keywords: *corporate communication, reputation management, social media, social media guidelines, content analysis, brand ambassador*

The Role of Employer Branding in Stimulating Employer Attractiveness

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Introduction and purpose

Public relation practitioners seem to agree that various stakeholders make decisions with the reputation of the organization in mind (Maden et al., 2012; Verčič, and Ćorić, 2018). Employer Branding (EB) plays an important role in understanding employees as a key stakeholder for organizations (Chhabra and Sharma, 2014).

The focus in EB literature lies on the process of building an identifiable and unique identity (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004) and the development of organization's unique and attractive image and reputation as an employer (Silvertzen et al., 2013).

We explore the relationship between employer branding and employer attractiveness as reflected in employee perceptions of organizational characteristics. We focus on the regional companies in the North of the Netherlands. Recruitment communication will reveal the image companies want to portray to potential employees in order to influence their perception of the organizational characteristics. We address the following research question:

To what extent does employer branding contribute to employer attractiveness of the regional companies in the North of the Netherlands?

Literature review

The body of literature shows that EB increases affinity with an employer because it has a positive effect on the corporate brand associations and therefore on perception of the employer brand (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Ewing et al., 2019). In this work the concept of employer attractiveness is defined as the intention to work for an employer. It is dependent on the employee perceptions of the organization, which is defined as envisioned picture of benefits of corporate image that an employee sees in working for a specific organization. Using corporate brand communication, organizations communicate their corporate identity and image (Cornelissen, 2008).

Several studies have suggested that information provided by the organization on core values, CSR and organizational characteristics will directly affect individual employee perceptions and affect employer attractiveness (Berthon et al., 2005; Elving et al., 2013). We propose a direct effect of information support (message) in recruitment on individual components of employee perceptions, while we expect employee's use of information during employer branding to influence employer attractiveness via their enhanced employee perceptions. See figure 1 for our conceptual model.
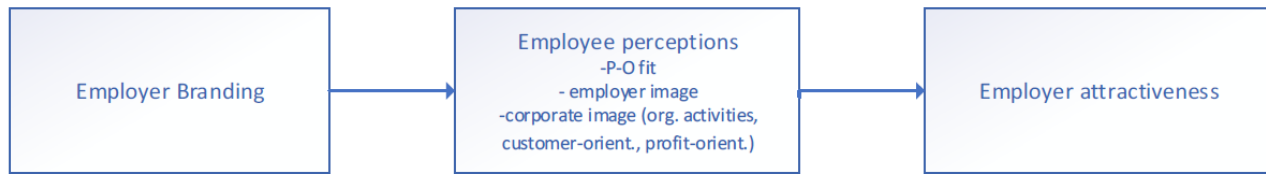
Figure 1: Conceptual model

Methodology

All three concepts are investigated among last year students at Hanze University of Applied Sciences, and University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Since the purpose of the research is to explore the extent to which EB contributes to the attractiveness of regional companies, we use an online survey and an experiment. Students are randomly assigned to one branded and one non-branded (regular) version of a vacancy. We measure employer attractiveness on a 7-point Likert scale developed by Highhouse el al. (2003) and for employee perceptions of an organization as an employer, we use a 25-items measurement of Berthon et al. (2005). The estimate of P-O fit is developed using work-value items by Cable and Edwards (2004).

Results and conclusions

Given this research is still in progress, the results are still to be determined. However, some limitations do exist. A clear limitation is the sample which represents students studying in the North of the Netherlands. This can skew the replicability results. Another limitation is the fact that data is collected via an online platform, which means that there is no way to be sure that the respondents are honest in their answers.

Practical and social implications

The practical and social implications of this study give a direction for communication practitioners and society. The results have potential in changing the practice of EB as a tool to influence employer attractiveness. The practical intent is to provide managers with a guide on how to influence employer attractiveness through EB.

Keywords: *employer branding, employer attractiveness, corporate image, employer image.*

From „Best in Covid" to „Worst in Covid": Underestimating the role of Public Relations in Government Communication during Covid-19 Crisis in the Czech Republic

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

On 31 August 2020, the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Andrej Babiš attended a discussion on the 15th Bled Strategic Forum in Slovenia. During his speech, he stated that the Czech Republic is „best in Covid", because of his profession as a businessman and crisis manager (Bled Strategic Forum, 2020). This narrative, representing an example of "technocratic populism", was shared among more politicians in other Central and Eastern European countries, such as Slovakia and Hungary (Buštíková and Baboš, 2020).

However, the situation has changed rather quickly after such proclamations with the rise of Covid-19 cases during the early autumn months (also called "second wave"). The Czech government was hesitating to employ more strict governmental measures in the fight against Covid-19, because: "the public demanded that we loosen up" (Echo24.cz, September 13, 2020). On October 13th, 2020, the Minister of Health has stated that the Czech government will employ three strategic pillars in fighting the pandemic: 1) extending the capacity of hospitals to deal with an influx of patients, 2) blanket testing of the population, and 3) a change of

communication strategy to better explain to the public how much was at stake and secure their cooperation (Radio Prague International, October 13, 2020).

This article will focus on the analysis of government steps to fulfil the goal of change in communication strategy during the height of the "second wave crisis" since October 2020 in the Czech Republic. Government communication in the Czech Republic has undergone a major transition from the post-communist propaganda system (Soukeník, 2018b). Despite the aim of a new stakeholder model of government communication (Soukeník, 2018a), the strategies and processes still reflect the formal structure of communication departments embedded in ministries and government offices, which was developed under the Communist propaganda communication model. Theoretically, this structure represents the public information model proposed by James Grunig and Todd Hunt (1984). This article aims to answer the following questions: 1) Which strategies and tools did the Czech government implement during the Second wave of the Covid-19 crisis? 2) Were these strategies and tools effective (did they reach audiences, increased information or change behaviours? 3)

Which external factors influenced negatively the aim of the communication to secure the co-operation of the citizens, such as following the government measures, trust towards the government officials etc.?

Methodology

We will use the systems theory framework to analyse the principles of government communication (von Bertalanffy, 2010) and the institutional theory of communication (Fredriksson, Pallas and Wehnmeier, 2013). For the analysis of effectiveness, we will use the WHO strategic communication framework, which defines six principles of effective communications, based on Scott Cutlip's pioneer work Effective Public Relations (1962).

The analysis of government communication, the role of communication strategies, and stakeholder management is crucial for understanding the role of public communication. Due to different cultural background, media and political system, which affect the nature and credibility of political public relations, we believe it's necessary to build case studies, which represent the country specifics (van Dyke and Verčič, 2009; Sriramesh and Verčič, 2012).

Results and conclusions

Contrary to the optimist prime minister's speech in August 2020, the Czech Republic has been ranked among the worst in world for Covid-19 response (Bloomberg, November 16, 2020). The role of government communication in crises, such as the pandemic, is crucial for responding in a timely and effective manner and for building the resilience of citizens. The results of this analysis will detect potential crisis nodes, internal and external factors, which influenced the government communication on the example of the Czech Republic. The results can serve as a basis for further international comparative perspective, especially in CEE countries. The man-agerial implications will serve for future implementation of strategic communication in crises on the government level.

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Citizens and politicians in Spain: How strategic communication could build confidence or distrust in the covid-19 pandemic?

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Introduction and purpose of the study

On 14th March 2020, Spain decreed its first state of alarm, which substantially paralysed all economic and social activity, leading to the confinement of all people, with some exceptions. After three waves of contagion, with an ever-increasing incidence, citizens seem to prioritise social and personal contacts, the source of transmission, over prudence in the face of the risk of infection.

The increasing number of infections and deaths over the three waves raises questions about the reasons why messages have not been sufficiently persuasive; when communication ceased to be strategic and may have led to pandemic fatigue (WHO, 2020) and increased distrust of governments, the virus and vaccination.

The causes may be varied, but in this paper, we will focus on the possible lack of political and communicative leadership of both national and regional governments; on the quality and effectiveness of the messages sent to the population. And we will focus on finding out whether there is a correlation between the communication strategy of political leaders, with unclear and contradictory messages, the behavior and growing distrust of citizens and the consequences of three waves of contagion, each one more serious and lethal.

Literature review

In order to carry out the paper we started from different studies on social trust and strategic communication. On the one hand, during the COVID-19 pandemic, regions with higher confidence in the health care system are more likely to reduce mobility once the government mandates that its citizens are not to leave home except for essential trips, compared to those with lower health care system confidence (Chan et al., 2020). And also, regions characterized by a low social trust witnessed a higher excess mortality during the first wave and mass polarization also played a significant role (Charro, Lapuente & Rodríguez-Pose, 2020). On the other hand, covid-19 crisis has elements in common with risk communication (Glik, 2007) and crisis communication in organizations (Millar & Heath, 2004), but many aspects bring it closer to public relations and strategic communication management where messages and audiences are key to success.

Methodology

This research analyses the key messages pronounced by the national government, the spokesperson of the ministry and the autonomous governments for one year taking the 14th March 2020 as first benchmark. It will also be analyzed the evolution of Spanish public opinion during this time on the perception of the pandemic, vaccination and the behaviour that has led to three waves of contagion. Special emphasis will be placed on the analysis in those territories where infections have been diametrically opposed to each other to see whether communication has been a consequence of the increase or containment of the virus.

Results and Conclusions

The expected results and conclusions will allow us to reaffirm some of the theories that highlight communication strategy as a key aspect in dealing with a situation of risk or prolonged crisis, such as the covid-19 pandemic.

Practical and Social Implications

It is hoped to discover how proper use of communication with citizens can be a key tool for saving lives and using resources efficiently.

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Rejecting communication. When facts are "manipulated" and "manufactured"

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In recent times, the reputation of the communications sector has come under the spotlight as a consequence of Brexit, global politics and the pandemic. Trust in the sector has been compromised as a result of the actions and inaction of major institutions who, in theory, should know better. Society has experienced first-hand the consequences of leadership, decisionmaking, communication and ethical standards in organisations. Some experiences have been positive, others negative – and for communicators, negative incidents are remembered by peers and stakeholders.

Communication, some say, boils down to "getting people to do what you want them to do" (Tolley, 1988, p. 4) and involves the creation of arguments based on "the interpretation and communication of scientific evidence in relation to concepts of the truth" (L'Etang, 2001, p. 158). Arguments can be strong or weak. Strong arguments are logical, truth-based and robust, in other words flawed reasoning is absent. Weak arguments on the other hand use logical fallacies and flawed logic to appear stronger than they actually are. (Sesonske, 1968, p. 217 to 231). Critics point out that logical fallacy based communication fractured US politics, influenced the outcome of the UK's Brexit referendum and has enabled the rise of conspiracy movements for decades demonstrating that the selective use of information divides and polarises stakeholder groups (Rose, 2017, p. 556).

The normalisation of logical fallacies (intentional or not) casts doubt on the motivation and credibility of those involved in the design and dissemination of information because communication which contradicts and lacks clarity creates confusion (Blake, 2018). Fake news hiding under a veneer of authenticity is commonplace (Tandoc, Lim and Ling, 2018, pp. 137–153) and the blurred lines between trust, fact, evidence and fallacy has been experienced by at global and grass-roots level in political dialogue and during the pandemic. The resulting confusion undermines trust in the communications profession and the integrity of information circulated.

When communication works well, it is invisible and often taken for granted by internal and external stakeholders. However, on occasions when things to go wrong, the problem is often fault-based and framed as inept or clumsy communication, a job 'anyone' can do.

So what happens when organisations communicate messages which contradict and confuse stakeholders and what needs to be in place to move all parties along the path of change. Democratisation of media and technology platforms and citizen as communicator has created a paradigm where information sharing takes place in real time and not necessarily authenticated. What is said, is not necessarily true creating a situation where citizens do not know what to believe and abusers of information leverage information gaps to manipulate beliefs.

This paper shares examples of communication best practise and questionable with vulnerable groups and proposes a path forward to thwart the normalisation of logical fallacies in the sector and builds on calls for communicators to be positioned intermediaries managing mistrust and the balance of power (Bourne, 2013, p. 72) because communication is "anything but harmonious" (Hoffmann, 2019, p. 301). Although communicators are well placed to address this issue, trust is compromised because some high profile communicators have been identified as enablers of disinformation. It asks the sector to work together and take on board President Biden's call to "reject the culture in which facts themselves are manipulated and even manufactured"(Biden, 2021, p. 2)

Keywords: *trust, mistrust, communication, public relations, power dynamics*

Remote working during the COVID-19 crisis: The impact of communication and support on employees' perception of social isolation, their perceived productivity and their work satisfaction

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and consequential restrictions to social and economic life brought a sharp rise in the number of employees working from home in 2020/21. Remote working has been steadily gaining popularity in the past decades, but was delimited to a certain group of employees (teleworkers), who at least to some degree had deliberately chosen this working mode. Remote working brings about various advantages such as increased autonomy and flexibility, but can also result in a feeling of social isolation for some workers. The risk of social isolation should become more severe, when employees are forced into remote working, as it was and still is the case during the COVID-19 pandemic. Toscana and Zappalá (2020) give first evidence for feelings of isolation and negative work-related outcomes among Italian employees working from home during the lockdown in spring 2020. In the light of these downsides of remote working, this study is interested in possible remedies by answering the following research question:

RQ: What effects do communication and support by co-workers and supervisors have on employees' perception of social isolation, their remote working productivity and their work satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Literature review

Prior research defined workplace social isolation as "a psychological construct that describes employees' perceptions of isolation from the organization and from co-workers" (Marshall, Michaels, & Mulki, 2007: 198) and demonstrated its negative effects on job performance and satisfaction (e.g., Orhan, Rijsman, & van Dijk, 2016). Workplace relations and exchanges are regularly examined within the framework of social exchange theory. High-quality social exchanges have been shown to generate various positive outcomes (e.g., higher productivity, commitment, work satisfaction) in the organizational context. Such succeeding interactions stem from reciprocal exchanges of resources (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). While providing employees with economic resources is generally important,

for employees working from home symbolic resources that are typically mediated through verbal or paralinguistic behaviors should be specifically meaningful. In this study, we consider two categories of symbolic resources that an employee can receive in interactions with supervisors and co-workers: (1) communication quality, which is reflected in a well-flowing exchange of relevant information, both formal and informal, and (2) support, which comprises aspects like care, appreciation and encouragement. It is hypothesized that the provision of these resources reduces the perception of social isolation and its negative effects on work-related outcomes. Furthermore, positive direct effects on productivity and satisfaction are expected.

Methodology

To test the assumed relationships, data were collected from employees in the United Kingdom (UK) through an online survey. Respondents (N=304) were recruited via Clickworker between November 12 and 15, 2020, one week after a second nation-wide lockdown was imposed. The sample was nearly gender-balanced, and respondents came from various sectors and different-sized organizations.

Results & Conclusion

Data were analyzed with a structural equation modeling approach. As control variables, we included age, gender, household size, working hours, pre-existing experience with remote working, and organizational tenure. Both, the measurement model (CFI = .954; RMSEA = .053; SRMR = .054) and the structural model (CFI = .959; RMSEA = .042; SRMR = .044) reached a good fit to the data.

First of all, the results indicate that remote working increased employees' perception of social isolation (β = .20, p <.01). In line with previous research, this perception of isolation negatively affected perceived productivity (β =

-.23, p <.001) and work satisfaction (β = -.24, p <.001). Concerning possible remedies, two significant effects emerged: Co-worker communication quality reduced the perception of isolation (β = -.35, p <.01), thereby indirectly affecting the outcome variables positively. Supervisor support had a direct positive effect on employees' satisfaction (β = .23, p <.001).

Based on the data, it was high-quality communication from co-workers and not the more emotional resource support that could prevent an employee from feeling isolated. An explanation could be that keeping track helps employees to continue feeling integrated in the organization and to sustain productivity and satisfaction. Support from supervisors, however, could directly enhance satisfaction during remote working.

Implications

Remote working can result in employees' perceptions of isolation from an organization and colleagues. Maintaining physical offices, where employees can routinely and, even more important, spontaneously interact and exchange relevant resources, is not to underestimate. Any post-pandemic changes towards more remote working need to establish measures and platforms that compensate for spatial and temporal distance and ensure well-flowing horizontal communication. Experiences from the pandemic need to be thoroughly evaluated with that concern.

The cross-sectional design of the study is a limitation, as it does not allow to account for longitudinal effects due to learning or adaption during remote working.

Keywords: *Remote working, social isolation, communication quality, support*

40 Years of Public Relations with MLB's Chicago White Sox – 1981-2021

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Introduction

Jerry Reinsdorf took over as owner of Major League Baseball's Chicago White Sox in 1981 and he has endured to become the longest tenured owner in the league. With an acute understanding of the value of public relations, Reinsdorf's time with the White Sox has been marked by success on and off the field. Starting from modern times and working backwards, the team is emerging from a tear-down rebuild – one that received significant support from White Sox communications and PR (Isaacson, 2018) – to become a World Series contender heading into the 2021 season in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. The team's rebuilding period, which took place between 2016-2019, followed an 8-year period when the team had the most famous fan in the country, then President Barack Obama (Berkow, 2010). In 2005, the team won its first World Series title since 1917. Since MLB started a "final man vote" that allowed fans to determine the final member of the All-Star team in each league, the White Sox have won the contest four times, more than any other team. Each voting opportunity has been supported by a flash promotional campaign, and the team's 2005 work was profiled by *PR Week* (Frank, 2005). In 1988 the team was deeply involved in a political controversy when it threatened to move to Tampa/St. Petersburg, Fla., unless it was supported with public financing to replace aging Comiskey Park. The PR and political campaign was successful when a last second vote in the Illinois legislature secured the team's future in Chicago (Hart, 2018).

What role has the senior PR staff played in supporting and advising the Chicago White Sox during this 40-year period? Scott Reifert, the team's current senior VP of communications, has been with the Sox since the early-1990s and is credited with reorganizing and expanding staff capacities, developing a direct link between PR and top management, and, most recently, developing communication strategy during Covid-19. In the late 1980s, Paul Jensen helped support communication efforts surrounding the new Comiskey Park vote. Chuck Shriver, who began his PR work with the Chicago Cubs in the 1960s and worked for legendary White Sox owner Bill Veeck, managed the initial PR efforts when Reinsdorf's ownership group took over.

