

**Social Enterprises and Social Media:
A Dialogic and Comparative Analysis**

by


Kevin L. Rawls

Presented in Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University
School of Communication and the Arts

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Abstract

This study is devoted to assessing the public relations activities of social enterprises on social media through a dialogic communication lens and comparing those activities with traditional businesses. Social enterprises are fundamentally devoted to leveraging market forces to help create sustainable social change, and as such are interested in not only financial returns but also specific social returns, and the public relations strategies of these organizations should be more aligned than traditional businesses with fully functioning society theory and dialogic communication principles. This study reveals areas of opportunity for both social enterprises and conventional companies to develop in the area of dialogic communication on social media platforms.

Keywords: public relations, social enterprise, strategic communication

Copyright Page

Dedication

This study is dedicated to the Lord and the community of support that have I received throughout this process. My wife, children, family, and friends have all been gracious enough to put up with me during the pursuit of this endeavor. I thank God for you all.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the community of scholars who supported me during this process. The faculty, committee, and dissertation chair helped to shape my study into its final form, and I am very grateful to each of you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

This study is devoted to exploring the social media activities of social enterprises to determine if the principles of dialogic communication are present and used in the public relations activities of these unique businesses. The specific mission and vision of a social enterprise direct these corporations to intentionally move society forward in a positive direction through a blended value proposition to consumers regarding their products or services (Emerson, 2003). However, the positive social good desired by these organizations does not end with the exchange of goods or services but extends to their marketing and public relations activities.

The communication and relationship building that takes place between the corporation and the stakeholders or broader public falls in the realm of public relations (Grunig, 2006), and the communication that takes place should work to benefit both the public and the organization. By seeing the corporation and the public as agents who must enact effective engagement strategies for communication (Heath, 2006) the principles of dialogic communication have proven invaluable to helping public relations professionals understand how they can more effectively develop strategies to bring the interests of the company and the stakeholders together (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

The use of social media has become an important tool in the public relations toolbox (Aichner et al., 2021; Sembor et al., 2017) and has served as a new means by which the public and corporations can interact and engage (Kent & Taylor, 2021). The ability to offer a variety of ways for the organization and the public to interact means that social media has the potential to be a powerful tool of engagement for the public relations activities of the organization. However, there is a gap between the potential for effective engagement and its execution. The following

sections introduce the content of this study by describing the problem statement, purpose, and guiding research questions.

Background

Social Enterprise

Throughout the early part of the twenty-first century, researchers and practitioners have had many opportunities to observe and study the various ways that businesses and industries influence the broader society. From corporate scandals involving Enron and WorldCom (Cowton, 2009; Hail et al., 2018) to the housing crisis and global economic turmoil in 2008, the symbiotic relationship between business decisions and the societies in which they operate has proved fruitful for researchers.

As with the abovementioned examples, the effects of these businesses were felt not only at the local level but also all over the world in a newly globalized economy. The interconnectedness of societies and businesses has raised questions about the level of responsibility that corporations have to those societies, and what can be done to help ensure that the mission and policies of the company ensure that appropriate steps are taken to account for all company stakeholders.

The increased focus on how businesses and corporations operate has led to the emergence of new business models and enterprises. One of the new models of business that has been developed is the social enterprise (Young & Leecy, 2014). Social enterprise is an aspect of the broader concept of social entrepreneurship whereby a social entrepreneur creates a corporation or business to leverage the sale of goods or services to generate sustainable and positive social change (Spaviero, 2019). Rather than focusing exclusively on the maximization of profits, social enterprise includes an expanded value proposition whereby the business not only offers the

particular product or service to the consumer but also integrates positive social value into the exchange (Acs et al., 2013). This blended value proposition is the hallmark of a social enterprise (Emerson, 2003) and it drives the company's mission, vision, management, accounting, marketing, and communication strategies (Manetti, 2014; Zietlow, 2001).

There are a couple of organizations, notably B-Labs and Ashoka (Wulleman & Hudon, 2016), that have worked to bring clarity to social entrepreneurship and social enterprise for the benefit of both practitioners and scholars. This lack of clarity has presented a challenge to the scholarship that surrounds these organizations. While there has been increased attention to the business model and the value proposition of the corporation, there has been little in the way of research and scholarship focused on the communication plans and strategies that guide the relationship between the corporation and the broader society (Heath, 2006). The internal and external rhetoric surrounding these organizations provides an opportunity to study how the unique mission impacts not only the accounting and value proposition but also stakeholder communication strategies. These communication exchanges take place in a different manner than those taking place outside of the exchange of goods and services and reflect the broader impact that the corporation has on the society in which it operates. This broad public communication dynamic falls within the area of public relations.

Public Relations

Public relations as a field of inquiry has undergone several different iterations and areas of focus. As a tool of rhetoric, public relations has roots that date back to antiquity with speeches and papers written to inform or persuade the public. The printing press, radio, television, and the internet have all contributed to the methods by which organizations or individuals communicate

with the broader public. These tools and the ways that they are used in different cultures have made the history of public relations a wide-ranging subject.