Methodology

This case analysis will combine a review of existing media coverage and team publications (e.g., media guides) with six already completed depth interviews among current and former PR staff. The six interviews cover 40 years of PR work by the team. The case method and supporting interviews permit a thorough review of primary source material that is typically hard to access. The primary goal of the project is to explore the strategic and tactical changes to PR efforts across a broad time period. Due to the profound impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic during the last year – the team played without fans in 2020 and negotiations are currently underway concerning

procedures for 2021 – a particular focus will be on communication with key stakeholders during that timeframe.

Results/Conclusions

Initial results of the research indicate a team that has been progressive with its PR efforts during the past 15-20 years. It has reacted to social media opportunities and the declining influence of traditional media and print journalism by developing its own in-house media team. While navigating the recent team re-build, the PR staff took a proactive approach with a focus on transparency that positively influenced the media and fan narrative. Many of the team's most successful creative efforts were a result of careful planning to maximize media exposure. Additional research will be completed related to team reactions to Covid-19 heading into the 2021 season.

Practical Implications

Professional sport organizations are understudied in the field of public relations. Oftentimes, academic researchers struggle to gain access to the organizations, and the professional PR/communication staff members rarely participate in industry trade or academic associations. A case method with proper access provides insights into the PR efforts of a professional sport organization that would otherwise be difficult to obtain, and an understanding of how a popular organization reacts to trends in the PR field has value inside and outside of the classroom.

Keywords: *Sports Public Relations*

Antecedents and Consequences of Dialogic Communication on Social Media. Findings from a Survey among Communication Professionals

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Introduction and Purpose

Platforms such as Facebook or Instagram have enriched the ways how companies manage relationships with relevant publics. Hence, corporate relationship management is facing a new dynamic on social media, which is based on the daily dialogic communication between users and individual PR professionals on behalf of the company. Such direct forms of interaction require "a bottom-up and top-down capacity in order to cultivate a *dialogic culture*" (Ihlen & Levenshus, 2017, p. 227). For this reason, this study aims to explore the antecedents and consequences of company-public dialogic communication on social media with special regard to often neglected aspects of organizational culture.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Numerous studies on external communication have found that dialogic communication is an precondition for sustainable organization-public relationships. However, this research—which is mainly based on content analyses—often neglects antecedents of dialogic communication. In contrast, research from internal communication emphasizes the relevance of supportive organizational culture for the quality of employee relationships and symmetrical employee communication. Although surveys are more established in internal communication research, effects on external communication and external relationships are under-examined.

As the idea of mutual support is anchored in both supportive organizational culture and dialogic communication, it is aimed to bridge the gap between internal and external communication research. Specifically, this study examines positive effects of internal supportive organizational culture on companies' symmetrical (H1) and dialogic communication (H2) as well as on the state of company-public relationships on social media (H3). Additionally, effects of dialogic communication on company-public relationships (H4) and effects of symmetrical communication on dialogic communication (H5) are tested.

Method

To test the hypotheses, we conducted an online survey among corporate social media communication professionals in Germany (October 2020 – February 2021; $n = 151$). The items for measuring supportive organizational culture (Sarros et al., 2005), symmetrical communication (Kang & Park, 2017), dialogic communication (Yang et al., 2015), and company-public relationships (Jo, 2006) were derived from the literature and adapted for the context of this study.

Results and Conclusions

Structural equation modeling is used to examine the hypothesized effects. The model supports all five hypotheses ($\chi 2(1, n = 151) = .054, p = .816$, CFI = 1.000, RMSEA = .000, SRMR = .004) (see Figure 1). Moreover, the analysis reveals emphasizes the mediating role of dialogic company-public communication between supportive organizational culture and the state of company-public relationships. Based on these results, the importance of an internal and external culture of mutual support must be highlighted. Its direct and indirect significance for the relationships between companies and their external publics on social media indicates that an internal culture of support is reflected externally, which has strategic potential for a successful relationship management.

Practical Implications

This study points out the need for a more integrative perspective when studying dialogic communication on social media. From a practical point of view, it is recommended that companies carefully recruit and train their social media professionals when it is aimed to foster sustainable relationships on social media.

Although the study contributes to close the gap between internal and external communication research, the results are mainly limited by the self-report character of this study. Hence, future research should validate these findings by triangulation approaches combining content-analytical and survey-based data.

Keywords: *Dialogic Communication, Company-Public Relationships, Organizational Culture, Symmetrical Communication, Social Media*

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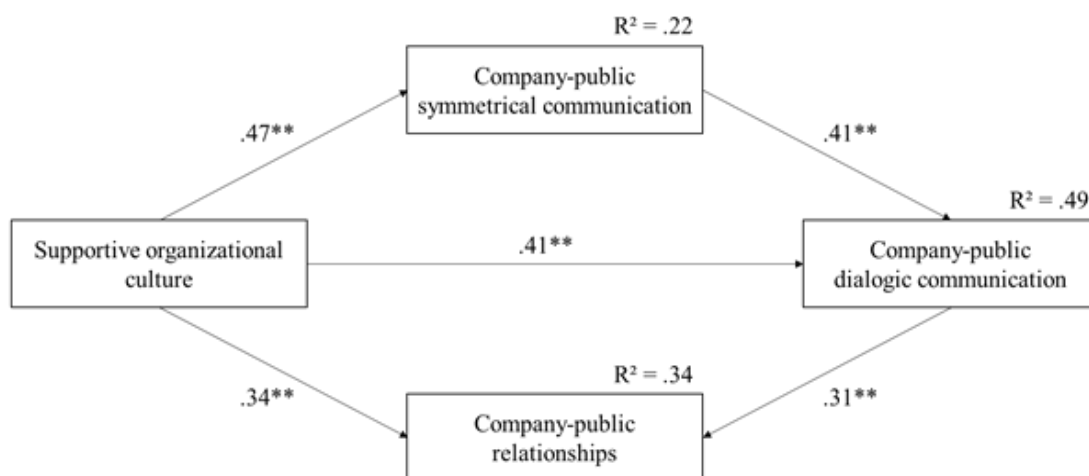
Model fit: χ2(1, n = 151) = .054, p = .816, CFI = 1.000, RMSEA = .000, SRMR = .004
Standardized beta coefficients; 95% confidence intervals for indirect effects based on 1,000 bootstrap samples
* p < .05, ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Figure 1. Path model for the antecedents and consequences of dialogic communication

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The Science Of Risk Mitigation For Strategic Integrated Communications

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Introduction and Purpose

This proposal is to present a years-long research project that answers critical outstanding questions that are existential threats to the continued prosperity of the industry. It seeks to challenge existing assumptions and test academic theory and operationalized practice across the full spectrum of communications disciplines to research whether there is a way to mitigate and remove the risks associated with a communications strategy.

The research project sought to investigate whether it was possible to create a systematically organized body of knowledge for forming testable hypotheses and strategic predictions, that would allow both seasoned practitioners and entrepreneurs to improve the effectiveness of public relations and marketing strategies. It also sought to explore how closer cooperation between communications disciplines could deliver mutual benefit.

In addition, it sought to address key barriers to adoption: primarily affordability and accessibility and sought to make the work that public relations and marketing practitioners undertake more transparent. It was the purpose of the research to investigate current metrics and seek a measurement system that enable communications strategies to be measured both in terms of progress towards the desired outcome as well as business impact.

Methodology

The research was conducted via a combination of desk research, studying existing academic research, combined with conducting hundreds of scientifically-designed experiments to test hypotheses and learn from their outcomes.

As part of the research discipline models were created along with a series of visual tools for enabling data to be collected, collated and applied in a scientific way. It was also considered whether the development of a new communications ontology that organized key data points in a strategic hierarchy could help reduce the risks of strategic communications failing to deliver specific goals and outcomes and whether it would be possible to create repeatable patterns in order to reduce unnecessary risks.

Results and Conclusions

The research concluded that the primary causes of risk for strategic communications effectiveness are unvalidated strategic assumptions, a singular focus on disciplines (rather than on as part of an integrated approach) and the fact that communications is often disconnected from other business functions and, as a result, is not seen as a strategic management function by non-practitioners.

This presentation will showcase how practitioners can reduce strategic risk from integrated communications by addressing these three risks, and present a new scientific methodology that

allows assumptions to be identified, tested in order that they can be mitigated or removed as an integral part of strategy development and implementation.

It will explain the risks associated with each discipline and the compound risks that result from un-mitigated risks in interrelated disciplines - and a system for identifying risky strategic assumptions and mitigating these risks, present a new scientific approach and a new strategic communications ontology.

The presentation will also present a new fully-integrated risk mitigation toolkit that can be used to implement new risk mitigation strategies, including risk-mitigation matrices that allow key data points to be collected, organized and tested. At the heart of each decision matrix is the 'build, measure, learn' process first applied to product development as part of Lean Startup® Methodology that enables practitioners to validate or disprove each of the strategic communications assumptions in order that risk can be minimized and the chances of building an effective strategy for achieving a defined business outcome to be increased.

A summary of the research can be found at thinkdifferently.ca/thescienceofcomms

Robinhood on Reddit: A Case Study of Triangular. Dynamics of Internal and External Publics

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Introduction & Purpose of Study

Historically, an organization's relationships with its external publics have been described and understood as two-way interactions between it and its customers or its activist publics. In networked digital media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and Reddit, which has been recently featured in the media, employees or investors (internal publics) have for some time now had the ability, to simultaneously engage in communicative interactions directly with external stakeholders and with their own organization. This study explores the disposition of three-way communicative actions unfolding on networked digital platforms and their affect on the practice of public relations. The purpose of this study is to further develop burgeoning theory in the exploration of three-way symmetric communication as a public relations concept.

Literature Review

Employees of companies with which they have poor relationships may express their discontent online. They may blow whistles, leak information, exaggerate problems or the severity of their consequences, or otherwise collaborate with external publics against their companies' management. This phenomenon has been described in previous research as *megaphoning* (Kim & Rhee, 2011). Two-way symmetric communications have been identified through previous research to be the preferred evolutionary state of public relations practice (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 2013). The triangular model (Kaufman & Kim, 2020) used in this research separates the organization, previously viewed somewhat monolithically, into its constituent management and internal publics and then assesses communicative actions between the three nodes of the triangle (including external publics) across different time periods, as opposed to viewing those actions as occurring strictly between organization and external publics directly.

Methodology

Recent events have offered an organization—Robinhood—and crisis unfolding on the social media app Reddit, on which to apply and test our model. Robinhood, is a stock trading mobile application used to quickly trade stocks, securities and cryptocurrencies from mobile phones. The crisis we study began on January 28, 2021, when Robinhood suspended its users' access to buying stock in GameStop, a company that is experiencing a bizarre tug-of-war between hedge fund investors and an organized group of activist traders who have gathered on the Reddit WallStreetBets thread. Robinhood's move was widely seen externally as a kind of underhanded, and perhaps even illegal, method of propping up the hedge funds who experienced sizable losses due

to the artificial inflation of the stocks they have shorted. This prompted a new thread on Reddit, populated by self-declared Robinhood employees. They spoke out about what they agreed was a decision by their organization to unfairly tip the scales against its own customers.

We document this case and investigate Robinhood's internal publics through a narrative of their adversarial communicative actions on Reddit. The reaction to those megaphone actions will be assessed through a survey of Robinhood customers. We will use Amazon MTurk to obtain a sample of 300 customers. Their relationship to, and opinion of, the organization will be measured at the outset. We will then expose the subjects to some actual megaphoning examples from the Robinhood employees, and then we will measure again the quality of their relationship to Robinhood, to gauge the megaphoning effects in the eyes of external publics, as well as how they see the response from the organization.

Results and Conclusions

This research is ongoing, and will be completed in the spring. We expect our research questions to yield important confirmational data on the existence and use of triangular models to describe the relationships and implications that exist between organizations, their internal and external publics.

Practical and Social Implications

Using the lens of the triangular model presented in this study, we test the theoretical concept of three-way symmetric communication, as well as its moderating effect on the crisis and on the issues unfolding in a networked digital platform. In addition to ongoing research to investigate the potential of the triangular models, this case study will provide valuable foundational knowledge that will help to expand the theory of three-way symmetrical communications. This descriptive theory will through future research develop into a prescriptive one that public relations professionals might use to navigate complex multi-actor scenarios, which appear to be the future of networked communications.

Keywords: *communicative action, , megaphoning, relationships, triangular model, symmetric communications, ambassadorial, adversarial*

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A Triangular Model Illustration for Multi-Actor Relational Dynamics: Spillover Effects of Employee Relationship on Organization-External Public Relations via Megaphoning. Corporate Communication International, Milan, Italy. [Top Academic Research Paper]

Organization

T_{-1}
Past

T_0
Present

T_{+2}

**Triangular Model
for Multi-Actor Dynamics**

Employees

T_{+1}
Future

External Publics

ADVERSARIAL COMMUNICATIVE ACTIONS
By ANTAGONISTIC INTERNAL PUBLICS
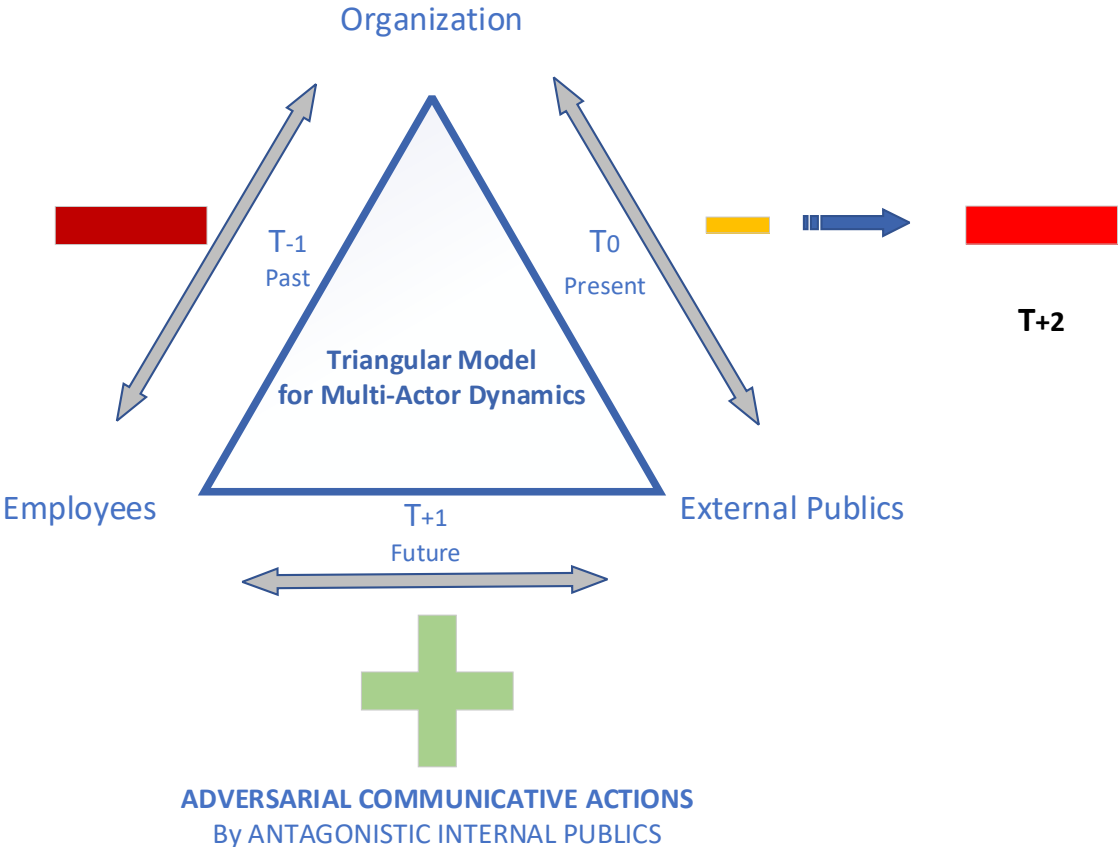
When the HOD becomes the trusted Public Relations face in a pandemic: Case of Malaysian Director-General of Health during the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic

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Malaysians depended heavily on the Director General (DG) of Health to not only manage the coronavirus pandemic, but also as the trusted source to provide credible information on the extent of the pandemic and all health related issues surrounding it, including where were the danger zones, what was being done to contain the spread, how individuals could protect themselves, and where to go for medical assistance were among the myriad demands of a society affected by a pandemic. In the early stages of the pandemic in Malaysia in 2020, the world saw Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah, the Health DG, as a "hero" who had contained the crisis by taking all the correct steps while local audiences were mesmerized by his daily TV appearance and "open" communication about the situation and the strategies taken to curb the spread. Likes and shares of his personal facebook posts on the situation spiked by the thousands while his FB followers avidly looking for trustworthy information amidst the trending plethora of misinformation reached over a million in a short space of time. He was the local star of the Covid 19 show who effectively managed the communication about the situation, not unlike Fauci as the global face. Unfortunately, in the fourth quarter of the year the local coronavirus situation took a turn for the worse. Hisham was now forced to address the situation within the context of the rising national economic and political challenges. How does a popular figure sustain his influence as the able and trusted spokesperson to communicate and manage the risks posed by the virus and the crises arising from it in the face of growing socio-economic and political crises in the nation?

This paper will address the positive contributions of the director-general's and the national health department's public relations as well as the gaps in their communications strategies since the beginning of the pandemic. Concepts of risk and crisis communication (Coombs, 2020; Zhang, Li, & Chen, 2020), and health communication (Dutta, 2008; Elers, et al, 2021; Mheidly & Fares, 2020; Servaes & Malikhao, 2010) within the body of knowledge of public relations will guide the discussion on the communication experiences during this pandemic to evaluate the contributions, gaps and impact on the trust held by the masses. The case study will employ a mixed method of qualitative interviews with the heads of public relations in the Ministry of Health as well as the Department of Health; and a qualitative content analysis of organizational

media releases, news reports and the Facebook postings of the Director General to provide a comprehensive understanding of the efficacy of the communication strategies employed in the face of the pandemic. The results will provide a cultural perspective of the impact of trusted individuals in a health crisis and the implications of communication strategies employed to sustain the trust of the head of the health department. The limitation of this study for risk and crisis communication theory is that as a single case study the findings will only provide the experiences in a specific context. However, it will add to the body of knowledge by providing an example of a cultural perspective to how communication was leveraged during a global pandemic health crisis, which can offer potential implications for practice.

Keywords: *Health crisis communication, pandemic, Malaysian Director General of Health*

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Symmetry, Inclusion, and Workplace Conflicts: Conflict Management Effects of Two Managerial Strategies on Employee Advocacy and Departure

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Introduction

Workplace conflict bogs down in organizational processes. It increases divisive culture and psychological distancing and dampens morale and collaboration among employees. Organizations may fail in the absence of managerial strategies for internal conflict. In the present study, we identified two strategies for safeguarding and moderating risks in workplace conflict: communication strategy (symmetrical communication) and behavioral management strategy (inclusive management). We examined the effectiveness of the strategies on two employee behaviors: job turnover and employee advocacy.

Literature Review

Symmetrical communication is one of the key components of internal employee communication (Men, 2014). Organizations that implement symmetrical communication in employee communication programs are decentralized and give employees autonomy within the organization. In addition, organizations with organic structures, participative culture, and inclusivity are more likely to practice symmetrical communication

with their employees (J. E. Grunig, 1992, L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002).

Inclusive management is a way of enacting shared value systems when an organization faces uncertainty in decisional situations. Inclusive management seeks to account for and be accountable for all those affected by organizational choices and actions. In employee relations, it is critical to creating an organizational culture and internal procedures so that employee voices are heard and employee needs and wants are incorporated. The IABC Excellence study (L. A. Grunig et al., 2002) found that in the most effective of over 300 organizations, CEOs and leaders create and embrace an organic structure and participative culture that involve public relations in the decision-making process.

Research Questions and Method

Given a wide range of company size, we first examined if workplace conflict is a general phenomenon across companies of all size. Therefore, the following hypothesis that investigates of a universality of workplace conflict is put forth. If the hypothesis is not supported, it is necessary to

investigate factors affecting organizational success in the face of workplace conflict.

- H1. Top companies and non-top companies have a difference in terms of frequency or likelihood of workplace conflicts.

- We further established four hypotheses about how symmetry and inclusion affect employees' behaviors if the workplace conflict prevails at any company.

- H2. The more symmetrical communication in the workplace, the less likely the employee job turnover intent.

- H3. The more symmetrical communication in the workplace, the more likely the employee pro-organizational megaphoning.

- H4. The more inclusive management in the workplace, the less likely the employee job turnover intent.

- H5. The more inclusive management in the workplace, the more likely the employee pro-organizational megaphoning.

To examine the hypotheses, an online survey was conducted. Employees from the five largest corporations (Hyundai, LG, Lotte, Samsung, and SK – top companies) and other Korean companies (non-top companies), respectively, were recruited for the survey. A total of 600 responses were collected: 300 participants from each company group (i.e., TOP5 corporations vs. others) using an online panel.

Results

The results showed that workplace conflicts did not vary by company types (t-test): top companies (M = 2.31, SD = .82) vs. non-top companies (M = 2.31, SD = .91; p > .05). Therefore, H1 was not supported. Results from a series of multiple regression demonstrated that the higher level of the symmetrical communication (β = -.14, p < .01) and the inclusive management (β = -.16, p < .01) in workplace led to employees' lower intention to leave their current jobs. In addition, the symmetrical communication (β = .23, p < .01) and the inclusive management (β = .13, p < .01) were found to strengthen employees' positive advocacy toward the company. Hence, all H2, H3, H4, and H5 were supported.

Conclusion

We explored management strategies based on symmetry and inclusion that could decrease or moderate unavoidable workplace conflict. The findings are encouraging. Symmetrical communication and inclusive management had effects on lowering employee retention and increasing their voluntary advocacy when organizations experience trouble. Furthermore, these effects on employees were shown salient regardless of the level of workplace conflicts. Therefore, organizations are recommended to aim their communication and decision cultures toward symmetricity and inclusivity when it comes to corporate communication with employees.

Keywords: *Conflict management, Employee, Inclusion, Symmetrical communication, Workplace conflict*

'Super-wicked' challenges and political communication in crisis

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Introduction, purpose and rationale (implications for academy, practice and society)

The global pandemic has put governmental and other leadership functions under unprecedented pressures. COVID-19 is a "complex problem in a complex system", as a comment in the British Medical Journal put it. In management and leadership science, such problems (from global warming to modern healthcare systems) have long been known as wicked, or even super wicked problems (Wexler and Oberlander 2020). In the late 1980s, scholars at the US Army War College coined the term VUCA for the increased volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity triggered by geopolitical disruptions. Some countries and leaders have dealt more effectively than others with the manifold, interrelated and largely unpredictable impacts of COVID-19.

This paper explores the UK Government's response to, and management of, the interconnected crises (public health, social care, education, economy, employment, to name a few) caused during the pandemic. It does so from the perspective of risk and crisis communication, as well as political communication, on the basis that the pandemic doesn't just put leadership and leadership theory to the test, but also established frameworks and theories of how to effectively communicate in an evolving crisis.

Lit review

We discuss the field of risk and crisis communication as it pertains to the present global crises. We find that established frameworks and models are not fully equipped to deal with the new class of super wicked problems, not least because of a lack of understanding of 'radical uncertainty'. We argue that existing frameworks focus on manageable (if complex) problems, whereas radically uncertain problems are fundamentally equivocal and indeterminate.

We discuss political communication and health communication as related public communication issues. In 'normal' times, public health agencies and their communication specialists operate independently of political communication, following different norms and purposes. Increasingly, at least in the UK, political communication takes the form of permanent campaigning, prioritizing image management over information provision (Joathan and Lilleker 2020).

At a time when a severe global health crisis requires expert-led governance and information-based public health communication aiming to change behaviour on a large scale, the permanent campaigning principle of political communication is unfit for purpose.

Methodology

Based on our grounding in risk and crisis com-

munication, as well as public health and political communication, we review in depth the chronology of the UK Government's reaction to the evolving crises. We look at public announcements, information campaigns and policy decisions, and consider motivations and drivers of decision-making. Specifically, we look at the persona and role of the leader, Prime Minister Boris Johnson. We posit that his public persona, as well as the composition of his government, were suited and geared to 'making Brexit happen', but then struggled to adjust to the requirements of a global pandemic.

Where meaningfully possible, we compare the UK's response – decision-making and impact – to that of countries which appear to have dealt more successfully with COVID-19, such as Germany and New Zealand.

Results and conclusions

Working from the analogy of close-minded ideological hedgehogs and open-minded empirical foxes, we conclude – with Philip Tetlock and Nate Silver, who both introduced the analogy in the context of data-based prediction – that a fox mindset and framework is better suited for the super wicked problems of our unpredictable VUCA world. This corresponds with an ability to adapt leadership and communication styles to problem styles along the tame – wicked – critical continuum. (Grint 2020)

In contrast, our analysis shows two sets of narrow-minded hedgehogs – a government focused on protecting their brand and projecting certainty working with advisors solely focused on the health crisis aspect of the pandemic. This approach led to confusion as soon as the complexities caused by the pandemic came into focus and the failure to meet targets became evident led to a sharp and persistent decline in support for and satisfaction with the UK's official handling of the pandemic.

Leaders and communication specialists alike increasingly need 'foxy' skills to operate between, rather than within, core functions such as risk and crisis communication, public health communication and political communication.

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Pandemic risk and crisis communication from an IGO: A case study of NATO's Public Diplomacy

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Introduction

It is no secret that The COVID 19 pandemic has affected every aspect of life including communication activities of the whole world. NATO, traditionally a military-oriented security alliance is no exception. In March 2020, this Inter-Governmental Organization's (IGO) vibrant public diplomacy programs, its press tours, and visitors' programs all came to a sudden halt. The public outreach travels of high ranking NATO officials to destinations around the globe, including to Colombia and Japan, were either cancelled or postponed while new invitations were not entertained.

Two immediate tasks rose up in front of NATO's communicators – how to shift all of its programs to a digital online mode and how to negotiate its role and communication about NATO in the midst of a global pandemic. The first task was done in a relatively fast manner. Just as many other organizations – be they national or international, private or governmental, discovered the online platforms, so did NATO's Public Diplomacy Division, NATO's main communication body. The second task was more pertinent and difficult – what is the role of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a collective defense organization whose objective is to provide for security of its 30 members states, in face of a health crisis?

NATO leadership quickly understood that NATO needs to be proactive and demonstrate both to its citizens but also adversaries that it continues to deliver on its primary role such as military operations, military exercises and other security related tasks in time of a pandemic. It should also assist its member and partners in a time of crisis. As a military Alliance, NATO owns important airlift capabilities, it has logistical and planning procedures and its members have trained military medical staff and hospitals. All of these tools were put in use immediately.

Since time was of essence, it was important to timely communicate about all of NATO's efforts in the fight against the pandemic. NATO has adopted a dual track approach to NATO's communication posture during the pandemic – proactive communication of what NATO does and of understanding the information environment in which its communication is competing with other narratives. Two strategies were adopted across all NATO's bodies - Communications Plan on NATO's Response to COVID 19 and NATO's Response to COVID19 disinformation. Both plans had clearly defined communication objectives and audiences, communication tools and techniques and evaluation and assessment to review its effectiveness at the end of the campaign. The final review is still in making but partial assessment indicates relative success of

NATO's fast and proactive communication approach in a time of an unprecedented crisis.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss NATO's strategy and public diplomacy tactics during a pandemic and analyze these based on communication theories.

Literature Review

Dhanesh and Sriramesh (2018) critiqued existing approaches to crisis communication -- particularly SCCT and the Benoit approaches – for not at all paying attention to the impact of culture on crisis communication (including risk communication). Defining culture broadly going beyond the concept studied by anthropologists to include political, economic, media, and activist cukltures (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2020), the authors critiqued the crisis that Nestle India faced with regard to a food contamination crisis in India. This paper follows that approach and seeks to explore how these five cultural variables played a role in the way NATO conducted its public diplomacy activities during this pandemic. As an IGO, NATO is immensely influenced by the political, economic, and cultural environments of member nations, which all play a role in how it can manage its relationship with member nations and also the rest of the world.

Methodology

This paper uses the case study approach. The first author is a key member of the public diplomacy activities of NATO being stationed in Brussels. This paper will only use the unclassified documents for the purpose of this paper. As needed, we may also use personal interviews for data going beyond the documents that will be reviewed. First, the paper will focus on the communication strategies that this IGO had to establish at the outset of the pandemic that upset all its established communication program. Next, the focus will be on the techniques (tactics) that NATO devised to put this communication strat-

egy into action. Third, the paper will address the challenges that NATO faced in implementing these strategies and techniques. For instance, it is well known that at least one member of the alliance, the US, did not seem to walk the same path as most NATO nations with regard to the science behind the pandemic. Finally, what lessons can we learn from the experiences of this IGO when confronted with such a global pandemic with many risk and crisis communication implications?

Practical Implications

This paper, while remaining conceptually grounded, is very much oriented to practical applications given that the first author is immersed in practice for NATO. The methodology section has outlined four key areas that this paper will address and each of these has enormous practical applications not just for NATO but for any IGO. It is hoped that the analysis emanating from this paper will inform how NATO's Public Diplomacy Division and other IGOs can learn from its activities during 2020 as it pertains to this pandemic.

Keywords: *NATO public diplomacy, Pandemic communication by IGO, Culture and Communication, Culture and Public Diplomacy*

The role of internal communication during the Covid-19 pandemic and its intertwining with public risk communication. A study on Italian companies

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Internal communication plays a relevant role during crises, since employees have a special bond with the organization and their contribution is pivotal to overcome the crisis itself. The specific nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, enforcing social distancing among employees and posing high risk to their health, has made the role of internal communication even more important. This study was aimed at outlining the role of internal communication strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic to sustain the relationship with employees. Moreover, it explored the role of internal communication strategies in its intertwining with public risk communication to support employees' understanding of the health risks associated with Covid-19 and to motivate them to adopt appropriate preventive behaviors.

Literature review

Crisis communication strategies adopted by organizations can vary along a continuum, from pure defensive strategies to pure accommodative strategies, devoted to meeting varied stakeholders' expectations (Coombs, 1998; Pang et al., 2010). A set of contingency factors can affect the adoption of these strategies (Pang et al., 2010). Organizations should also consider that employees have more intense emotional reactions to a crisis compared to external stakeholders, due to the specific nature of the relationship (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). Based on this assumption, the objectives of internal crisis communication can be targeted towards creating a sense of security, sustaining a sense of belonging and activating employees as allies of the organization (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015). Taking all this into consideration, this study argues that pure accommodative communication strategies are in principle the most desirable in internal crisis communication.

Methodology

This study was conducted among Italian organizations and included: a preliminary qualitative

phase through two focus groups and ten individual interviews with internal communication managers; and a quantitative phase through a survey on a sample of 116 internal communication managers recruited through a snow-ball sampling technique.

Results and conclusions

Results show that Italian companies tended to adopt accommodative strategies of corrective action and cooperation aimed at creating a sense of security among employees, at sustaining their sense of belonging towards the organization, and at activating employees as allies of the organization. In particular, organizations took into consideration the high relevance of the stake of employee health and safety to make their decisions about internal communication strategies, and this factor led organizations towards employing an accommodative approach. Specifically, creating a sense of security among employees implied clarifying the measures undertaken by authorities to reduce Covid-19 infections and adapting such measures to the organizational context, as well as informing employees about preventive behaviors to adopt at work. In this way, while internal communication managers had to face the challenges of communicating in an uncertain information framework and of transferring complex and ever-changing content, internal communication helped employees deal with the external infodemic and better understand how to behave correctly to reduce health risks. The study has some limitations: it was based on a non-probabilistic sample and collected data only in Italy. Future research could help overcome such limitations and reinforce these study findings by employing probabilistic sampling and replicating the study in different national contexts.

Practical and social implications

Considering the particular relationship with employees and the contribution that internal communication can give to sustain employee engagement, managers should always consider an accommodative approach when managing internal crisis communication, especially when a relevant stake such as employee health and safety is at risk. At the societal level, it is worth considering the role that organizations can play to complement and reinforce public risk communication: through their internal communication, organizations can contribute to make their employees more aware of public health risks and help them understand the importance of adopting preventive behaviors both at work and in their private sphere.

Keywords: *Internal Crisis Communication, Accommodative Strategies, Covid-19 Pandemic*

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#adidasgate and Crisis Award Winners: Excellence within Corporate Communication during the Covid-19 Crisis

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Introduction and purpose of the study

"These recent months have seen corporate reputations made. And corporate reputations wrecked," says Francis Ingham, Director General of the Public Relations and Communications Association. It is without question that the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic poses significant challenges for the corporate communication sector. Depending on whether these challenges were met successfully, the pandemic crisis has strained or strengthened relations with stakeholders. However, more than one year into the crisis, there is still little data available on how affected companies communicated throughout the crisis. This paper therefore explores corporate crisis communication strategies in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. It will also investigate the role of excellence in Public Relations with regard to crisis outcomes.

Literature review

Companies across the globe have been affected by the pandemic economically and/or epidemiologically, causing countless organizational crises as well. So far, one mostly relies on anecdotal evidence with regard to corporate crisis responses and their effect on reputation, often stressing the importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (e.g. He & Harris, 2020).

To achieve a more differentiated understanding of an effective corporate communication throughout the crisis, one first has to understand how an organization is affected. The paper therefore draws from Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) to distinguish victim, accidental, and preventable crisis clusters (Coombs, 2007, p. 168). Depending on the cluster, communication professionals can choose from a variety of response strategies that predict the best possible outcome for the organization.

In combination with analyzing corporate crisis response strategies, the paper will use excellence theory in public relations and communication management (Grunig & Dozier, 2002) to understand in how far empowerment of public relations function, communicator roles, organization of communication function and understanding of PR models are relevant for successful communication management during a crisis.

Methodology

The study entails three steps: 1) selection of contrasting case studies based on some of the most prominently discussed positive and negative examples of Corporate Crisis Communica-

tion; for Germany, UK and the U.S., one positive and one negative case will be defined (N= 6). 2) Qualitative content analysis of all related press releases and selected social media posts between March and December 2020 to reconstruct the narratives according to SCCT implemented by affected companies. 3) Analysis of indicators based on excellence theory in press releases and/or additional publicly available sources.

Results and conclusions

Preliminary findings from two German cases show that different crisis response strategies indeed led to different outcomes and were closely linked to excellence aspects. For instance, the first Covid-19 cases in Germany were detected at the automotive supplier Webasto, resulting in a victim crisis. Thanks to a strong empowerment of the PR function and a quick and transparent communication, the company was able to protect and enhance its reputation – and even won awards with this approach. Contrastingly, the sporting goods manufacturer Adidas created a preventable crisis by deferring the rent for its European stores, which was widely criticized. Judging from the company's communication history, it seems that initially a lower management level was involved in the communication and only in the end the CEO got involved and decided to continue the payment and issue an apology.

To conclude, our analysis illustrates that for affected companies, the pandemic crisis can be both a chance to build and extend a positive reputation, but also poses a significant reputational threat.

Limitations

A limitation lies in the fact that the study focuses only on six case studies. In addition, all observations concerning the excellence perspective will be only external and will need to validated with internal interviews in the future.

Practical and social implications

The analysis show that 1) the main factors for a successful crisis communication are defined a long time ahead of the crisis and 2) the combination of SCCT and excellence theory provides a powerful tool to improve crisis preparedness and response.

Keywords: *crisis communication, pandemic, communication management, excellence theory*

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Communication leadership in extraordinary times : exploring the role and work of female communications leaders during the coronavirus pandemic

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Introduction: a pandemic tale

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic has been a global phenomenon with at the time of writing over 100 million cases of coronavirus and over 2 million reported deaths worldwide [WHO]. `Here the USA heads the grim league table of coronavirus attributed deaths with over 400,000 deaths, followed by Brazil [219,000], India [154000] , Mexico [152000] and then the UK [103 000] . The worry around the world has been the arrival of a second wave of an even more contagious strain of coronavirus which has threaten to overwhelm the health-care systems in many countries. The discovery and approval of a number of coronavirus vaccines has offered some' light at the end of a very dark tunnel' but production and distribution issues have left most countries playing ' catch up' in a race to try to get ahead of and stem the growing tide of infections.

While governments around the world have committed resources on an unprecedented scale in an attempt to combat the coronavirus and treat those infected; most governments have also recognised the huge economic damage and cost of these measures, which threaten to bring about one of the worst economic recessions across the world since the Seventeenth Century. The

UK government [mirrored by similar measures in the USA and other countries] has introduced a wide range of measures to address the sharp economic decline and prop-up failing sectors of business , ranging from a hugely expensive furlough scheme, and loan guaranteed scheme to support large swathes of business at risk of permanent closure. The total cost of these measures has been forecast to increase public debt to around £2.63 trillion by 2024 (Office for Budget Reasponsibility, OBR)

The lockdown and other restrictive measures have had a profound effect on many business sectors notably, travel and tourism and hospitality, leisure and professional services have suffered devastating losses and closures, others such as online retailing and gaming have boomed. One of the most profound changes enforced by the pandemic has been in the way many businesses have been forced to fundamentally change how they organise and manage their operations as well as their interaction with their stakeholders Remote working has become almost the norm, with virtual team meetings, online conferencing often supported by the extensive use of social media.