Bentle (2010) described a series of evolutions from interpersonal communication in the early history of mankind to a developing social system in the twentieth century. Grunig and Hunt (1984) is one of the first significant studies of public relations. Drawing upon systems theory, they examined the way that the public relations activities of an organization operated as part of a larger social system or interconnected network in a complex society. This recognition of the public communication strategies of the organization as being a part of a larger system allowed public relations researchers to increase the scope and understanding of what public relations was and could be. The four models of public relations begin with the publicity relationship and move to the public information and two-way asymmetric models, but it is the fourth model, the two-way symmetric, that forms the foundation of this study. This two-way symmetric public relations model has generated a number of public relations theories and practices and represents the highest level of engagement and co-creative power of public relations activities.

To establish a more co-created narrative regarding the company, the public relations activities of a company should have a dialogic communication strategy to establish the highest possible level of engagement between the company and the public, and the emerging trend in public relations literature over the past decades has been away from a singular focus on the best interests of the company and toward a more symbiotic relationship with the broader community of stakeholders (PRSA, *About Us*, n.d.), reflecting Grunig and Hunt's fourth model of public relations (1984).

The role of public relations in the broader society informs recent literature and research in the field. Rather than a means of communicating the exclusive needs of the organization, which

may end up doing more harm than good to the broader society (Berger, 2005), the field of public relations has developed models and principles to function as a more intentionally positive social force. Heath (2006) developed fully functioning society theory as a way to help public relations researchers and practitioners realize a vision of how the communication activities of the organization might positively contribute to the broader society. By directing the public relations activities of the organizations to see both the public and stakeholders as having agency, the corporation could help reflect the needs of the community alongside the needs of the organization.

The relationship-building and engagement of public relations that is called for in fully functioning society theory (Heath, 2006), social harmony theory (Marsh, 2012), and civil society theory (Sommerfeldt, 2013) are prominent in the model of public relations interaction known as dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002). This model of communication focuses on engagement between the corporation and the public through the use of the principles of creating a dialogic loop, usefulness of information, generation of return visits, ease of use of the interface, and conservation of visitors (Kent & Taylor, 1998). With advancements in technology that allow greater communication between the corporation and the public, these principles are more relevant than ever, and social media platforms can help facilitate this type of dialogic interaction.

Social Media

The growth of the internet has created myriad avenues and channels whereby individuals and corporations can communicate. These platforms have brought about a new way for organizations to interact with and engage the public (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Company CEO's (Capriotti & Ruesja, 2018; Yue et al., 2019), Fortune 500 companies (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010), and non-profit organizations (Waters & Jamal, 2011) have all used social media as a means

whereby engagement and relationship building with the public can take place. The interactive capabilities of these platforms provide the consumer, stakeholder, and stake-seeker with a kind of access to companies not previously available. The ability to respond directly to an announcement by a company with a public comment has given stakeholders a more effective opportunity to voice support or concern for the company in a substantive way.

However, there are still unexplored opportunities to maximize the use of social media as a tool for two-way dialogic communication (Shin et al., 2015), and while social media provide opportunities for more effective engagement, whether the corporations take full advantage of these opportunities remains to be seen. Taken together, the emerging business model of the social enterprise and evolving models of public relations present an opportunity for research that merges both model types.

Introduction to the Problem

Social enterprises focus on specific and positive changes in society (Sparviero, 2019) and exist as market-oriented tools to create sustainable social change. These businesses or corporations do have a focus on profits, not as an end in themselves but as a means to sustain social change. The unique value proposition of social enterprises integrates social change with the sale of goods or services. These specific social missions are predicated on adding positive social value, and as with traditional or conventional businesses, the mission should be reflected throughout the organization (Stevens et al., 2015).

However, corporations do not exist in isolation, as they are a part of a larger social fabric comprised of stakeholders, state-seekers, and the broader public. To effectively communicate as a company with these stakeholders, public relations has grown as a means to establish a relationship between the corporation and the stakeholders to achieve company goals (Theaker &

Yaxley, 2017). Through the communication activities of public relations, a corporation can establish and maintain relationships with stakeholders, and through that relationship bring about the broader mission and vision of the company.

One of the goals of public relations is to effectively engage with the stakeholders. This engagement best takes place in the form of dialogic communication. By recognizing the inherent value and dignity of another (Buber & Smith, 2013), dialogic communication allows for communication to be two-way rather than one-way, with each agent involved in both sending and receiving information. When the public relations activities of a corporation grant agency to the broader social community in which it operates, described as a focus on *communitas*—rather than exclusively focusing on the goals and needs of the corporation, described as *corporatas* (Heath, 2006)—there is an opportunity for two-way communication. Dialogic communication between agents has the opportunity to yield a more positive outcome for both, as it allows for the creation of shared meaning and goals with the opportunity to “build relationships that serve both organizational and public interests” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 21).

While the value proposition of a social enterprise may be adequately addressed and aligned with the mission, there is little evidence that the public relations activities of these specific kinds of organizations are established and guided by strategies and principles consistent with the company’s positive social goals. In other words, while the mission of the organization may differ from those of traditional enterprises, public relations strategies may still reflect a corporation-first focus and behavior.