Research Purpose

It is against the backdrop of this radically changed business environment that this study seeks to examines the role of female communications leaders and how they have responded to the challenges and opportunities that they have faced during the coronavirus pandemic. Indeed one interesting question explored is whether female leaders are inherently more effective at the type ambidextrous virtual team management required during the pandemic than their male counterparts. The study focuses on leadership within communications / public relations teams that often provided the vital 'glue' in the form of communication support for their organisation's management strategies during the pandemic

Literature review

One consequence of the impact of the pandemic on business has been a widescale move to remote working, which involves motivating and organising virtual teams, which arguably, demands specific leadership capabilities and skills- namely the ability to respond quickly and decisively to change, while at the same time maintaining stability and continuity within the team. This type of virtual team leadership demands the ability work in a highly flexible, adaptive manner – what has been termed an 'ambidextrous approach' to management and leadership (e.g.Raisch & Birkinshaw,2008). Indeed, the notion of ambidextrous management (e.g. .Raisch & Birkinshaw,2008; Simsek , 2009) alongside that of transformational leadership, which refer to approaches that it has been argued are well suited to turbulent environments (Bass, 1990; Bass 1985; 1997; Aldoory and Toth, 2004). The latter, in particular, has been found to be more closely associated with and delivered by female leaders as they have been found to display more enabling behaviours (Powell et al, 2004; Aldoory and Toth, 2004; Brandt and Laiho, 2013). Moreover, the transformational approach is not only seen as the preferred leadership style (Aldoory, 1998; Aldoory and Toth, 2004; Werder and Holtzhausen, 2009; Jin,2010; Wu,2010) but is also strongly associated with effective PR leadership (Yang, 2012; Berger and Meng, 2014)

Methodology

This paper draws on the data collected from extended in-depth interviews with eight highly experienced female Directors of Communication each of whom had more than ten years' experience in a senior role. This qualitative approach which used thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2012; Miles and Huberman, 1994) to tease out the dominant patterns within the data enabled the researcher to probe the 'how' and 'why' of their lived experience as Directors of Communication exploring their response to and experience of leadership during the current coronavirus pandemic.

Findings and Conclusions

Because the sample of senior female communications leaders were drawn from a quite diverse sectors it was not surprising that individual leader experienced exhibited marked differences particularly in terms of the issues faced, the support provided and the freedom and scope of the actions enacted . However there were also a number of common threads uncovered notably the resilience, flexibility and sheer determination exhibited by female leaders, as well as in virtually all cases, the fierce loyalty the female leaders commanded from their teams.

Keywords: *Pandemic communications*; *ambidexterity*; *female leadership capabilities*

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Crisis Communication in Public Relations Courses: What has been changing with the pandemic COVID-19?

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

It is known that the public relations profession often involves a position of media relations. In this context, this type of expert must obtain skills in the critical and active use of media. Afterwards it arises the need to understand what kind of investment in crisis communication has been done by Portuguese Public Universities. In the past we analyzed the curricula of undergraduate and public relations master of the 15 existing Portuguese public universities to understand in what sense there is an investment of media literacy in public relations courses in Portuguese public universities. Currently and considering the context we are living we want to know what has changed and how public relations courses were prepared for crisis communication. This is because the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) significantly changed everyday practices and this is the first pandemic to be almost "livestreamed" on social media and digital platforms.

Literature Review

The literacy has been seen as a dimension of the new civilization, after the industrial revolution. In this context, this ability to work with words and images is relevant for the transmission of information and knowledge, being as a form of social hegemony. It is known that, today, 90% of the population belonging to developed countries is literate. This is because, as a rule, individuals develop their basic skills in reading, writing and calculation since the primary school (Perez-Tornero and Varis, 2010). However, new skills have begun to be required, mainly regarding aspects related to media coverage of the image and audiovisual language. It this context we must acquire the understanding of what is currently considered to be referred to media literacy (Perez-Tornero and Varis, 2010).

There are some careers in which it is important to have media literacy, particularly those that are inserted in the area of communication sciences. The public relations function is one of them, because these types of professionals must purchase a set of critical analysis skills related to the media. In this sense, there is an urgent need to make related decisions to choosing the right channel to reach the audience; understand how multiple channels (email, brochures) reinforce the message (Wilcox and Cameron, 2009).

Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation of social alarm corresponded to a situation of communication crisis for which the organi-

zations did not have response plans (Ortuño, Rincón & Ferreira, 2021). A study carried out recently in Portugal showed that in times of pandemic, the individuals consumed information from all available sources (television, social networks, digital newspapers and the Internet), but attributed greater credibility to conventional media - television and newspapers (Ferreira, 2021; Serrano, 2021). Social networks, although regularly consulted, were trusted by a minority. These data show the need to consider people capable of disseminating information, especially in times of crisis (Ferreira, 2021). Thereby, it becomes increasingly important to understand what is the investment that has been made, in academic terms, in the Public Relations Degrees, to realize, too, the long-term impact this has for public relations professionals.

Methodology

In the present research, a mixed methology was used. In this way, we conducted interviews with university professors and questionnaires with public relations students. These interviews and questionnaires were complementary to try to understand if there has been any change in the study plans of these courses, in the sense of a greater investment in crisis communication. This research had a total of 110 individuals: 10 university professors and 100 students. The interviews had a semi structured character and we conducted a content analysis, in order to divide the speech into different categories. The questionnaires were analyzed using the SPSS statistical program and with descriptive statistics.

Results and Conclusions

It was possible to perceive that the students and the professors report that there have been some changes in the sense of a greater concern in talking about issues related to crisis communication. Although there has not yet been a reformulation of the study plans, as we are still expe-

riencing a pandemic context. However, there is a growing concern to take crisis communication into account. these conclusions will be stronger when the pandemic ends, in which we can verify if there was indeed a reformulation of the study plans at this level.

Practical and Social Implications

Considering the investment that is being made by universities with regard to crisis communication, may be important to act more efficiently and effectively in the future. Current public relations students are the professionals of the future. In this sense, it is essential that they develop the skills to know how to act in times of crisis. It is known that many of the risk behaviors that have been identified at this level are due to misinformation by people. In this case, the public relations professionals playing a fundamental role, because they may help policy makers to disseminate more coherent and less confusing information to citizens.

Keywords: *Public Relations*; *Crisis Communication*; *COVID*-19; *Universities*

Personality Traits and Value of Corporate Apology: An Experimental Study in the Aviation Industry

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Crises are processes where everything that organizations say and do are carefully monitored by stakeholders and society. Therefore, this situation requires organizations to act much more carefully and with care in their crisis communication processes. Explanations and statements that are misunderstood can cause further crises. This can have further negative effects than the original crisis itself. The destructive effects of crisis can be reduced by effective crisis management processes. The organizations should be prepared for crises and they should manage it by implementing the appropriate strategy, taking into consideration the impact of different types of crises and public attribution. That is to say that each crisis requires different management in terms of its features and scope. In this context, which strategy will be more effective in which crisis situation constitutes the problematic. In addition to this, the socio-cultural characteristics of the country where the crisis takes place are also among the other determinants of the reactions to the crises. We can include personality traits as another factor. The purpose of this study is to understand the reactions of publics to different corporate apology strategies of the aviation industry. Which type of corporate apology works well with which type of crisis? In addition to this, another purpose of the study is to understand if different personality types react differently to the corporate apologies, in other words, is there a link between personality of the individual and their preferred corporate apology?

Literature Review

Crises can be categorized as internal or external depending on whether the crisis is initiated through inside or outside actions. They can be also classified as intentional or unintentional (Marsen, 2020). Chung and Lee (2021) have studied how corporate apologies influence cognitive and affective public responses during an aviation crisis, examining responsibility and sympathy- oriented apologies with internal and external crisis situations. In our study, we will replicate their study for aviation crisis in our home country with slight modifications and include personality types and preferred corporate apology.

Methodology

The research will be an experimental one where we will be writing different scripts for different crisis types. Coombs and Holladay (2009) stated that experimental method is being used increasingly to investigate crisis communication. In our study, different crisis types will be matched with

different corporate apology strategies. Through the scenarios, and the survey conducted with participants, the aim is to understand the cognitive and affective responses of the publics to these situations. The impacts of two types corporate apology which are responsibility and sympathy will be tested with two types of causal attribution which are internal and external. In the study of Chung and Lee (2020) for the internal /controllable crisis, an inexperienced pilot scenario has been created. In our study, for the internal/controllable crisis, it will be a technical malfunction. As external/uncontrollable crisis, it was bad weather, and in our scenario, this will be bad weather as well. News articles will be around these themes, and then the participants will read the corporate apology by the X Airlines. The personality characteristics will be measured by the Big Five Inventory (BFI) developed by John, Donahue and Kentle (1991). The dimensions of (BFI) are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness.

Results and conclusions

The results of the study cannot be generalized; this study may not apply to all crises contexts. The aviation industry is prone to crisis and the study will be useful for crisis communication and corporate managers. Also by examining the link between personality characteristics and the preferred corporate apology, new data will be generated on this aspect as well.

Practical and social implications

There are not many studies in our home country that use experimental methodology to study different crisis situations and corporate apology.

Keywords: *personality traits, crisis communication, corporate apology, aviation industry*

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Media Portrayal of Corona Pandemic Press Briefings by Public Health Officials: A Public Relations Approach

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Few corporate communication scholars would dispute the widespread interest in crisis and crisis-related communication in terms of the massive public and media attention crises situations generate. Arguing that covid-19 was the dominant global crisis in 2020, this study investigates how government health authorities in Kenya and Turkey responded to the pandemic by analyzing media coverage and portrayal of press briefings during the first and second waves of the pandemic early in 2020 and at the end of 2020 and early 2021, respectively. The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How did the two countries' health officials give information about the pandemic to the public with regard to; a). Specifics about the virus and risks posed to the public?; b). Factual information about the status of spread of the virus in the country, and c). Safety precautions recommended to the public? (2) From what level of government were officials who gave information on coronavirus drawn and how frequently was information given to the public? (3) How were the coronavirus briefings framed by Kenya's **Daily Nation** and Turkey's **Hurriyet Daily News** newspapers? (4) Were there significant differences in the way information on the pandemic was communicated to the public in Kenya and in Turkey?

Literature

The simpler conceptual goal of this study is to attempt a comparative investigation of how the media in two countries covered and portrayed the same global crisis. Perhaps a more important goal is an attempt a response to one of the research concerns increasingly gaining occurrence - about crisis communication research's seeming over reliance on organization-centric model of inquiry; with some scholars increasingly arguing that while this approach may be good it would not sufficiently or adequately explain plurality of voices that typically accompany many crises situations (Coombs & Holladay, 2014; Luoma-aho & Vos, 2010; Luoma-aho, Tirkkonen, & Vos, 2013, Raupp, J., 2019). Rowley (1997) developed the rather influential network theory of stakeholders as a preferable way of holistically understanding organizational behavior in times of crisis. The stakeholder theory argues that crisis communication may be better understood if viewed as a stakeholders' relationship network – no longer focusing on one organization's crisis response strategies but on "patterns of interactions" (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017 p. 148) of various voices. Main downside of the approach, however, is that not enough empirical studies have been done and data gathered (Coombs, 2014; Frandsen & Johansen, 2010). It is to this small but growing body of literature

that the present study is intended to contribute. We also use two media conceptual traditions of media framing and agenda setting on the one hand, and excellence theory and rhetorical arena theory in public relations, on the other, to investigate and analyze how the two leading newspapers in Kenya and Turkey covered and portrayed the dissemination of crisis information on coronavirus by the two countries' government health officials to their respective publics.

Method

Content analysis of two leading English language newspapers was chosen to collect data for the research. Content of the 2 selected publications would be analyzed during the 2 months peaks of the first and second wave of the corona pandemic (March/April 2020) and (December 2020 /January 2021) to investigate the media discourse on the corona pandemic as well as undertake a comparative analysis of how the selected media organizations framed the pandemic in terms of risk and seriousness of the disease, prevalence and threat(s) posed to the public and country and/or the world, and who the key government actors and stakeholders involved were. A two-step sampling procedure would be used to both identify relevant news articles about the pandemic and analyze statements within the selected articles attributed to key actors. Unit of analysis would be the headline and intro of pandemic-related stories attributed to health officials at press briefings.

Keywords: *Media framing and bias, crisis communication, excellence theory, public relations, coronavirus pandemic, rhetorical arena theory.*

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Public Relations in risk communication: a critical asset

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Introduction and purpose

The contours of the current VUCA global reality, with free circulation of individuals, information, goods and services and where digital has revolutionized interpersonal relationships and the notion of distance, democratizing access to knowledge and improved the quality of life, launched society into a normal state of uncertainty, but also of emergency and catastrophe, jeopardizing its survival. As a result we today live in what is known by risk society.

In these paradoxes lies the pertinence of studying the risk communication mechanisms and strategies carried out by a local authority to face the possible risks that citizens may be subject to. The purpose of the study is then to observe the place assigned to public relations professionals in the institutional structure and evaluate the efforts made in communicating risk by a local governmental institution. Thus the research question is: what contribution is reserved to public relations in communicating risk to citizens in the context of local government?

Believing communication is a cornerstone able to establish such favourable conditions for the relationship between institutions and their public, it is noted that there are few investigations in the area of strategic risk communication, even less in local / municipal contexts. Hence the increased interest in studying a particular case of a local government.

Literature review

It is known for a fact that the perception of risk does not generate consensus, either between the scientific community in different fields, nor between technicians and decision makers, and even not forgetting the public in the matter. There is an urgent need to share the notion of risk, bringing together the perceptions and contents of experts and normal people without knowledge in this matter. This consensus between multiple levels of expertise through an informed understanding of risk and the quality in which communication generates cooperation and social relationships is what it is called risk communication (Leiss, 1996; Kruk, 1999; Covello & Sandman, 2001; Bostrom, 2003). The practice of integrated risk communication, strategically aimed at audiences with different levels of awareness / information, constitutes an effective means for population training in understanding, assessing and acting on the risks to which it may, unfortunately, be subject. This communication is close to the ideal of risk governance characterized by bilateral communication, as a channel for the exchange of (info)training and opinions among stakeholders so that, in the end, they converge in decision making regarding the behaviours to be implemented.

Methodology

A case study will be carried out using qualitative research tools such as an audit of the commu-

nication office; SWOT analysis; content analysis to the municipality website and also its facebook; interviews with elements involved in decision-making, governance and risk communication.

Results

In the case of the municipality studied the arrangement of responsibilities and competencies, seems to safeguard a sharing of knowledge and communication skills that end up insuring and confirming the fundamental role that public relations play not only alerting citizens about risks but, above all, educating and empowering them through a logic of openness to dialogue and joint participation in risk governance.

Limitations

Some of the difficulties inherent to the present study include the restricted access to local government institutions; as well as the difficulty in obtaining the desired answers since the risk constitutes a controversial subject wrapped in a certain secrecy, or at least tends to provoke silences, which denote little opening to explore this matter in the local public sector.

Practical and social implications

As this is a reality that has been little studied and unfortunately still little valued in the decision-making and risk management processes, we hope to draw attention to the advantages and gains that public relations can bring to an integrated risk governance process. With the results and reflection on the role of public relations in risk communication in a local community, it is also expected to contribute to the establishment of a fluid strategic communication between the City Council and the surrounding community, corroborating the great responsibility that justifies the existence of a shared and empowering communication, capable of acting not only in a preventive way in face of risks but also guaranteeing the reduction of dangers and victims in situations of crisis and real danger.

Keywords: *Public Relations*; *Risk Society*; *Risk Communication*; *Local Government*

Algorithmic Profiteering and Corporate Social Activism of Video Platforms: The Effect on Social Change

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Introduction

With the rise of civil rights protests, pandemic hysteria, and a tumultuous election year in the United States, there is a climate for corporate social activism. Organizations are increasingly choosing to engage in controversial issues, diverging from the traditional business model that operates within the authority of institutional stakeholders. Video platform companies are unique in that they participate in activism with mixed motivation: providing a combination of algorithmically curated content that works in tandem with corporate activism to spark user engagement. The impact on issue progression and social change of such targeted content curation are explored through the change in attitudes and behavior of users on the controversial issues such as Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ rights.

Literature Review

Scholars identify the unconscious relationships corporations have with publics as part of an organizations' corporate social range, or CSR3 (e.g., Vercic & Grunig, 2000). In this lens, corporate social activism (CSA) is the outcome of social reasoning by management and reflects the values and ethics of the organization. Video platform companies engage in CSR3 with mixed motives, encouraging user engagement by tapping into current social issues and trends. Similar to strategic philanthropy, the focus is

profiteering of the video platforms and the participation in social justice issues. By highlighting content that potentially facilitates controversial issue discussion, video platform companies may shift user perceptions on these issues.

Recent studies observe the effects of selective exposure or selective information approach on strongly held beliefs and attitudes (e.g., Kim & Grunig, 2021). Content of stories have the potential to drive action, or to increase behavioral effects, while attachment to characters can compensate for the absence of real-life contact with disadvantaged groups, reducing support for restrictive policies (e.g., Rosenthal et al., 2020). However, persuasive communication can pose a potential threat to perceived freedom, leading to the strengthening of pre-existing attitudes (e.g., Grandpre, 2003). It is plausible that while CSA messages may be intended by companies to usher in societal change, they can also be contributing to a greater divide in issue resolution.

Research Questions and Methodology

The literature on the effects of CSA messaging on users in video platforms is limited, therefore, two research questions are examined: 1) Do corporate activist messages, delivered through genre suggestions on video platforms, influence audience viewing choices on controversial societal issues? 2) Does exposure to algorithmic and corporate activism promoted content shift audi-

ence attitudes or cause behavioral outcomes on controversial societal issues? This study will use data from the top 3 video streaming platforms in the United States. Two groups will be identified such that current subscribers of the three platforms (N=250) as well as non-subscribers (N=250) from M-turk panel. To establish the link of content consumed to activist messaging, user surveys will assess participant's contents use patterns on the streaming service, their issue stance on a variety of divisive social issues, (i.e., BLM/LGBTQ movements), and their opinion extremity and communicative actions on those issues. Controlling demographics factors and subscription history, frequency, and content inclination will be examined for their correlations with issues-stance, close-mindedness, and communicative actions on issues. Further, the two groups (subscribers with heavier selective exposure/approach to the issues versus non-subscribers) will be compared for their opinion extremity and motivated issues communicative actions.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of CSA messaging has been steadily increasing and occurs in many forms. Some would consider this type of CSA as strategic corporation social reasoning (CSR3) of Vercic (1997) and Vercic and Grunig (2000), comparable to strategic philanthropy (e.g., donation for charities). This study uses M-turk samples to focus on the consequences of CSA and algorithmic content curations (CSR3) would have for users' direction and motivation of participation to sociopolitical issues. Future research can investigate CSR3's managerial dynamics and mixed-motives (i.e., profits by preferred content curations and user gratification). There a need for a sound framework to measure the amount and type of CSA a company engages in, and this study explores and further conceptualizes the different types and impacts that CSA can have on stakeholders.

This investigation **provides a novel perspective** into the phenomenon of CSA messaging and its infusion into companies that use algorithms to stoke user engagement.

This study **adds to the knowledge** of the impact of different forms of CSA companies can engage in and the effects on the attitudes and behaviors in society on controversial issues.

This paper **identifies new research problems** in CSA communications in management motivations to participate in controversial issue messaging, risks involved, and impact on the organization and society.

Confessions from a Cliff Over the Abyss: Developing a Workshop in Public Relations Entrepreneurship During a Pandemic

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This first-person essay advocates for opening an aperture in the curtain surrounding public relations pedagogy as I reflect on developing a Workshop in Public Relations Entrepreneurship designed to prepare senior-level undergraduate students for pandemic workplace realities. Offering young professionals options is consistent with Postmodern Theory values. Paired with practical application tools, this dynamic could go a long way in helping students to navigate risk associated with graduation with no job waiting. Scans of the public relations literature suggest very little formal research about how to teach entrepreneurship and support students transitioning from classroom to business ownership. In-depth interviews with professional public relations consultants in the form of advice provided the foundation for creating content and tone for a five-week (half-term) course. The essay concludes with advice for instructors who value opportunities to coach future entrepreneurs interested in launching their own consultancy now, in the near-term future, as a side gig, later in their public relations career, or after retirement from a full-time public relations job.

Introduction

College faculty cannot ignore the socio-economic-political environment in which we teach. I pondered exactly how to support senior-level students with as many options as possible while they fretted alone in quarantine about their future. The purpose of this essay is to explain how I responded to this context and developed a Workshop in Public Relations Entrepreneurship so that I may offer advice to faculty colleagues.

- RQ1: How shall "public relations entrepreneurship" be defined?

- RQ2: How does one develop a new course in public relations entrepreneurship in unprecedented times, amidst uncertainty and fear?

Literature review

A cursory view of the public relations pedagogy body of knowledge offers little advice on how to define or teach entrepreneurship. Henderson (2001) hinted at the value consultants bring to public relations work as ad hoc "on an as-needed basis" support (p. 542) and Hindrichsen (2001) contextualized consulting work in terms of senior executives "setting up shop after losing" corporate jobs (p. 455).

The journalism pedagogy literature offers clues about the importance of teaching entrepreneurship to college students. For example, U.S.-based universities have responded to recent decades' negative journalism industry trends by creating

media entrepreneurship programs that respond to a decline of traditional journalism models and in the process have operationalized media entrepreneurship as "the creation and ownership of an enterprise whose activity adds an independent voice to the media marketplace" (Hoag, 2008, p. 74). In this context, Sindik and Graybeal (2017) advocated for collecting "international wisdom" by tapping global networks and pooling pedagogical tools to offer students the best course content on entrepreneurship (p. 163).

Method

This exploratory study is rooted in qualitative in-depth interviews conducted among a convenience sample of six female public relations consultants who offered advice on "hot skills" in demand during 2001 as organizations seek the best means for maintaining and establishing relationships with key stakeholder groups during a pandemic. Given the scarcity of information and direction available on the PRSA website or among the public relations pedagogy literature, this method afforded a valuable quick take steeped in research participants' lived experiences as professional public relations consultants.

Results and conclusions

In response to RQ1, *public relations entrepreneurship* is defined.

In response to RQ2, five themes emerged among research participants' advice that was translated into specific theme-topics used to develop content for five weeks (half-term) of an undergraduate Workshop in Public Relations Entrepreneurship. In addition, conversations with research participants yielded tips for setting a tone of optimism amidst so much uncertainty and high risk – which took the form of cheerleading, underscoring young professionals' talents (especially proficiency in use of social media channels), and entrepreneurship's maximum flexibil-

ity for launching a small new business now, in a few years, after starting a family, as a side gig, or upon retirement far into the future.

Advice on how to structure course content, reduce anxiety, and solicit videos from practicing consultants is provided.

Study limitations are offered, as well as suggestions for future research with implications for practice and society.

Keywords: *Pedagogy, Entrepreneurship, Consulting, Pandemic*

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The challenges of 'neo-intermediation

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Introduction and purpose of the study

This essay focuses on the role of the "representative bodies," which have declined through what many defined as "disintermediation age."

Covid-19 pandemic only accelerated the pace in this "permanent crisis scenario." Paradoxically, despite the crucial role of public communication, it is less clear and in need of a rethink the contribution of Public Relations to intermediation as a whole.

In September 2020, CNEL, the constitutional home of the country's intermediate organisms, commissioned Storyfly to a signature Study on the current dynamics of corporate intermediation: integrating its upcoming findings, this study will compare various benchmarks to define a possible new model of "neo-intermediation."

Literature review

This investigation ideally started at the 2019 BledCom Symposium, within the Panel led by Toni Muzi Falconi focused on the "Social Weaver." Many scholars, such as Martino, Beck, Field, underlined how the disintermediation process moved from being a transactional or a financial model to a whole-scale phenomenon, nowadays affecting every part of the 'social body'.

This process could even support Grunig's Fourth Model. The key elements in this frame are competence and responsibility: representative organizations should be able to "listen" and provide valuable information and communication, and also to embody ethical behaviour. Where these elements are missing, an erosion of trust (and reputation) is inevitable.

As clearly shown by the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer, in the context of the Covid-19 crisis, none of the four societal institutions measured—government, business, NGOs, and media—is trusted anymore. Some commenters such as Nilsson or Naveen already noted that it would be all too easy to shift the blame for this situation entirely on the shoulders of a "dumb citizenship" or the unstoppable impact of technology. We can therefore infer that the representative bodies themselves have also been responsible for losing trust throughout disintermediation. Covid-19, therefore, sped up change through an already flawed scenario.

To address the functional differences of the proposed models, we will tap on a multidisciplinarian approach, also inspired by the Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman's fundamental distinction between textual and grammatical orientations, as taken up later on by Umberto Eco, who applied this framework to cultures and societies as whole structures.

Methodology

Research is based on a sample of approximately 500+ organizations, ranging from Parties, Trade Unions, Embassies, Associations, Confederations, Chambers of Commerce, and other top tier Italian organizations from the vast 'intermediation landscape'.

First, an on-line Questionnaire with closed-responses is going to be e-mailed to these organizations to report on various statistics concerning topics such as integrated reporting (before/after Covid-19), communication tools, stakeholder relationships systems, organizational concerns, and policies.

Second, the Leaders of a selection from these organizations will be interviewed in-person. They will also be asked about the challenges they had to face before and during the pandemic; the changes they had to introduce to structure, policies, organization, reporting, resource allocation; how they managed adaptation to the new scenario, and their forecasting regarding the future of intermediation as a whole.

Finally, the descriptive article will integrate and re-analyse the research findings as qualitative and quantitative benchmarks to build on a new hypothesis of "-mediation landscape" (see the Scheme below).

Results and conclusions

In the light of the research results, whose first findings will be available by June, the initial hypothesis of this essay will be challenged and therefore updated to provide a 'minimum viable definition' of a constructive concept of "neo-intermediation" as a vital factor for the proper functioning of organizations into a disintermediated world.

A world in which Governments and in general complex organizations reached an all-time low in terms of trust: instead of vainly trying to regain their lost status, the representative bodies should aim to achieve a new role, moving towards an alternative 'horizontal/circular/grammatical' paradigm: that of neo-intermediation.

The last part of the essay will investigate further if and where the Public Relator is still perceived as the best candidate to support the "intermediate organizations." With their implied capability to improve the quality of stakeholder relationships for private, public, and social organizations, public relations can create measurable social capital within-and-amongst them and their respective territories and stakeholders. This process is based mainly on listening, instead of adding just more "propaganda" to an already overexerted context.

As such, the Public Relator could lead the representative bodies through the difficult transition from being "dispensers of truth," as they pretended to be at the end of the "intermediation-era," to "enablers of meaning," as players able to guide the citizenship in an over-complex world effectively. In this scenario, authoritativeness will come from the capability to represent complexity and ambiguity, leading to a new "representativeness" model for the 'neointermediated' organization.

Keywords: *Neo-intermediation, Representative Bodies, Trust, Reputation, Relationship Governance Models.*

Intermediation > — Disintermediation <--- Post-intermediation?

Re-intermediation?

Neo-intermediation?
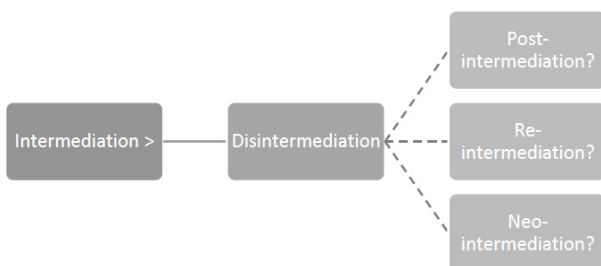
A female communication trailblazer by any standard: South Africa's Prof. Ronèl Rensburg

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Prof Ronèl Rensburg, former Head of the Division of Communication Management at the University of Pretoria, had a profound impact on the development and recognition of communication management as a discipline in South Africa. Her influence however, was also acknowledged globally.

Ronèl led research that informed the King Reports of Corporate Governance in South Africa and that was taken up into corporate reporting regulations. She was the 8th female president of PRISA (Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa), and received PRISA Fellowship in 2015 in acknowledgement of her work in public relations and communication management education and practice regionally, nationally and internationally.

Globally she also made an impact and was a Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (GA) board member, and regularly contributed as evaluator to the International Association for Business Communication's (IABC) Blue Ribbon Gold Quill Evaluation Panels, amongst others.

In an academic world dominated by males and a profession that relegates females to techni-cal roles, Prof Ronèl Rensburg, stood out as an anomaly. This study aims to celebrate the achievements and investigate the factors that led to Ronèl's success as a corporate communication professional and academic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Being an academic requires a person to excel in research, teaching and academic citizenship. Academic citizenship can be defined as: "the service behaviors carried out within and outside organizational boundaries, are in fact cornerstones of university functioning…" (Tagliaventi et al 2019:1057).

However, maintaining a balance between the tri-part sets of tasks, can be very challenging for academics. Some academics orientate towards a specific aspect of these tasks, to the detriment of the other tasks. While others, try to "do it all", without great achievements as seen from an international perspective (Tagliaventi et al 2019).

In addition, it is argued that female professors place more importance on the specific tasks of mentoring than their male counterparts, which can be argued to hold back the careers of female academics (Macfarlane & Burg, 2019). A certain combination of the "right personality" traits is also argued to determine the person's success (Islam et al 2018).

Furthermore, South Africa faced great social and political challenges in the time that Ronèl worked on establishing recognition for a profession, typically relegated to secretaries as a technical function.

Given all the above, the odds seemed stacked against a South African female academic, trying to promote the communication discipline.

RESEARCH AIM AND METHOD

The aim of this paper will be to (i) discuss Ronel's scientific contribution to the public relations and communication management disciplines, (ii) her contribution to the profession through liaison with professional bodies, (iii) leadership roles she took in academia, and (iv) her contribution to the wider communication community through education and mentorship. Furthermore, (v) the factors that led to her success as professional and academic will be explored.

The data will be gathered through a fact and event-oriented approach to historiography by analysing historical and academic archives, conducting interviews and through personal recollections (Raaz & Wehmeier, 2011:261).

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The research aims to show how a dual focus on national and international commitment, provided a pathway to superior academic citizenship for Ronèl, while considering the challenges she had to overcome in her career. We conclude that not all academics can hope to have such an impact and that a combination of the right personality in terms of having a proactive personality and conscientiousness (Islam et al 2018), passion, available time, intellectual ability, and so forth, need to be harnessed to truly achieve the coveted successful tri-part sets of tasks outlined for academics.

PRACTICAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Overall, the lived experience of Ronèl seems to move closer to the placeful university concept discussed by Nørgård and Bengtsen (2016). Placefulness supports a university that engages and collaborates with others through dialogue, openness, democracy, care and joint responsibility, in essence where the academic, on behalf of the university, takes the lead in collaboration with others. Thereby not only living by the outputs of research products (Dean & Forray, 2018), or students being delivered, but becoming part of the societal discussion and development.

The researchers propose that Ronèl's personality of determination, endless energy and a passion for the discipline, were crucial in propelling her impact to such a wide audience. However, in the end, her drive to make a societal contribution, set her apart.

Keywords: *Ronèl Rensburg, academic citizenship, public relations, communication management, placefulness, historiography*

Communicating reliable Covid-19 information: WhatsApp lessons to be learned

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Introduction and purpose of the study

South Africa's president, Cyril Ramaphosa, acted swiftly when the threat of Coronavirus was identified. To manage the situation the Disaster Management Act of 2002 was activated, lockdown instituted from 27 March 2020 and a National Command Council put in place to give guidance to government. At this point it was recognised that the South African economy was already struggling and would be crippled by the lockdown, and similar to other countries, that a lockdown would escalate political and social tensions.

In reply to the recognition that misinformation would be the "other" pandemic to manage, as was also seen in other African countries (Kazeem, 2020), South Africa's National Department of Health swiftly set up an automated WhatsApp service, Covid-19 Connect, where citizens could get up to date information on the pandemic. It was deemed important for the government to have a direct line to the public to give accurate information quickly. The app gave the latest statistics on cases, but also guidelines for isolating, travel advice, information on symptoms, and information to dismiss myths and misconceptions. The app was used together with government briefings and advertisements on various channels. In addition, WhatsApp is accessible and used by 89% of the population in South Africa (Kemp 2020), and the usage is spread evenly across all generations (Iqbal 2021). In the first 7 weeks the app had reached 6.2 million users (Preakelt.org, 2020c).

The success of this app was hailed in South Africa, and the WhatsApp application was adopted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (Kazeem 2020). The WHO application of the WhatsApp application has reached 50 million people globally (Matiashe 2020).

Although the need and usefulness of the app is agreed, only a small percentage (6.2 million) of the South African population of 60 million, accessed the app. In addition, mistruths were still circulating, and behaviour change was slow to adapted in some instances.

This raises the question as to what the impact of the WhatsApp app was, especially considering the aim of risk communication is to influence citizen behaviour to become less risky by providing scientific information. This paper aims to understand the success criteria for the app, as well as lessons learned from its implementation as viewed by the app managers.

Literature review

When reacting to a disaster, communities make use of the information available to them to guide their actions. Especially given the availability of information, and the ease for people to create messages on electronic channels like WhatsApp, truth-management becomes challenging. Strategic communication management advocates an approach where stakeholder-created communication is not limited or disregarded, but where a proactive approach to guide the conversation is encouraged.

The Sendai Framework for disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (UNISDR, 2015) highlights a strong focus on pre-disaster cooperation between government and citizens, to enhance in-disaster collaboration. In addition, by implication, the government stay responsible for accurate communication during the pandemic. Most importantly, communication from governments should be deemed trustworthy in order to result in behavioural change.

Methodology

This paper delivers information on the first phase of a larger project to understand the value and management implications of the WhatsApp app used during the pandemic in South Africa. Semi-structured interviews with the main players managing the app are ongoing and will inform the findings of the first phase. Five key players from government and the app developing company, were identified for the interviews. The second phase of the research, reported at a later stage, will understand the view from the citizens on the app.

Results and conclusions

The creation of a WhatsApp information sharing channel was a quick win for the South African government in securing up to date and true information reaching their citizens. It provided a foundation for other integrated communication strategies to follow and build upon.

It is expected that the respondents will report some challenges in the upkeep of information, and impact on citizen behaviour. It is also expected that the pre-Covid trust relationship between the government and citizens might have influenced the impact of the app on behavioural change.

The results from the first phase of the study are limited, as the view from those that developed and implemented the app may be more favourable towards its success. However, this information may also provide valuable insight on the management aspects related to the app. Adding the view from the citizens on the success of the app in phase two, would provide further insight into the use of an app during a pandemic.

Practical and social implications

Lessons learnt from this case could strengthen future applications of WhatsApp use for information sharing during times of crisis.

Keywords: *WhatsApp*; *Risk communication*; *Covid-*19; *Pandemic*

Character Assassination as Crisis Producer: The Cocreational Perspective

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Introduction and purpose of the study

This presentation will examine the causes and effects of character assassination campaigns as main producers of reputational crises in the age of social media. Character assassination (CA) refers to the strategic effort to discredit an individual or group target via subversive communication. Traditional research on CA sees subversive communication mainly from the functional perspective – as a means to an end, a tool in the hands of a

powerful attacker. This presentation intruduces the cocreational perspective of CA in the epoch of social media which highlights the key role of various publics in the production of CA campaigns. It permits us to make sense of the relational complexity of reputational crises that are jointly produced by interdependent publics. Importantly, it is a commonly accepted fact that social media have changed the perception of CA as a tool in the hands of power structures. **How do social media enable subversive actors create reputational crises targeting government officials in authoritarian political systems?** This presentation discusses the use of *kompromat*, or compromising materials, against the Russian political establishment in subversive campaigns produced by political activist Alexei Navalny.

Literature review

The cocreational perspective sees SC as planned campaigns that are based on studying and understanding the needs and wants of various publics rather than simply focusing on message production (Botan, 2018). The importance of being publics-centered is therefore fundamental to the cocreational model. This meta-theoretic view of SC will be elaborated upon next. Under the cocreational model, a public is understood to be an "interpretative community

engaged in an ongoing process of developing a shared understanding of its relationship with a group or organization that can differ substantially from that of the organization" (Botan, 2018, p. 59).