While public relations strategies have begun to shift to a more community-focused approach, a new technology has presented public relations professionals as well as the broader community with a new method of communication. The increasing prevalence of the internet has

brought with it an increase in the use of social media. Social media is an internet-based tool that has become a widespread means of engagement between individuals and corporations (Aicher et al., 2021). Social media allows for a degree of interaction and engagement between stakeholders and corporations that has not been previously available, and with this comes a greater opportunity for organizations to develop effective relationship-building strategies.

As public relations professionals and organizations have evolved, social media has become a tool not only for the dissemination of information but also for providing effective engagement with stakeholders through a variety of web-based platforms and applications. Each of these social media platforms represents an opportunity for a corporation to develop relationships with stakeholders through engagement, and while each platform may have different components, each provides an opportunity for using and applying dialogic principles. The use of social media as a tool for effective dialogic engagement is still lacking (Shin et al., 2015), and there may still be remnants of the traditional corporate-focused and one-way communication methods employed by social enterprises in the social media activities of these companies. The following section will frame how this dynamic informs and guides the problem under study.

Problem Statement

The framing of the problem in the previous section leads to the identification of the problem that will guide the research project. The problem being studied is that if a social enterprise is not using dialogic communication principles in its public relations activities on social media, the corporation may not be fully accomplishing the social good that its mission requires.

Purpose Statement

As a result of the identification of the problem statement, the purpose of this study is to assess the presence of dialogic principles in the social media activity of social enterprises in comparison to the presence of the same principles in the social media activities of conventional corporations. Through a content analysis of the social media postings of both social enterprises and Fortune 100 companies, this study is devoted to analyzing and comparing the presence of dialogic communication strategies in these organizations.

Significance of the Study

The resources devoted to public relations activities in an organization represent an opportunity for the company to establish meaningful and effective relationships with the public. However, if the activities of these organizations do not reflect the principles of dialogic communication, then there may be missed opportunities for effective engagement, and the resources spent on public relations may not have sufficient return on the investment to warrant their expenditure. Researchers would find this study significant because it opens up another avenue of inquiry related to the communication activities of this emerging business model. The social media and public relations activities of social enterprises have not yet been the focus of substantial research, so this study is an opportunity to identify and analyze these kinds of businesses. Additionally, this study is significant because it can help provide practitioners with information and data related to how social enterprises can more effectively engage stakeholders in a meaningful and positive way, with the ultimate goal of helping these types of organizations accomplish their mission and vision.

Research Questions

In light of previous sections on the background related to social enterprises, public relations, and social media, the research proposal design encompasses a number of research questions. The first question is intended to determine whether a social enterprise has intentionally adjusted its public relations communication to integrate dialogic communication principles.

RQ1. Which dialogic principles are present in the Facebook postings of a social enterprise?

RQ2. Do traditional and social enterprises differ in utilizing dialogic principles on organizations' Facebook pages and postings?

These two research questions are a starting point for this study of the public relations and communication activities of social enterprises. In the field of communication, there are a number of different means by which a problem may be studied, and this study uses a quantitative methodology to answer the proposed research questions. Each question will have corresponding hypotheses to be measured using statistical analysis.

Summary

The preceding sections outline the background and current research problem and questions to be studied. Each of these steps is an integral component of a cohesive research project and will guide the literature review and methodology for the next chapters. Through a systematic review of the literature and an explanation of the best method for addressing the research questions, this proposal seeks to ensure alignment between all of the various parts, ultimately comprising a study that effectively addresses the problem.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

This study represents an integration of multiple areas of inquiry in an effort to draw from each area to address the underlying research questions and problem statements. In the realm of organizational communication, there are a number of areas worthy of consideration, from internal to external rhetoric to mission statements and public relations strategies. This study focuses on the public relations strategies of an organization, which is an effort on the part of managers and leaders to develop relationship-building and engagement strategies with stakeholders (Taylor & Kent, 2014). However, each organization is different, and some may have a greater need for public relations and engagement activities than others. Indeed, some organizations are devoted to their unique relationships with stakeholders to the point where the organization's mission statement and vision focus on the identified beneficiaries of the organization. These types of organizations may be called social enterprises, and the unique mission and vision of the organization should necessarily have ramifications for the public relations strategies of such a company. These unique businesses may not yet have fully developed the necessary changes or characteristics of effective public relations strategies to match the mission and vision of the business, relying instead on strategies of traditional or conventional businesses. Historical research related to social and psychological change, social entrepreneurship, and public relations strategies will guide the content of this chapter.

The underlying philosophical and theoretical foundations of this study are formed through the confluence of various traditions and theories. The following sections will outline the fundamental theoretical basis for the study as well as introduce applicable specific areas of inquiry. Through an effective review of the relevant literature, the study will be positioned within

the broader body of knowledge and research in the public relations and engagement strategies of social enterprises as they seek to create positive social change. The initial section will focus on situating the study in the field of communication and establishing its relevance to the applicable communication traditions.