Strategic subversive campaigns appeal to invested and motivated stakeholders that have a legitimate interest in a particular public figure or organization. This is particularly evident in crisis situations when the targets of attacks are surrounded by active investors who capitalize on the collapse of the target's reputation. These invested stakeholders (the media, bloggers, activists, competitors, etc.) also seek to develop CA events that often cause strong public reactions. As noted by Coombs and Holladay (2020), stakeholders can even push management to change problematic behavior by threatening to harm the corporate image of their company.

Social networking sites provide strategic actors with resources to realize subversive campaigns in both liberal democracies and authoritarian societies. In authoritarian political systems, governments no longer have a monopoly on CA. It

is now available as a power resource to non-systemic actors.

Methodology

This presentation utilizes the case study approach. The case of Russian political activist Alexei Navalny demonstrates the power of subversive campaigns in authoritarian societies with a developed internet ecosystem.

Results and conclusions

The participatory culture of internet media has translated cocreational theory into practice. Internet technologies streamline the production and implementation of cocreated subversive campaigns even in authoritarian contexts. Activist and social movement campaigns represent popular forms of online subversion. Subversive campaigns that produce CA events now develop almost instantaneously and in an unpredictable manner due to high connectivity and a greater number of individual and collective contributors. This reality reduces the effectiveness of traditional crisis management strategies and prevents organizations from controlling for multiple risks.

Practical and social implications

This discussion of CA through the lens of cocreational theory illuminates multiple directions for further scholarly investigations of this surprisingly overlooked topic. More research is needed to explain whether the effects of subversive campaigns by political activist Alexey Navalny will persist in the face of ongoing state efforts to shape and control the development of the public sphere. These state activities include tightening censorship of internet media, suppressing inconvenient narratives with pro-government propaganda, and normalizing peer pressure on dissent through fake-grassroots campaigns. More empirical research is required to measure the effects of authoritarian manipulation of the internet by countries like China and Russia

Keywords: *character assassination, crisis communication, reputational crisis, political communication, reputation*

Covid-19 vaccine effectiveness: regional differences in online reporting of media outlets from vaccine-manufacturing countries

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The research aims to compare the reporting of web portals of mainstream media outlets on the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines in the four vaccine-manufacturing countries - USA, United Kingdom, Russian Federation, and China. The present study intends to examine the presence of false or misleading information in reporting on vaccines produced in other countries compared to the vaccines produced at the origin of the media outlet. Furthermore, the study explores whether vaccine-related reporting is used as supporting tool for health diplomacy beyond the borders of the countries of origin of the mainstream media.

Literature review

Sanders and Jones (2018) identified six categories of fake news, including false connection, misleading content, false context, imposter content, manipulated content and fabricated content. In any of the described forms, fake news is having significant agenda setting power, affecting the audience across various mainstream and online media outlets. Body of literature contains description of the agenda-setting role of fake news in four vaccine-manufacturing coun-

tries. Various sources describe the emergence of fake news during COVID-19 pandemic, including numerous misleading content articles related to COVID-19 vaccine. Given the fact that COVID-19 vaccine is recognized by literature as diplomatic tool of health diplomacy, it is critically important to understand if mainstream media outlets from different countries that produce COVID-19 vaccine engage in creation and distribution of false context, misleading content, manipulated content or fabricated content related to COVID-19 vaccines that originate from the other countries. Following the findings that media can engage to support the diplomatic efforts, it is important to understand if mainstream media outlets from four countries that produce COVID-19 vaccines have engaged as supporters and advocates of health diplomacy of their countries.

Methodology

Comparative content analysis of the web portals of mainstream media outlets in English language from the USA, UK, Russia, and China for the period November 2020 – January 2021 has been undertaken to identify the news published about COVID-19 vaccines. In order to identify possi-

ble discrepancies between media reporting and reality, content of the news has been compared with COVID-19 vaccine specification provided by producers (Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Sputnik V, Sinopharm) and with the announcements provided on the government and governmental entities` websites.

Results and conclusions

The study confirmed engagement of mainstream media outlets from the USA, UK, Russia and China in creation of fake news and negative reports about COVID-19 vaccines whose producers do not originate from the same country as mainstream media outlet. In total, 23 examples of false context and misleading content news related to the vaccines of other producers, originating from mainstream media outlets, had been identified across all four countries. Majority of the identified examples can be classified as false content fake news, with high level of facticity, high intention to deceive the audience and indirect motivation for sharing. Unfavorable reporting and spreading false content about Sinopharm vaccine has been especially noticeable from the end of US-based media outlets, while unfavorable reporting and spreading false content about Pfizer vaccine has been especially noticeable from the end of Russia-based mainstream media outlets. Further, spillovers of negative articles about Sinopharm and Sputnik V vaccines have been noticed in the countries that have adopted Pfizer and Astra Zeneca vaccine, and vice versa. Spreading false information about Astra Zeneca vaccine has not been noticed in US-based media outlets, while spreading false information about Pfizer vaccine has not been noticed in UK-based media outlets. Chinese media outlets in English language are not reporting negatively or falsely about Sputnik V vaccine, while Russian media outlets do not report negatively about Sinopharm vaccine. Mainstream media outlets analyzed within this research are using examples across the world to create false context news

and support unfavorable reporting about vaccines produced in other countries. None of the media outlets reported negatively about the vaccines produced in their countries. Reporting of media outlets clearly demonstrates the existence of two blocs of media engaged to support health diplomacy – one consisting of United States and United Kingdom, and another, consisting of Russian Federation and China. Limited number of mainstream media sources in English language from Russian Federation and China, and relatively short time span for inclusion of the news published by the portals of mainstream media outlets are the main limitations of this research.

Practical and social implications

The study provides insights to communication professionals and society about mechanisms of creation and spread of fake news in the context of agenda-setting for favorable acceptance of the vaccines originating from certain countries.

Keywords: *COVID*-19, *online communication, fake news, media studies, health diplomacy*

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Social Media Guidelines in the Workplace: Stimulating or Restricting Employee Social Media Use?

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Employees are increasingly using social media *at* work, *for* work and *about* work. Therefore, many organizations implement social media guidelines to minimize the risks (e.g., the spread of criticism) and maximize the opportunities associated with employee social media use (e.g., ambassadorship). Prior research on social media guidelines is predominantly descriptive and focused on the organizational perspective. We thus have little or no idea about the actual impact of social media guidelines on employees. The purpose of this study is to investigate how these guidelines affect employees' social media-related behaviors on the one hand and attitudes toward their employer on the other hand.

Literature review

Although research has not examined the impact of social media guidelines on employees, some advice has been formulated on how these guidelines can be drafted and communicated. First, communication scholars generally recommend to formulate social media guidelines in an incentive way, focusing on opportunities and stimulating employee social media use (e.g., Stohl et al., 2017). Legal scholars, by contrast, advise organizations to protect themselves by means of unambiguous and strict guidelines (e.g., O'Connor et al., 2016). This aligns with a rather restrictive formulation, focusing on avoiding risks and limiting work-related social media use. Two experimental studies examine the effectiveness of these types of guidelines in terms of employee branding behavior and guideline recall, as well as their impact on the organization-employee relationship.

Second, research indicates that most organizations write their social media guidelines in a conversational style as opposed to a more traditional, corporate style (Johnston, 2015). Such conversational style can help organizations to adopt a conversational human voice, which has already proven to generate benefits (e.g., positive word-of-mouth) when communicating with external publics. The first study, therefore, examines guideline style as a potential moderator in the impact of guideline content. Third, some organizations demand employees to sign the social media policy (O'Connor et al., 2016). This is believed to enhance their guideline recall and understanding. As such, the second study investigates the potential moderating effect of how the guidelines are imposed on employees.

Lastly, the approach employers take regarding their social media policy can determine whether employees feel as if their freedom has been limited. According to reactance theory (Brehm & Brehm, 1981), people who feel that their freedom is threatened, can experience reactance.

This reactance can cause employees to resent their employer and display the exact behavior that the policy aimed to prevent. As such, the second study also explores the role of reactance as a potential mediator.

Methodology

To examine the causal impact of social media guidelines on employees' attitudes and behavior, two online experiments were conducted among Belgian men and women who worked for an organization consisting of at least 20 ($N = 212$; Study 1) or 50 employees ($N = 222$; Study 2). Participants read a fictitious social media policy that was manipulated in terms of focus (i.e. restrictive vs. incentive) and style (i.e. conversational vs. corporate; Study 1) or enforcement (signature requested vs. not requested; Study 2).

Results and conclusions

Results indicate that restrictive guidelines succeed best at enhancing guideline recall. Incentive guidelines, by contrast, are most beneficial for stimulating employee branding behavior on social media, while safeguarding the organization-employee relationship at the same time. The guidelines' style and manner of enforcement did not seem to matter. A key recommendation for employers that want to draft social media guidelines is, therefore, to do so in an incentive rather than a restrictive way. However, the findings also show that solid social media guidelines will not make up for an organization's initial bad reputation among employees. The organizational reputation among employees affected their social media behavior and relationship with the employer more strongly than the focus and formulation of social media guidelines.

Finally, our research does not indicate that distinct types of social media guidelines affect reactance differently. However, results show that reactance can negatively influence employees' attitudes and social media behavior. Future re-search should examine the overall impact of having a formal social media policy on reactance. To do so, a control condition can be included in which participants receive no guideline at all.

Practical and social implications

An organization's reputation is increasingly shaped by what employees say and do on social media. Communication and public relations executives are, therefore, in need of best practices on how to appropriately guide employees' social media behavior. Our findings can help executives to draft social media guidelines in a way that increases the opportunities (e.g., ambassadorship) *and* reduces the risks (e.g., criticism) associated with employee social media use, while also safeguarding the organization-employee relationship.

Keywords: *Social Media, Guidelines, Employee Communication, Ambassadorship, Organization-Employee Relationship*

Social Media as a Gift and Curse in Crisis Communication: A Study on Turkish Public Relations Practitioners

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Introduction and Purpose

As social media has been causing a redefinition of communication function in general, its effects on crisis communication are quite remarkable. The ongoing change of social media has made the crisis environment much more complicated (Lee, 2020) that has led to the evolution of crisis communication practice and understanding.

The purpose of this study was to examine how Turkish public relations (PR) practitioners evaluate social media in terms of its threats and opportunities for crisis communication, and its effects on crisis consulting process. It also aimed to take recommendations to use social media more effectively during crisis communication.

Literature Review

In crisis communication field, social media is generally considered as both a gift and curse (Cheng, 2016) since it can trigger or inflame crises (Pang et al., 2014) and can help organizations to prevent them, respond better or learn from crises (Lin et al., 2016). In digital age, it plays a crucial role to know how social media should be used and managed before, during or after a crisis.

The impact of social media on crisis communication has been seriously debated all around the world. However, studies that include recommendations for use of social media in crisis communication are mostly disorganized (Lachlan, Spence and Eith, 2014) and research on how PR practitioners in Turkey approach social media in terms of crisis communication is extremely limited. This study aims to explore views of PR practitioners related to the role of social media in crisis communication in Turkey.

Methodology

The present study followed an exploratory approach and utilized qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviewing method with 20 senior PR practitioners who work in agencies that are members of Turkish Public Relations Association (TUHID) and Communication Consultancies Association of Turkey (IDA). The participants were chosen through purposive sampling technique. All interviews were conducted online via between June and August 2020. After data collection process, interviews were subjected to a thematic analysis which indicated 14 themes based on the research questions.

Results and Conclusions

The findings showed that Turkish PR practitioners mostly regard social media as a curse rather than a gift due to number of threats they asserted about social media. This study revealed two significant risks which are relatively less mentioned in the crisis communication literature. The first one was the inexperience of the digital content agencies in sensing the risks that may cause a crisis. Another serious risk was related to context of Turkey discussing opposing parties on social media created by the polarization in Turkey which are likely to put organizations in a dangerous position any moment.

When it comes to crisis consulting practice, all participants agreed upon the view that crisis communication consultancy has risen to the top among the services most demanded from them. In addition, it was a common view that it has become very difficult to develop scenarios due to the increasing difficulty of making predictions in this new world. The majority of the participants recommended an emphasis on relationship building and two-way communication opportunities with key stakeholders on social media in proactive crisis communication phase which is underutilized due to workload in agencies.

There were two main limitations in this study. Firstly, only PR agencies that are members of TUHID and IDA were included in the study. Future studies could include other PR agencies to widen the scope of the research. Secondly, it only discussed consulting services; further studies could examine the organizational part of the crisis communication to compare both sides.

Practical and Social Implications

This paper presents a comprehensive and up-to-date crisis communications guide to communication professionals that includes practical recommendations and emphasizes risks and opportunities that social media brings along. The results are also insightful for highlighting dynamics of Turkish context.

Keywords: *crisis management, Turkish PR industry, crisis consulting, digital crisis communication*

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Public Health Crises: Communicating Risk and Lessons Learned from the Early Days of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic created new and unprecedented challenges for public sector risk communicators. The wildfire spread of the virus together with people's perceived low susceptibility to the risk of contracting the virus created new concerns for risk and crisis communication, but in particular for public health officials. This paper aims to investigate the communicative response to COVID-19 of various public sector organizations in the U.S. Local public health organizations are often overlooked as crisis communicators, which in turn negatively affects the quality and efficacy of their risk communication efforts (Coombs, 2020).

Studying unique and challenging crisis cases like this one is a way of learning about crisis management and communication while simultaneously providing information for designing health interventions.

Literature Review

COVID-19 created specific communication demands which also have implications for future risk and crisis communication efforts. Coombs (2020) proposes six major areas explored thorough the lens of the Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM) which could be applied to COVID-19 communication efforts. These demands are (1) anxiety, (2) empathy, (3) efficacy, and (4) fatigue, (5) reach and (6) threat. Additionally, the Health Belief Model (HBM) is a theoretical framework in health communication used to explain health behaviors (Becker, 1974). Furthermore, it is often applied to guide health promotion and improve disease prevention programs. This study utilizes Coombs' propositions together with the HBM in order to examine how various public health organizations across the United States communicated about the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020.

Methodology

This pilot study employs a content analysis to examine various communication efforts of several local health organizations across the United States, with the sample including the East Coast (i.e., New York), West Coast (i.e., California), and Central (i.e., Texas) areas. These areas are chosen specifically because of their later infamy of being COVID-19 hotspots within the United States.

Specifically, we will examine communication disseminated via traditional and social media for the first two weeks of March 2020. This time frame is appropriate for the purposes of the study because this is the time when the spread of the virus was still in its infancy and federal, state and local authorities were eager to slow it down.

The second half of March 2020 was marked by nation-wide lockdowns and mandatory stay-at-home orders which were guided by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recommendation. The most obvious limitation of the study is the fact that it is based in the U. S. context. However, since the United States has had the highest reported death and infection rates in response to the pandemic, it is also important to understand why the crisis response has failed, particularly from a communication standpoint.

Results

This is a pilot exploratory study and thus generalizing the results would be challenging. However, this opens the door for future research. Specifically, examining Coombs' (2020) extension of the EPPM applied for crisis communication on the COVID-19 pandemic along with the HBM (Becker, 1974) will allow for future experimental research to determine the options that health and governmental organizations have regarding message content for future health crises.

Practical Implications

The purpose of this study is to identify how public health organizations across the United States approached the COVID-19 pandemic. Pandemics are especially serious threats to public health organizations and to society because of world travel and globalization (Morens & Fauci, 2013). It is therefore important to study and understand how risk messages are constructed. Examining the content of public health announcements will enable researchers to improve risk and crisis communication. This would be beneficial for both constituents who receive such information and agencies who are responsible for creating it. Moreover, the idea is to study this type of public health risk communication in order to be able to identify gaps and address possible issues hindering the effectiveness of the messages. Although COVID-19 is unique in many ways, the underly-

ing threat of pandemics and sudden health crises is there. Public sector organizations must continue to be ready to manage such outbreaks for both this and future pandemics. More research on the communicative aspect of health-related messages for the public are needed to improve health and governmental organizations' communication efforts in attempts to ultimately meet the needs of the public.

Keywords: *risk communication, public health crises, crisis management*

How crises affect internal communication channel preference

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Introduction and purpose of the study

In late 2019 we explored how the choice of internal communication media influences internal communication satisfaction. In order to test this relationship, we started with an analysis of the most commonly used internal communication channels in large companies. We completed empirical work in twelve large corporations and linked the results to employees' satisfaction and media choice. In March 2020 SARS-CoV-2 pandemic interfered and temporarily stopped our work in the field. In October 2020 we resumed our fieldwork and completed auditing twelve more companies. This real-life experiment with pre- and during/post-crisis condition enable us to expanded the analysis by testing how the same relationship after the pandemic changed the importance of individual internal communication channels.

Literature review

Organizational choice of communication channels depends on a series of factors such as an organization's size, profile, culture, environmental culture, as well as employees' qualifications or the level of technical development (Dévényi, 2016). Each medium means a different kind of engagement and defines the scale and speed of communication. When discussing effectiveness of various channels for communicating with employees one of the most common theories used is media richness theory (Daft and Lengel, 1986). The theory combines the richness of a medium and the equivocality of a task to determine the effectiveness of a communication medium. In internal communication using rich media, such as face-to-face communication, adds to organizations' effective and symmetrical communication since it allows feedback and internal dialogues (Men, 2014). Technological development is significantly changing the rules of all communication, including internal communication. Various social media, that range from blogs to social networks, bring with them interactivity, the possibility of two-way communication and employee engagement (Crescenzo, 2011). Social media can be a powerful dialogue creating channels that can have an indirect influence on traditional media (Berger, 2008; Lee, 2018). New media channels could prove to be helpful in fostering listening skills and high-quality face-to-face communication (Rhee, 2004).

Methodology

In order to answer the research question, we applied three predesigned measurement instruments, as a part of a larger communication survey, among 3037 employees from 24 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 crite-

ria. 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 30 up to 10 000. Within each company, significant effort was made to include representative samples of employees.

Results and conclusion

Results for the original twelve companies showed that modality of communication is connected with communication satisfaction. We are in the process of data analysis of additional fourteen companies and the comparison between the two data sets. We will complete our research before July 2021.

Practical and social implications

Organizational environment is turbulent and management has to prepare and plan for crises. The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic is an example of external crises that can affect internal dynamics of organizations. Knowing how satisfaction with different internal communication channels changes in crises can be a valuable input for crisis preparedness.