Situation in Communication Tradition

The use of communication traditions as formulated by Craig (1999) helps researchers identify various ways in which the study of communication can be described and applied. While there is no one tradition that may claim to fully express the totality of communication theory, each of the traditions speaks to an area of study to which communication can make a claim of application and legitimacy. There are a total of seven traditions: cybernetic, rhetorical, socio-psychological, semiotic, socio-cultural, critical, and phenomenological (Maguire, 2006). While the proposed project might legitimately fall within a number of communication theories and traditions, there appear to be two traditions that are of major relevance and two traditions of minor relevance. The major traditions are the socio-psychological and the socio-cultural traditions, and the secondary traditions are cybernetic and rhetorical. The following sections will describe the relevance of each of these to the proposed study.

Socio-Psychological Tradition

The socio-psychological tradition is concerned with those aspects of communication that focus on the ways that social interaction can be used to achieve specific outcomes (Craig, 2009). This aspect of the communication tradition intersects with social psychology, specifically the writings of Kurt Lewin (1939), to inform the proposed study in a significant way, as it is the ultimate goal of the social enterprise to not only effectively engage stakeholders but to do so with a particular focus on social change as the primary function and goal of the organization. The

public relations activities of the social enterprise focus on influence and change and are therefore situated within the socio-psychological tradition. The socio-psychological aspect of the study is also reflected in the role that dialogic communication plays in the engagement of stakeholders by the organizations sampled in this study. Dialogic communication has implications for the psychological processes that take place in individuals as a result of engagement with others (Welch, 2011).

Socio-Cultural Tradition

In addition, the proposed study fits within the sociocultural tradition, as this tradition focus on the interactions that produce cultural values such as meaning, rituals, or social structures (Craig, 2009). A social enterprise is focused on the ways that the organization or business can work with various stakeholders to address a social issue while at the same time engaging in mutually beneficial commercial interactions, the consumption of the goods or services is not merely an exchange that benefits the company and the consumer but is intentionally focused on helping to bring about positive social change. It is in this manner that the interaction between the social enterprise and the consumers fits into the socio-cultural tradition, as the engagement and communication, whether by dialogic communication or the exchange of goods and services, seeks to (re)establish a more desirable social order (Maguire, 2006) from which all stakeholders can benefit. Indeed, Craig (1999) describes the “coconstruction” (p. 133) aspect of this tradition as one of the hallmarks of the theories that fit into the socio-cultural tradition.

Cybernetics

In addition to the primary traditions, two secondary traditions are relevant to this line of inquiry. The cybernetics tradition accounts for those theories that focus on the ways that

information exchange and communication take place across systems (Craig, 1999). From the way individual minds operate and communicate to complex human dynamics, which represent large-scale pathways of information processing in a complex social system (Nowak et al., 2013), cybernetics addresses the way that information is processed and exchanged to develop and influence systems, whether biological or technological. When we think about the ways that societies operate as large-scale systems and how communication activities can affect that system, we see that the intentional public relations activities of a social enterprise, developed through dialogic communication with stakeholders, can serve to impact not just the individuals involved but the larger social system in which the stakeholders operate. These complex social systems are brought together and affected by communication between each of the individual parts. Whether it is the neurons in the mind of the individual or the electronic pathways spread across computer systems, the cybernetic tradition speaks to these systems addressed in the proposed study.

Rhetorical Tradition

Craig (1999) described the rhetorical tradition, which is the category of theories related to the “practical art of discourse” (Maguire, 2006, p. 89). This tradition is built on the history of persuasion and elements of communication that can change minds or provide persuasive arguments. Within the rhetorical tradition, there are five canons: “invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory” (Littlejohn et al., 2021, p. 37). The relevance of this tradition to the proposed study is found in the discursive and persuasive components (Craig, 1999).

In the proposed study, we examine dialogic communication in the relationship between stakeholders engaged in interactions with the public relations activities of a social enterprise. In the dialogic communication dynamic, there is a discursive component of engagement between these stakeholders that focuses on the best way to work together and positively address social

issues. This discursive and persuasive component of engagement positions the proposed study within the rhetorical tradition, which grounds the ways stakeholders engage with the company through dialogic communication oriented toward positive social change.

Theoretical Framework

The proposed study reflects the intersection of a number of theories. The following section is devoted to explaining the crossroads of the theoretical foundations in this particular study. These theories each work together to help accommodate the various aspects of the proposed study. Within the field of communication, there are a number of theories that relate to public relations activities and methods. Fully functioning society theory (Heath, 2006), dialogic theory (Taylor & Kent, 2014), and field theory (Lewin, 1939) will be discussed and their relevance to the study presented in the following sections. While dialogic theory (Taylor & Kent, 2014) is being tested in the study, field theory and fully functioning society theory are nonetheless relevant to the study and form the foundation for the literature on public relations strategies for social enterprises.