Keywords: *Internal communication, internal communication channels, crisis internal communication.*

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Office Culture and the Communications Industry in England: The Role of Social Interactions and Banter on Carrer Progression for Women in Public Relations, Advertising and Journalism

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The study explores the office culture in the communications industry in England (journalism, advertising, public relations) with a particular emphasis on the position of women and women's perceptions of the office culture, including an emphasis on social interactions and banter. The study is conceptually grounded in exploring cultural masculinities in the public relations industry in England and its impact on life opportunities for women practitioners.

Literature Review

Studies on women in journalism have been showing for a while that women have to merge to masculine newsrooms and become blokish to succeed (Mills, 2014; 2017; Topić, 2018). While some women can embrace masculine identities and merge into man's way of doing things, including engaging in masculine banter and doing things the way the men do, many women are unable to do this and thus fall off the ladder and end up leaving the profession. While blokishness is mentioned in papers on journalism, studies do not usually conceptualise this term, which is what this paper tackles using journalism, advertising and public relations industries as a case

study. Whilst there are lots of papers analysing the position of women, papers usually do not analyse cultural masculinities and structural and everyday barriers to career progression and experiences in the industry. The research using sociological theory and approaches is even more scarce.

Methodology and Framework

Through the study of early socialisation experiences and using works from organisational studies analysing cultural masculinities in organisations, I have conceptualised the concept of blokishness as encompassing communication and behaviour that comes naturally to men rather than women due to the socialisation process. I am using Bourdieu's (2007) habitus theory and the Difference Approach in feminism (Tannen, 1995; 1990; 1986; Yule, 2006) to argue that organisations are masculine habitus where women who want to succeed have to embrace characteristics usually ascribed to men such as directness, boldness, lack of empathy, competitiveness, toughness, etc. These characteristics naturally come to men due to socialisation process (Bourdieu, 2007), however, my research shows that there are women who succeed in the masculine world due to having these character-

istics, and the link between their behaviour and communication comes from early socialisation process where these women have been socialised with boys rather than girls, and thus they embraced masculine characteristics.

To that end, I have conducted 41 interviews with women from advertising, 24 interviews with women from public relations and 20 interviews with women from journalism. Saturation has been reached in all three samples, and samples also have a geographical diversity and thus women from both north and south of England have been interviewed. Thematic analysis has been used for the analysis of data.

While this paper derives from the programme of three different projects I have designed, led and implemented since 2018, and the projects have analysed lived experiences, office culture and leadership, in this paper, I am focusing on the office culture and masculine habitus across three industries to show how women in three industries negotiate and manage their feminine identities and what structural barriers women in communications industries face. The research particularly looks at the role of early socialisation in being able to interact in offices and the impact of office culture on career progression. I am particularly focusing on social interactions and banter in offices and its link with exclusions and career barriers.

Findings

Findings show that across three industries women face masculinities and the so-called 'boys clubs', which result in exclusion from business decisions and career barriers. This is in large part perpetuated with gendered social interactions, which often results in segregation in offices and banter. However, there are differences between industries. For example, whilst women have to merge and become blokish in journalism to succeed (and if they succeed, they are usually as successful as men), this is not always the case in public relations (where women are called 'comms girls' and PR labelled as 'fluffy') or advertising (where women face open sexism, sexual harassment and are often openly told they cannot do certain aspects of job because they are not good enough as women), however, the data indicates that even in these two industries women who embrace masculinities fare and succeed better and that communications industry in England functions as a masculine habitus (albeit with some differences across industries).

Practical and Social Implications

Organisations should design policies on the office culture to ensure equality and respectful work environment for everyone. Consciousness-raising is needed across industries because many women do not recognise oppression in the form of social interactions and its effect on the position of women nor many women recognise what constitutes sexism and masculine practice, which prevents meaningful activism.

Keywords: *women, public relations, advertising, journalism, blokishness, cultural masculinities, England*

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Frames, Rationalities, and Image Repair Responses of Public Officials in the 2018 wildfire disaster of Mati in Greece

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Introduction and Purpose of Study

This paper attempts to investigate the Greek government's communication on the natural fire disaster of Mati, a seaside residential area in the Attica region in July 2018. The disaster killed 102 people, uprooted families, left psychological scars on victim's relatives and friends and destroyed many properties. These wildfires were the deadliest in Europe since 1900. A number of regional and local politicians as well as fire and police officials were accused of mismanagement and faced charges for negligent manslaughter, arson and grievous bodily harm.

Literature Review

We will approach the natural disaster through a social constructivist lens (Schultz, and Raupp, 2010) concentrating on the framing and sense-giving of the disaster by the major actors and public authorities. The social constructivist perspective pays particular attention to the socio-cultural context underscores the symbolic meaning of disaster communication. Vetternranta (2015), drawing upon the Heidegger's existential phenomenology, applies the distinction between technical-instrumental rationality and rationality of caring to the ways Norwegian government authorities responded in two crises situations. Technical-instrumental rationality is short term, applies scientific norms and re-lies on quantifiable information. The rationality of caring is long term, appeals to tradition and political culture and underlines the care for the welfare of the community. Because the two rationalities are not mutually exclusive, we also include in-between positions along the spectrum offering variable mixes of technical-instrumental and rationality of caring. Obviously, the rationalities expounded produce different framings of the disaster.

Methodology

We will explore whether technical rationality or rationality of caring or even a combined rationality permeates the communication patterns of politicians, administrative officials, experts and the public. In addition, we posit the following research questions: What are the different frames that various actors adopt? Do the frames adopted depend on to the position of the actors within the state (central and local government, public agencies) apparatus? Which attributions of responsibility are related to the micro-level, meso-level, and macro-level respectively? What are the image repair strategies used by main actors? To address the questions, we will analyze material produced by politicians, government officials, local government authorities (press releases, social media posts, media interviews, press conferences), testimonies and/or comments of concerned citizens as well as expert technical re-

ports. Then, the relevant material will be content analyzed based on the types of frame, rationality, response strategy, and blame attribution using the typologies of Vetternranta (2015), Benoit (1997), and Schultz and Raupp (2010). The results will be compared based on the position of the official and stage of the catastrophe. The effectiveness of disaster communication will be assessed based on the valence of media reports, articles, citizens' comments as well as reactions of users on social media.

Results and Conclusions

We expect that reports emanating from experts will follow a technical rationality logic, the texts of the politicians will adopt a combined rationality depending on the context and the audience addressed, and the comments of the public will mainly ascribe to a rationality of caring. As time progresses and we are moving further away from the occurrence of the disaster, the technical rationality is expected to overshadow the rationality of caring.

We also expect all actors to engage in blame avoidance public communication stances, trying to evade responsibility. In this respect, politicians and officials of public authorities will shift attributions of responsibility to one another.

Theoretical, Practical, and Social Implications

This study contributes to the literatures of disaster communication as well as image repair discourse. To our knowledge only few studies have examined how public officials respond during natural disasters. Hence, this study is expected to increase our knowledge about the different frames, rationalities, and response strategies employed by the main actors as well as their flow and evolution from the initial stage of the crisis all the way through the post-crisis stage. By applying the framework that was initially used in the analysis of the Norwegian context to the

Greek disaster case, we will offer a cross-cultural comparative focus. Examining other cases could help us better understand why some public officials communicate more effectively than others. The study will provide fruitful insights on the responses that public officials could employ or avoid during and after the course of a natural disaster.

Keywords: *technical-instrumental rationality, rationality of care, framing, qualitative methodology, image repair discourse*

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COVID-19 Internal Crisis Communication: Perspectives from Internal Communicators

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The purpose of this paper is to understand how internal communicators adapted to the COVID19 crisis and adopted strategies to engage and help organizations manage the evolving situation. Globally, black swan events are becoming the norm and unlike other crises, are unprecedented (Lagadec & Topper, 2012; Coombs, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic, one such crisis, has had profound impact on organizations and people. Due to the low chances of such crises occurring and the inability to interpret how they unfold; organizations can get lulled into a false sense of security resulting in catastrophic consequences. Therefore, making sense of the situation demands focused attention and engaging stakeholders early and meaningfully (Weick, 1988). This study assesses the interventions made by internal communicators and offers approaches that practitioners can leverage for such crises.

Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on organizational order and employee experience is profound. Reduction in force, cost saving measures and uncertainty has led to anxiety, distractions and financial concerns come in the way of employees' attention and productivity. Employee' well-being is negatively impacted, and uncertainty prevails on the future of organizations (Gartner, 2020; Willis Tower Watson, 2020).

During crises, organizations rely on internal communications to engage and involve employees to receive and send messages (Frandsen and Johansen 2011). Internal communications influences employee experience (Bersin, 2020a) although connecting and engaging employees remotely is a challenge (Bersin, 2020b). Fatigue among staff, (Gandhi, 2020), increased online meetings, (Spataro, 2020) and limited listening abilities (Institute for Public Relations, 2020) presented unique challenges for internal communicators.

During crises, employees attribute the responsibility of the issue to the individual in the situation or the situation itself. Attribution theory argues that people try to explain what caused the event in ways that makes sense for themselves (Coombs, 2007). How employees, a key constituent of crisis communications, perceive responses, can impact their behaviors and actions. If involved, employees can pick up signals early and help mitigate the crisis alongside organizational constituents (Heide and Simonsson, 2015). Given this context and the call for evidence-based research to further understanding practice and theory, there is a need to understand the role of internal communications in mitigating crises, especially events like the pandemic.

The role of internal communications in helping manage crises and rebuilding order, although recognized in literature, is understudied.

(Frandsen and Johansen, 2011). Employees prefer a combination of sources for their information needs and internal communications enables employee comprehension and rationale behind company decisions (O'Neil, 2008). Prior research demonstrates that internal communicators focus on online and media (intranet and web publishing) during crises although their impact is limited.

Research Questions

Therefore, to fill this research gap, the paper will explore how internal communicators communicated with employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, the internal communications approaches and strategies adopted to help employees cope with the evolving crisis. Lastly, the paper will review how internal communication practitioners evaluated the effectiveness of their response to the crisis and the measures used.

Methodology

The exploratory mixed method study will gauge these research questions by collecting data through an online survey among internal communicators, a case study of an organization's approach and document analysis of messages shared to triangulate the understanding of internal crisis communication during COVID-19 (Jick, 1979; Rosenberg and Yates, 2007). In addition, it will probe internal communication principles adopted, the role of internal communicators, channels used, the involvement of internal communicators before and during the crisis.

Results and conclusions

This study aims to offer unique perspectives on how internal communicators supports sense making efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, will provide valuable insights on the ability of organizations and communicators to listen to staff and respond to their concerns and interests. Finally, the implications of involving employees in crisis communication and organizational decision-making approaches that can contribute to mitigating crises.

Practical and social implications

As a theoretical implication, the results of this study will broaden the understanding of internal crisis communication and contribute to situational crisis communication and sense making theories that highlight the strategic role of internal communications in organizational productivity and reputation.

Keywords: *Internal communication, sense making, COVID-19, black swan, internal crisis communication*

The Ides of March: Agenda Setting Effects of Coronavirus Task Force Briefings

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Introduction and Purpose

With more Americans at home compared to any other time in modern history, the coronavirus pandemic served as a significant contributing factor to a twenty percent rise in television news ratings from February to March 2020. As individuals sought information about the pandemic, network news viewership soared to record levels. Upon declaration of a national emergency, the Coronavirus Task Force conducted twenty-six separate press conferences in the subsequent thirty-one-day period, becoming one of the most watched programs in the United States over the same period. How did the repeated interplay, on the national stage, between the U.S. president and the press play into follow-on media coverage? More specifically, who was setting the agenda – the leader or the media? The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of type (pre-planned vs. reactive), sentiment (positive, neutral, negative), topic (economy, public health, behavior, trust in federal government), and duration of messages delivered by the Coronavirus Task Force to assess any trends or correlations in subsequent media coverage for record-breaking viewership.

Literature Review

Lasswell (1948) reinforced his famous construct, "Who, said what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect" as a conceptual tool still employed by communication and public relations scholars today. Despite rapid advancements in communication through mass media and technology, there is significant utility in the conceptual applicability of Lasswell's construct – especially in how it remains "inherently flexible enough to meet the theoretical needs of today… (Sapienza et al., 2015, p. 617). Governing from "center stage", or a central, highly prominent position, causes the public to consume messages focused on select topics as determined by the prominent official. There is substantial agenda setting research addressing the President as the ultimate agenda setter (McCombs, 2014) and influencer for what the public thinks about (Cohen, 1963). Yet, in the digital age amid a pandemic, is that still the case? Is there a difference in how the media covers specific issues based on pre-planned and reactive communication? Previous work linking press conferences and agenda setting highlights the importance of this research. When a viewer receives information, they consider whether to accept, deny, or remain ambivalent about it (Zaller, 1992).

Methodology

The primary method employed was a content analysis of compiled transcripts and videos of every U.S. Coronavirus Task Force briefing that occurred over the selected timeframe of March 13, 2020 to April 13, 2020. In total, this sample consisted of twenty-six briefings, 1,046 pages of

official transcripts, and 2,243 minutes of briefing content – all of which received qualitative and quantitative analysis. The second portion of the study compiled and analyzed coverage and headlines of follow-on media reporting from follow-on mainstream U.S. news programs and prominent national newspapers during the same timeframe. This method provides empirical findings to justify the its conclusions.

Initial Results and Conclusions

While the data *is still being finalized*, initial results show a disparity in sentiment between prepared and reactive communication with subsequent media coverage. Additionally, scripted communication is more likely to achieve desired effects with regard to agenda building; whereas unscripted communication is less likely to achieve the inverse effect.

Limitations

Subsequent media coverage does not account for any condition setting or confounds that may have occurred prior to this timeframe, which could have impacted the trajectory of reporting. There is also a potential confound in government communication when the media is faced with contradicting information as they consider Task Force communication from the federal level (President) versus the state-level (i.e. Governor/Mayor, etc), Future studies would be well served to include the presence of misinformation and disinformation as an additional factor to this current research.

Implications

Ten days upon closing this data set, the Task Force delivered prepared remarks on Friday, April 24, 2020 and for the first time since the press briefings began, they did not take any questions. Additionally, the administration subsequently recommended and took actions that directly support the findings and recommendations for government communication (Acosta et al., April 24, 2020). Ultimately, these findings build on previous theoretical work which suggests that Bernard Cohen's (1963) dictum of the media telling the public what to think is as dependent on timing and tone, as it is in competence and credibility.

Keywords: *agenda setting, strategic communication, press conference, coronavirus*

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The Hiccup Paradox of Corporate Communication in the Pandemic

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Hiccups are a phenomenon that cannot be suppressed – not life-threatening, but omnipresent. Perceptions focus on getting rid of them, while other events fade into the background. This applies to corporate communication in the Corona crisis. It is not necessarily the decisive issue, but it becomes the pivotal point in corporate communication. A study that examined crisis communication for DAX 30 companies six months before and after the first lockdown in Germany shows that the attribution of causes for corporate crises has changed by the pandemic.

Literature review

Coombs defines corporate crises as a "perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectations of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcome (Coombs 2013, p. 19). The triggers are manifold: the causes can be attributed to human error or self-inflicted misconduct, but can also be based on external circumstances such as natural disasters (e.g. Hurricane Irene in 2011) or threats to public health (e.g. SARS 2003) (Cheng, 2018). An unambiguous classification is often not possible – ambiguous classification is often not possible –

exogenous factors can be a catalyst for already existing structural problems, but they can also have a disruptive character that harms previously successful companies.

Accordingly stakeholders seeing the threat to their own interests usually start searching a clearly identifiable scapegoat – there is often no room for a differentiated view with shades of grey. Standing in the limelight, companies are forced to engage in damage limitation for the protection of their reputation and licence to operate. At this moment, it is crucial to present the crisis to the outside world in the form of a credible story (Möhrle, 2016).

From a theoretical point of view, this opens up a triad consisting of attributing blame and image repair under the influence of classic and social media (Cheng, 2018). In order to provide companies with a guideline for appropriate crisis communication, Coombs (2007) developed the Situative Crisis Communication Theory based on Benoit's (1995) Image Repair Theory under the assumption that stakeholders are looking for a responsible party (Cheng, 2018). Following Kelley's covariation principle, it is possible to attribute crises to internal or external causes.

Methodology

To check whether the share of crises that were considered exogenous increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, using an automated content analysis we first looked at the time series of counts of text fragments of the 30 largest German companies listed in the DAX30. For each company, we defined any day that had a number of fragments greater than the third quartile plus 1.5 times the interquartile range as an outlier. For each outlier, we looked for publications (news, social media posts, etc.) describing what was going on in that company on that particular day. In a next step, we collected data on how the companies dealt with the crisis of the respective outlier day by analyzing those publications. Specifically, we examined whether the crisis was communicated as an endogenous or exogenous crisis. In a final step, we tested whether the proportion of crises that were classified as exogenous differed significantly between the Pre-COVID-19-era and during the COVID-19-pandemic. We have done this for all crises as well as for specific types of crises (e.g. staff layoffs).

Results and conclusions

The results show that the share of exogenous triggers in crisis communication increased significantly. While crises before the lockdown tended to be attributed to endogenous causes, afterwards there was almost only one answer for the eternal question of blame for any kind of problem: the Corona pandemic. The results of this study are limited to the DAX-30 companies and to corporate communication in the context of Covid-19. Further research looking at other crisis situations, cultural influences and the reaction of other stakeholders to this attribution of causes would be desirable

Practical and social implications

In the shadow of a global crisis, managers are able to avert attention from their own misconduct or to communicate endogenous corporate decisions to the outside world in a credible way without risking any reputation damage. While the pandemic as the main protagonist covers everyday life like a veil, reflection, critical questioning and a differentiated view are among the main tasks and responsibilities of the media and society.

Keywords: *Crisis communication, social listening, attribution, Covid-19, SSCT*

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Debating the Importance of Professional Communication and Working Media Experience as a Prerequisite for Public Relations Faculty Positions in the US and Canada

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The debate about the importance of various credentials for full-time public relations educators has a long history in North America dating back to as far as the late 1940s when many universities – in the US at least – saw an increased enrollment interest in subjects such as journalism and public relations. An issue in many of programs at that time involved the importance of academic vis-à-vis practical experience for those applying for full-time public relations faculty positions at universities. At that time the "ideal" full-time public relations faculty member possessed a master's degree plus five-to-ten years full-time working experience in some aspect of journalism or public relations.