Fully functioning society theory, as proposed by Heath (2006), is based on the understanding that the public relations strategies of organizations should begin to focus less on *corporatas* and instead focus on *communitas*. The former sees public relations strategies as accommodating the mission and vision of the corporation, and the latter sees them as a part of a larger community whereby the stakeholders are relevant and necessary clients of the public relations activities. By broadening the public relations goals of an organization and considering the stakeholders as clients, an organization gives the society agency and a voice in the company. By focusing public relations on community goals and structures, rather than just representing the goals of the organization, the broader society can be effectively involved.

The relationship with the broader society through the work of the public relations strategies of the organization for the purposes of *communitas* and stakeholder engagement allows for the involvement of dialogic communication theory, as this will help to create a clearer picture of developing a relationship with stakeholders that contributes to a more fully functioning society. Dialogic communication is rooted in the concept of engagement. Taylor and Kent (2014) proposed that “engagement is a part of dialogue and through engagement, organizations and publics can make decisions that create social capital” (p. 384).

Finally, field theory plays an important role in the theoretical foundations of the proposed study because it focuses on individuals and societies establishing a state of equilibrium and how that equilibrium may be changed (Burnes & Cooke, 2013). Lewin (1939) established the fundamental principles of field theory using a topological approach to individual and group states. The basic principles of field theory are that there are forces that exert pressure on individuals or groups and form a kind of field of influence, with some forces pushing and some pulling, but the results of the total amount of forces in the field create a stasis or equilibrium. These forces may be external or internal, and while it may be difficult to identify the forces, field theory offers a model for understanding how these forces interact to create a state of equilibrium between an individual and society.

Lewin (1947) looked not only into describing the existence of the field in individuals and societies; he also sought to understand how and why these situations change. Forces exerting pressure on an individual or a society may be addressed or changed to move an individual or a group to a new equilibrium. This movement is described in the three-step model of change (Burnes, 2020) as a series of stages whereby the current stasis is “unfrozen,” the movement to the new state is completed, and the new state is “refrozen” to prevent the original state from

being reestablished (Burnes, 2020). This theory is relevant to the study because social enterprises exist with a specific social mission and business model for changing the current social state. Therefore, the public relations activities of the organization should be developed and implemented to bring about social change from one state to another through dialogic communication practices. The specific aspects of this theory will be expanded upon further in this chapter.

Finally, in the context of field theory and fully functioning society theory, dialogic communication in a social enterprise can intentionally bring about positive social change. Dialogic communication draws from the theological and philosophical writings of Martin Buber (Buber & Smith, 2013), in which the inherent value of others allows two-way communication to bring about new and useful connections within the fabric of society.

Dialogic communication differs from a monologue in that it not only focuses on providing information from one agent to another but also allows the agent to receive information from the other agent, as they are both seen as valuable. This understanding that the transmission and reception of information as a two-way system is useful when applied to public relations (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Rather than seeing public relations activities as the mere transmission of information from the company or organization to the broader public, dialogic communication allows the corporation to see the public as *thou* rather than *it*, to borrow Buber's terms (Buber & Smith, 2013). When the broader public is given this agency, the corporation should provide not only a means of communication with the public, but a way for the public to communicate with the corporation.

The technological innovations of social media have presented new opportunities for corporations to communicate with stakeholders (Wang et al., 2021) while allowing opportunities

for stakeholders to communicate in turn with the corporations in new ways. Traditionally, there were few if any ways for a stakeholder to engage with the corporation in a dialogic manner. However, the technology of social media has provided the means to develop a more dialogic communication dynamic between corporations and stakeholders (Navarro et al., 2018).

Related Literature

Social Change

A social enterprise focuses on bringing about a specific social change, and it is in this area where Kurt Lewin's (1939) field theory becomes relevant. Field theory describes the social forces that work together to create a particular state of equilibrium for an individual or group. An individual or a society can change the current equilibrium through what Lewin calls a three-step model of change (Burnes, 2020). In this model, it is necessary for an individual or a society to "unfreeze" from the current equilibrium, move to a new space, and "refreeze" to prevent movement back to the original state. Communication and public relations play important roles in each step.

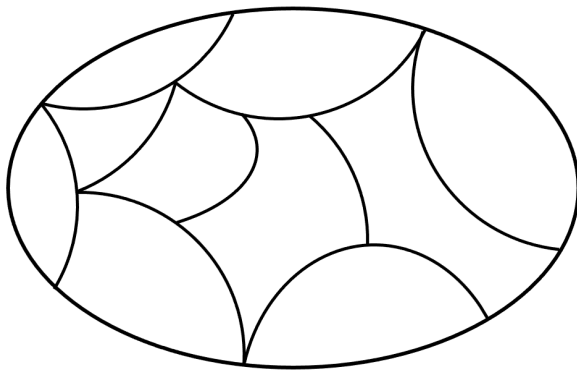
The goal of field theory is reaching a large-scale understanding of the forces and factors that create the current state of an individual or a society, so that a researcher can begin to understand what forces may need to change to move an individual or a society into a different state. The array of the forces is described as the field, and the various interactions in the field are described by Lewin as the life space (Marrow, 1969). These forces all work in concert with some push and some pull, but the equilibrium of the forces make up the field and the resulting life space.

Lewin drew from the field of topology to help describe and understand these forces. Topology is similar to the study of geography in that it is concerned with the way that certain

shapes and figures interact and share space (Manetti & Chiossi, 2015). Lewin used these geographical terms to describe the push-and-pull forces that move an individual or a society in a particular direction (Lewin & Lorsch, 1939).

Figure 1 below provides a visual representation of a life space. This description shows how different forces work together to fill up and create the space that represents a specific equilibrium in a society or individual. This graphic shows that there are no empty spaces and that each force interacts with the individual, but the forces also interact with and push against each other in various ways. It is also worth noting that this representation of the life space is similar to a topographic map, which helps to strengthen the theoretical relationship between field theory and the discipline of topography.

Figure 1



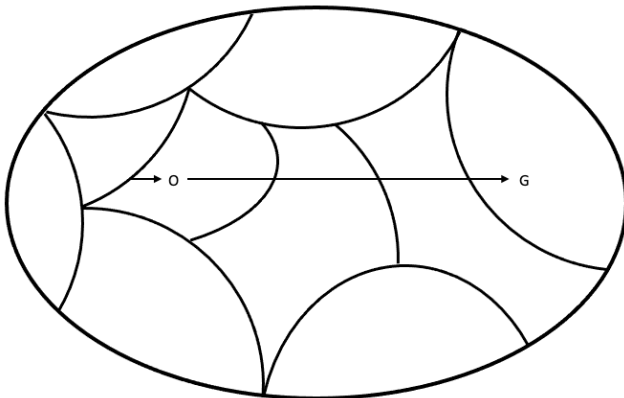
Adapted from Burnes & Cook (2013).

The life space described by Lewin has geographic origins; Lewin sought to apply these fields to bringing about change in the individual or society. In other words, field theory seeks to understand not only the current equilibrium, but also how an individual or society can change the space that surrounds them. Lewin used the term *hodology*, the study of pathways, to describe

how an individual or society can move from one state or area of a life space to another (Kadar & Shaw, 2000).

This movement from one place to another in the field is represented in Figure 2. A potential pathway for an individual or segment of society is represented by the “o” or point of origin, and the goal, which is represented by the “g” in the figure as the area or space being pursued (Burnes & Cook, 2013). The different forces in the field are pushing toward the goal or pushing away from the goal. This representation of an individual or segment of society moving in the life space harkens back to the topological foundations of field theory.

Figure 2



Adapted from Burnes & Cook (2013).

Some of the forces are pushing towards the goal, and some are pushing away from the goal. Lewin (1947) described forces that push or pull the individual or the social group as driving and restraining forces, respectively. These forces are complex and are represented by psychological or social factors that create equilibrium, and they may be conscious or unconscious to the individual or society seeking to make a change. The forces therefore are not always pushing against the movement, but the balance between the forces must change for

movement to take place (Burnes, 2004). If a social change is to be made, the forces that seek to create the change will come into contact with those resisting the change. It is the goal of the social enterprise to understand these forces and how they can be directed or changed to bring about the desired outcome. Communication strategies, specifically public relations strategies of the organization, play a large part in changing these forces.

Social Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprises

In any social system, whether through their own efforts or those of others, some individuals or groups will be seen as successfully navigating and benefitting from the existing systems. However, not everyone in a society may be benefitting, and there will be others at the other end of the spectrum—those who struggle to succeed through their own actions or the actions of others. Still others in society may take notice of those who are not succeeding or who are not afforded the same benefits as others. These individuals may notice a particular issue within larger social structures where some individuals or groups are not benefitting from the existing structures or social dynamics. Some may take it upon themselves to begin to work to change that social system with the intention of helping to raise others from one state to another through creative and market-oriented solutions. These individuals may be referred to as social entrepreneurs. The term social entrepreneur was coined by Dees et al. (2001) and refers to those individuals who work to bring about positive social value and change through the use of innovative means and processes, primarily through market-oriented solutions (Nichols, 2009). The organizations created by these social entrepreneurs are called social enterprises (Dees et al., 2001).

There are a host of business activities that could be considered beneficial to the broader community in which they operate. Historically, there are different terms, but the term *corporate*

social responsibility (CSR) has emerged as an effective label for those actions a business can take to ensure that they are not merely focused on maximizing profits. These CSR initiatives allow businesses to show that they are making intentional efforts to engage with and serve the community around them (Viererbl & Koch, 2022). These CSR activities are not exclusive to established or entrepreneurial companies, as both new and already existing businesses can engage in CSR initiatives to develop a strong affiliation or brand that associates the company with social good.

While these CSR activities may be positive aspects of these businesses, the difference between CSR activities and a social enterprise is that with the social enterprise, the social good and social value are fundamentally intertwined with the value proposition of the organization (Emerson 2003). This means that if a conventional business were to stop engaging in CSR activities it would not ultimately change the business model of sales for their goods or services. However, if a social enterprise were to stop social value creation, it would fundamentally change the value proposition to the potential consumer of their products or services.