Even the emergence of public relations scholars with Ph.D. degrees in the 1970s and 1980s didn't diminish the importance of professional working experience. During those years the "ideal" public relations faculty member possessed a Ph.D. degree plus three-to-five years working experience in the field. While there was a time when it was nearly impossible to secure a public relations university-level teaching position, much less receive tenure and/or promotion, without significant professional experience, most of the current faculty hires focus much more on academic credentials and scholarly potential than on professional working experience. This has led a number of universities to hire "professors of the practice" who teach and conduct service activities without any research expectations.

Brief Literature Review

Although the literature contains a number of articles examining faculty composition, most of these focus on curriculum and other organizational issues. Few, explore the need for public relations educators to have had recent working experience in the field. One exception to this is the work of Black, et al (1980) that makes recommendations on an international scale. Two extremely thorough reports (Stacks, et al, 1999 & Distaso, et al, 2006) thoroughly examined the state of public relations education in the US, but dealt more with matters of curriculum and teaching than with faculty credentials. The work of Kelleher (2001) plus Krishna, et al (2020) point out how public relations practice has changed over the years thus making it even more necessary to make sure those who teach and those who practice know what each other are doing.

Methodology

This paper's methodology consisted of a thorough literature review plus a variety of in-depth interviews with senior-level public relations educators, some with academic credentials and others with professional working experience.

Conclusions

Although all interviews have not yet been completed, it appears the paper's main finding will support what has become the "professor of the practice model" where a number of highly successful public relations executives can be found teaching both undergraduate and graduate level public relations courses at various American and Canadian Universities. This finding appears to be more prevalent in the US than it is in Canada.

Keywords: *Professional Experience, Public Relations Education, Professional Relevance*

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Serving whom? Examining the motives and types of corporate social responsibility actions "during" a public health crises

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Introduction and purpose of the study

To fight against the Covid-19 public health crisis and its debilitating impact, corporations took various social responsible actions to contribute to the society, community and vulnerable groups, such as personal protective equipment or monetary donation. Internet companies in China also made various donations in combating the pandemic, i.e. Tencent (173 million U.S. dollars) and Alibaba (144.2 million U.S. dollars) (Statista, 2020), and CSR related information was announced in the companies' Weibo accounts.

Previous studies have shown the firm's motivation to undertake corporate social responsibility actions, including economic, legislative, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities (Carroll, 1996). Under the pandemic condition, how do corporations decide what CSR actions to be initiated during the emergency situation? What are the discernible differences in CSR actions among the corporations? This paper aims to fill out the lacunae of CSR motives and types "during a public crisis," compared to a normal situation.

Literature review

According to Halme and Laurila (2009), an action-oriented framework for evaluating corporate responsibility (CR) action type includes: philanthropy (i.e. charity, voluntary works), CR Integration (based on existing core competence with additional responsibilities), and CR Innovation (creating new business models for tackling external issues).

Publics may perceive the CSR actions as intrinsic or extrinsic motives. Intrinsic motive emphasizes the CSR initiatives are society-motivated while the extrinsic refers to those profit-driven CSR activities (Kim & Choi, 2018).

CSR fit or congruence refers to "the perceived congruence between a social issue and company's business" (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010, p. 12). Three types of CSR fit are identified based on whether the CSR undertakings are related to the business practices, i.e. external consistency, internal consistency, and coherence (Yuan, Bao, & Verbeke, 2011).

Methodology

Content analysis has been utilized to examine the internet companies executed CSR-based activities during the public health crisis period. Prior- and during-crisis CSR actions are examined to understand companies' motives and CSR types. According to the top 100 Chinese Internet Companies in 2019 report from the Internet Society of China and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, top three internet companies, Alibaba, Tencent, Baidu, were chosen as examples. Total 422 Weibo posts were reviewed during the pandemic period, from Jan 1, 2020 (after first Covid-19 confirmed case on Dec 31, 2019) to April 8, 2020 (Wuhan lifted lockdown), and the same period in 2019.

The CSR-related posts were collected and coded from the official Weibo accounts of the three companies based on the coding scheme, including variables from the literature.

Results and conclusion

Internet companies displayed different CSR practices during the pandemic crisis in year 2020 with that in the regular period in 2019. Companies were more out of *Intrinsic* motivation to address public issues in pandemic (M=0.946, SD=0.227) than in normal times (M=0.755, SD=0.431, p<0.01). Moreover, companies tended to adopt *CR Innovation* approach more during the crisis (M=0.223, SD=0.417) than in the normal period (M=0.063, SD=0.244, p<0.01). And less actions based on *CR Integration* were found during crisis (M=0.375, SD=0.485) than during usual times (M=0.561, SD=0.497, p<0.01). In terms of *CSR Initiative Fit*, companies emphasized less on *Coherence* when facing unexpected crises (M=0.027, SD=0.163) than on usual days (M=0.114, SD=0.318, p<0.01). The result also indicated that *Philanthropy* is positively related to *External Consistency* in both 2020 (r=0.872, p<0.01) and 2019 (r=0.775, p<0.01). While

amid public crisis, internet firms can leverage their core advantages to tackle problems, as *Technology* is positively correlated to *Innovation* (r= 0.482, p<0.01).

Practical and theoretical implications

From the results, philanthropy could be seen as the basic and immediate CSR actions to respond to the public crisis that echoes Carroll's pyramid model of corporate social responsibility (Carroll, 1991). When facing a sudden crisis, i.e. pandemic, internet companies have the tendency to demonstrate their responsibilities in philanthropic type and connect to society-motivated motives.

Internet companies have paid more attention to the CR innovation type to address external issues during the public health crisis. Hence, problem-solving oriented CSR seems to be an important strategic approach that goes beyond the classical economic, legislative, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. (word count: 702)

Keywords: *corporate social responsibility (CSR), motive, public health crisis, internet company*

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What drives perceived internal reputation? Empirical evidence from Chile

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Despite the debate surrounding whether reputation can be managed directly, scholars have nonetheless regarded reputation management as a critical public relations function (Doorley & Garcia, 2007). Organizational reputation resides in the eyes of both internal and external stakeholders (Fombrun et al., 2000). As a result of their distinct set of experiences, employees may perceive their organizations' reputation differently than external stakeholders. Hence, employees' intimate and direct experience with their organization, along with their ability to promote or sabotage their employers, impacts how external stakeholders perceive the organization (White et al., 2010). Therefore, employees are often the ultimate reputation makers or breakers of an organization.

The employee-centered, 'inside-out' approach to organizational reputation deserves as much investigation as the 'outside-in,' externally oriented approach. Nevertheless, public relations research has rarely focused on perceived internal reputation and its organizational antecedents. Drawing from literature in internal public relations, leadership, and reputation management, the purpose of the current study is to explore the driving factors of a positive internal reputation by emphasizing organizational- and individual-level enablers.

Literature Review

While leadership has been widely investigated in public relations and communication management, its impact on perceived corporate reputation, especially from the employees' perspective, has not been extensively studied (Meng & Berger, 2013). To partially fill this void and expand the application of leadership research in the context of public relations, we proposed and tested a model that links servant leadership and perceived internal reputation through two employee-centered mediators: employee psychological empowerment (i.e., an intrinsic task motivation reflecting employees' sense of control and an active orientation to their work) (Spreitzer, 1995) and employee thriving (i.e., a positive psychological state in which employees feel a sense of vitality and learning) (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

Many modern organizations implement servant leadership practices to foster employee thriving and well-being. Companies such as Southwest Airlines, Starbucks, Zappos, and Marriott, are all proponents of servant leadership. The need to serve is the core ethos of servant leadership. More than any other leadership theory, servant leadership highlights leaders' willingness to foster their subordinates' personal growth and success (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). Servant leaders order their priorities to ensure that followers come first, organizations second, and themselves last (Sendjaya, 2015). Considering

the crucial role of leaders in projecting a desired organizational image to employees (Scott & Lane, 2000), it is reasonable to argue that servant leaders' favorable traits and behaviors, particularly their people-centered behavioral approach, should elicit followers' positive assessment of their organizations.

Employees' cognitive assessment of their organizations is derived mainly from their direct, personal interactions with key organizational actors. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on employees' internal psychological activities and experiences to illustrate how servant leadership leads to perceived organizational reputation. We proposed that the relationship between servant leadership and perceived organizational reputation is serially mediated by psychological empowerment and employee thriving.

Methodology

An online survey was conducted on Qualtrics in February 2020. A total of 357 working adults from Chile across a wide range of organizations and business communities were recruited through Dynata, the world's largest first-party data and insights platform. The questionnaire was translated from English to Spanish by a bilingual member of the research team and later back-translated to English by two independent translators who are also bilingual. Structural equation modeling was utilized for data analysis.

Results and conclusions

We found that servant leadership's pathway to reputation was serially mediated by psychological empowerment and employee thriving. To elaborate, servant leaders enhance their followers' sense of empowerment by involving them in decision making and meaning-making and passing on knowledge and problem-solving skills. Empowered employees will, in turn, obtain a sense of vitality at work and engage in continuous learning. Ultimately, feelings of thriving would propel employees to form a positive evaluation of their organization. In addition to the sequential mediation, we also found a direct and positive association between servant leadership and perceived organizational reputation.

Practical and social implications

This study provides strategic insights to organizational leaders, public relations, and human resources professionals. First, organizations must implement training programs and provide resources and tools to encourage the adoption of servant behaviors across different management levels. In addition, this study provides one of the first pieces of empirical evidence on servant leadership practice in Chile. Servant leadership has been studied in many cultures, but evidence from Latin America is mostly missing. The finding of this study lends itself particularly well to organizations and practitioners that operate in Chile. Finally, we suggest public relations professionals monitor and assess employees' level of energy and learning at work and mobilize organizational resources to maintain thriving within the organization.

Keywords: *servant leadership, internal reputation, empowerment, employee thriving*

Leadership Going Social: How U.S. Nonprofit Executives Engage Publics on Twitter

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Nonprofit organizations play a significant role in the social and economic well-being of our society. The nonprofit sector in the United States continues to expand, contributing to 5.6 percent of the country's GDP in 2016 (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2016). With the development of digital technology, the function of public relations in nonprofit organizations has evolved and extended beyond traditional printed media to encompass computer-mediated communication (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Saxton & Waters, 2014). In the past few years, a sizable body of literature has begun to examine how various types of nonprofits utilize websites and social media to communicate and build relationships with their stakeholders (Patel & McKeever, 2014; Xu & Saxton, 2019).

Despite the burgeoning body of knowledge on social media use by nonprofits, how leaders in the nonprofit sector directly engage with publics via social media is rarely mentioned. Nonprofit executives play a vital part in connecting organizations with external stakeholders (Carlson & Donohoe, 2010). Through personal branding and engagement potential, leadership communi-cation typically functions as the human-side of organizational communication to authenticate or personalize the otherwise mundane, impersonal organizational-level communication (e.g., Tsai & Men, 2017). Given the immense potential of nonprofit executives as relationship builders and the paucity of research examining their communication styles and impacts, this study explored how nonprofit executives in the U.S. engage with the online publics by applying various communication strategies.

Literature Review

Drawing literature from dialogic communication, social presence, and the information-communication-action (ICA) framework, we investigated the extent to which nonprofit executives leveraged 1) digital dialogic principles, 2) social presence strategies, and 3) message tactics (i.e., message functions, message appeals, media vividness).

Public relations scholars have adapted the five dialogic principles in a vast amount of studies across different organizational social media platforms (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2018). However, traditional operationalization of dialogic com-

munication is mainly functional and not reflecting the interpersonal and relational nature of dialogue initiated by organizations. This study explored dialogic communication from both a functional and relational perspective by incorporating *social presence* into the operationalization of digital dialogic communication. Specifically, we examined nonprofit leaders' employment of three social presence strategies—affective, interactive, and cohesive strategies (Rourke et al., 1999).

Second, we applied Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) ICA framework to provide unique insights into the communication needs, interests, and focus of nonprofit leaders. We examined how nonprofit executives leveraged informational messages (i.e., serve to inform), community messages (i.e., serve to build and strengthen ties to the online community), and action messages (i.e., focus on promotion and mobilization) on Twitter.

To understand different message appeals used by nonprofit leaders, we applied the rational/emotional framework. We also explored message vividness, given that a richer sensory perception yields more robust social media engagement and message persuasiveness (Ji et al., 2019). Finally, we investigated how dialogic communication and message tactics can contribute to public engagement with nonprofit executives in terms of *likes, retweets, comments.*

Methodology

This study adopted a content analysis approach. We identified 35 leaders from the renowned *Nonprofit Times* 100 list published in 2019. In total, 14,039 tweets published between February 1, 2018 and February 1, 2020 as well as their top comments were collected through the Twitter Public API and our customized Python script. We randomly drew 20 posts from each executive, resulting in 700 qualified posts and 195 comments attached to these posts. The in-

tercoder reliability was satisfactory.

Results and conclusions

The results showed that nonprofit executives employed all four dialogic principles to some extent. Specifically, the most used principle was *information of interest to stakeholders* followed by *dialogic loop*. Regarding the use of social presence strategies, executives leveraged *affective, interactive*, and *cohesive strategies*. Notably, they embraced emotional expressions and often disclosed personal opinions. Furthermore, they were most active in disseminating information and creating an online community. Their messages, however, were less concerned with promotion, mobilization, or calling for action. We revealed mixed findings on how dialogic communication and various message tactics affected public engagement. Findings of this study were based on correlations rather than causality. Future researchers should test the proposed relationships in experimental settings.

Practical and social implications

This study provided strategic value to executive leaders and their public relations teams in the nonprofit sector. In the age of digital communication, the role of communication practitioners entails aiding top leaders in building relationships and engagement with online publics. Knowing how to select relevant topics, design effective messages, and evaluate key outtakes and outcomes is essential for creating value for organizations. This study also suggests nonprofit executives seize the opportunity to represent their organization, engage with publics, and amplify the impact of the organization's digital presence.

Keywords: *nonprofit communication, leadership communication, social media, dialogic communication, social presence*

Communicating Corporate LGBTQ Advocacy: A Computational Comparison of the Global CSR Discourse

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Targeting the intersection of LGBTQ advocacy and CSR communication and filling the knowledge gap in the nascent scholarship on corporate activism, this study answers three research questions: 1. How is the CSR discourse around LGBTQ issues constructed by major global corporations? 2. How does the global LGBTQ CSR discourse compare with non-profit LGBTQ organizations' guidelines? 3. How and why do these global organizations communicate their LGBTQ advocacy differently?

Literature Review

Existing literature on LGBTQ communities in corporate and organizational settings heavily focuses on business marketing and activist strategic communication (Ciszek, 2017; Mundy, 2013; Tindall & Waters, 2013). In contrast, corporate LGBTQ advocacy, where socially conscious companies take active roles to advance internal and external LGBTQ stakeholders' interests through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, received way less scholarly attention, despite the prominence of corporate efforts in recent events.

Although these companies' actions are prone to CSR skepticism and their motivations remain suspicious to some, referred to as pinkwashing by scholars, it remains a fact that corporations are increasingly engaging in political and social issues through CSR, and public relations scholars know very little about how they are getting involved in the process, how they are constructing discourses around these contentious topics, and why they might communicate their CSR efforts differently.

Methodology

Large-scale cross-national studies on CSR communication are challenging to conduct, and comparative studies in this domain are still relatively rare (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009). In this study, we take advantage of the huge potential of computational methods for comparative communication research (e.g., van der Meer, 2016). We collected and examined the annual CSR reports of companies on the 2018 Fortune Global 500 list. These documents were then manually searched for thirteen search terms concerning LGBTQ issues: LGBT, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, homosexual, sex, orientation, preference, gender, identity, and pride. We used the textual data of the context in which these terms were used. In most cases, the context was the paragraphs under the same subheading. In total, we collected 406 documents from these sampled companies, among which 236 mentioned at least one LGBTQ-related word in their CSR reporting. Our corpus thus contains 236 documents, 136,820 words, and 8,287 unigrams.

We consulted advocacy LGBTQ organizations to construct the non-profit guideline for corporate LGBTQ advocacy. Consulted organizations include Catalyst, Lambda Legal, GLAAD, Human Rights Campaign (HRC), International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), National LGBT Health Education Center, Pride At Work, The Stonewall, The Trevor Project, The United Nation Human Rights Council, and Workplace Pride.

The combination of semantic network analysis and structural topic modeling was used to present and compare the global CSR discourse on LGBTQ advocacy. Semantic network analysis, by revealing relations among concepts, helps demonstrate the meaning creation in corporations' discourse on a certain issue. Structural topic modeling (STM), an unsupervised machine learning method, was used to investigate topical patterns in our corpus. We use the variances in topic proportions in the STM model to test our hypotheses on why and how companies across the global might communicate their LGBTQ efforts differently.

Covariates that might affect how companies (N = 236) constructed their LGBTQ CSR discourses include: Industry, ranking, country, and continent of the Fortune 500 company; Each country's democracy level; Each country's civil liberty index; Each country's level of legal protection for LGBTQ individuals; Each country's LGBTQ social acceptance. These metadata come from the Fortune website, the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) and Industry Classification Benchmark (ICB), Polity Project's Polity score, the annual Global State of Democracy Indices by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the state-sponsored homophobia report by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), and the Social Acceptance of LGBT People in 174 Countries report published by the William Institute.

Results and Conclusions

Results indicate 6 corporate topics and 9 non-profit topics on corporate LGBTQ advocacy. We explicate those topics with more details in the full paper by referencing organizations' original writing. We further show that stakeholder expectations and institutional factors not only affect whether organizations report LGBTQ efforts, but also affect what topics these companies highlight in their CSR communication. Companies in democratic countries with substantial stakeholder expectations emphasize areas that need high investment and exceed legal obligations.

Practical and Social Implications

The results provide an overview of the global corporate discourse on LGBTQ advocacy for practical inquiries, and extend the institutional theory and the stakeholder theory. The study also highlights corporations' role in the contemporary society as active change agents.

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19
Branch offices

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5.3
Market share by total assets

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Customers

36
Branch offices

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%
1.9
Market share by total assets

139,358
Customers

28
Branch offices

Komercijalna banka Beograd
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9.9
Market share by total assets

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Customers

203
Branch offices

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%
17.3
Market share by total assets

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Customers

34
Branch offices

NLB Banka Podgorica
%
11.6
Market share by total assets

65,210
Customers

19
Branch offices

Komercijalna banka Podgorica
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