For example, if a company such as a local hardware store were to decide to take a percentage of their profits for one day and donate them to a local food shelter, that would be considered a positive CSR activity. That hardware store will go back to the same profit model the next day and would change nothing about the fundamental business, revenue, or brand that the company had established. However, if a social enterprise such as Tom's Shoes, which has a one-to-one model whereby when a customer purchases a product the company gives away a similar product to a beneficiary, were to no longer give away the product to someone in need, it would fundamentally change the value of the shoes to the customer and undermine the business and revenue model of the company.

The concept of social entrepreneurship and the individuals who start and maintain social enterprises has gone through a variety of definitions and descriptions. However, some common themes have emerged in studies of the business model and related social phenomena. Martin and Osberg (2007) provided a helpful starting point by describing three characteristics or themes that emerge when studying social enterprises. They described these items as follows:

- Identifying a stable but inherently unjust equilibrium that causes the exclusion, marginalization, or suffering of a segment of humanity that lacks the financial means or political clout to achieve any transformative benefit on its own.
- Identifying an opportunity in this unjust equilibrium, developing a social value proposition, and bringing to bear inspiration, creativity, direct action, courage, and fortitude, thereby challenging the stable state's hegemony; and
- Forging a new, stable equilibrium that releases trapped potential or alleviates the suffering of the targeted group, and through imitation and the creation of a stable ecosystem around the new equilibrium ensuring a better future for the targeted group and even society at large. (p. 35)

The description provided by Martin and Osberg (2007) has significant overlap with the elements of field theory concerning how to achieve lasting change in an individual or a society. For example, identifying which variables or aspects of the field may resist change is evident in this description (Schein, 1999). Field theory will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter, but it is sufficient to draw the connections between social entrepreneurship and social change in this section.

One of the hallmarks of an effective social entrepreneur or social enterprise is the intention to disrupt the existing social situation that has created an imbalance in the just or fair

functioning of a society (Christensen et al., 2006). This disruption is an intentional effort on the part of the organization or individual to address the current status quo and create a more just or fair society. This disruptiveness of the social entrepreneur and social enterprise is reflected in the unfreezing component of Lewin's three-step model of change (Burns, 2020). Christensen et al. (2006) sought to distinguish between disruptive innovations and catalytic innovations, with the former being more widespread and unintentionally socially beneficial, whereas the latter is more niche and intentionally focused on social change. Ultimately, however, the goal of the social enterprise or entrepreneur is to disrupt a system and ultimately create a new paradigm and status quo in which the negative social issue is fundamentally addressed and altered.

Of note, then, is the overall life cycle of the social enterprise. While there are models for traditional enterprises to evolve and adjust to meet consumer demand, the multiple-bottom-line approach of social enterprises creates a dynamic whereby if the organization is successful, there may not be a demand for the goods or services of the organization, as the social mission has been met. The transition challenges for the social enterprise may be more complicated than the liquidation of assets or the adjustment of the social mission, since it must keep the broader goals of the organization in mind. Transitioning the organization to a post-social issue mission has yet to receive much attention, but will become more necessary as these business models continue to proliferate.

The legal entity created as a result of the desire to identify and change a particular socially unjust equilibrium is known as a social enterprise (Arena et al., 2015), and those individuals who identify the need and create these organizations are known as social entrepreneurs (Nicholls, 2009). These individuals have characteristics that in some way overlap with those of traditional entrepreneurs, but in other ways do not. Nicholls (2009) listed these

components as sociality, innovation, and market orientation, and the sociality component is the hallmark of the social entrepreneur. The ability to leverage market forces to create a sustainable solution to address a social problem or achieve socially desirable goals is the hallmark of the social entrepreneur and enterprise (Seelos & Mair, 2005).

The unique characteristics of this emerging business model are still being studied and understood. Organizations such as Ashoka or B-Labs are working to bring clarity and guidance to these social enterprise endeavors (Wulleman & Hudon, 2016). The aspects of these types of organizations that are being scrutinized and studied range from their internal and external communication strategies to their funding and accounting principles, and every aspect in between. Even the hiring practices of these organizations are unique, as their stated social mission has ramifications throughout the behavior of the company.

The unique business model of the social enterprise in the United States lies somewhere between that of a charity, which does not engage in the sale of goods or services, and a purely for-profit entity, which is singularly focused on financial returns. The social enterprise, however, represents both those non-profits that generate revenue through the sale of goods or services (Foster & Bradach, 2005) and the for-profit companies that have a specific and intentional social mission that guides their organizational structure and values (Dees & Anderson, 2003). There are examples of other types of business models and tax structures in other nations, including the UK (Bull, 2018) and Canada (Defourny et al., 2012; McMurtry & Brouard, 2015). These various business and legal models include cooperatives, L3Cs, traditional for-profit, not-for-profit, and nonprofit organizations.

These organizations have a unique social mission, which necessarily has an impact on their various goals, means, and methods of communication. Additionally, with the specific social

mission of the organization, the need for a unique communication strategy impacts the organization from the outset, including creation and establishment of the mission (Sengupta & Sahay, 2017). This mission forms a narrative that guides the company throughout its existence and establishes a connection between the business and the consumers.

Of specific interest to this study is the public relations strategies of the social enterprise. These organizations exist to create a sustainable model of positive social change, and the manner in which they engage in public relations activities should naturally reflect that unique value and perspective. This study is an opportunity to better understand how individuals leading the public relations activities of social enterprise approach multiple stakeholders to determine how the social mission of the company extends to this area of communication.

Public Relations

Definition and Scope of Public Relations

The history of public relations and the method of describing that history depends on whether the focus is on the activity of public relations or the profession. The profession of public relations describing the specific roles in organizations, governing bodies, and codes of ethics began to develop during the early twentieth century (Myers, 2021). However, the practice of public relations, which describes a type of communication focused on persuasive or change-focused outcomes, has a history that is much older and more broadly applied. The way the history of public relations is recounted will depend to a certain extent on how the term is described and defined. The following sections will follow both the broad application of the history of persuasion and the specific area of public relations in society.

History of Persuasion and Attitude Change

The concepts and values of public relations, which are based on the desire of individuals to effectively communicate with each other, are as old as the spoken word. Formal examples of public relations can be traced back to rhetorical practices identified in Egyptian, Greek, and Roman cultures (Roberts-Bowman, 2021). Julius Caesar sought to highlight his achievements to the public during his reign through distribution of a daily paper to the masses (Wright, 2016), and the Egyptian pharaohs created large works of art to impress foreign dignitaries (Roberts-Bowman, 2021). The goal of these communication activities was to shape and change public perception of the rulers in power at the time, and the invention of the printing press allowed for the mass distribution of the written word to greater numbers of people than ever before (Browne, 2023). These examples are large-scale representations of the type of persuasive means used by individuals and organizations, even if it is not specifically called public relations. The writings of Paul might also be considered a form of public relations, as the goal of the Epistles is to communicate to a specific audience with the intention to persuade (Myers, 2021). Green (2016) even goes so far as to say that “the Bible would most definitely be a highly effective PR document, and God would be considered the best of all possible PR experts” (p. 621). At a fundamental level, the process of communication is devoted to the transfer of information from one entity to another. This communication takes place at biological (Paukert & Bergles, 2006), interpersonal (Oberman & Ramachandran, 2007), and organizational (Yang & Taylor, 2015) levels, and the extension of these communication activities helps to guide discussions of public relations definition.

The use of language to advance a particular cause or ideology is evident in the French and American revolutions, and the use of propaganda during the world wars of the twentieth

century reflects a form of public relations or persuasion. The term public relations was developed by Bernays (1923) in an effort to delineate the use of propaganda for potentially negative purposes from the use of information for relationship-building. The interaction between public relations and propaganda is one that recent professional PR organizations have sought to downplay, but aspects of public relations undoubtedly have roots in the use of information or communication strategies to realize specific political purposes or ends.

In an effort to describe the evolution of public relations, Roberts-Bowman (2021) adapted a summary initially presented by Bentele (2010). Table 1 below provides a summary of an effort to explain the way that public relations has evolved.

Table 1

Summary of PR evolution, adapted from Bentele (2010)

PR as a developing social system: 20 th century	Growth, consolidation, professionalization, globalization
Emerging occupational field: 19 th century	Emergence of the field: mid-19 th century to around 1918
Communication of organizations: End of Middle Ages, Modern Age	Pre-history of PR
Public communication: Antiquity, Middle Ages	Pre-history of PR
Interpersonal communication: History of mankind	Pre-history of PR

The way in which any type of strategic communication activity differs from a more specific understanding of public relations is important to effective study of the term. What differentiates public relations from other types of communication? In an effort to create parameters for public relations, Russell and Lamme (2016) describe two attributes of public relations: “strategic intent” and “human agency.” For a communication to be considered public

relations, it must have the intentional goal of changing the attitude or the behavior of the recipient. This is the strategic intent aspect of public relations, which distinguishes it from communication that is not meant to persuade the recipient to adopt a particular end or goal. However, this characteristic of strategic intent is not sufficient by itself because it also includes propagandistic activities that are meant to persuade, but with potentially destructive or harmful ends both for the recipient and others. Therefore, it is important that human agency be a part of public relations, showing value and respect for the individual. Human agency refers to the willingness of the recipient to voluntarily accept communication rather than having the communication imposed on them. By using public relations in a space focused on both strategic intent and personal agency, the activities of the practitioners may become clearer. This focus on human agency is also reflected later in this chapter in the concepts of fully functioning society theory and the impact that public relations can have when it is focused on engagement rather than mere persuasion.

Widely considered the “Father of Public Relations,” Edward Bernays, a nephew of Sigmund Freud, helped to establish the official role of public relations officer as a specialist in organizational communication with the public (Myers, 2021). Bernays (1923) combined an understanding of psychology and social science to influence and craft public relations activities to inform the organizational role of public relations counsel, a role similar to a legal counsel for an organization. Bernays worked to draw a strong distinction between publicity and public relations.

Arthur Page, in his role as the vice president of information at AT&T in the 1920s through the 1940s, also helped to transform the position of public relations. Page was influential in helping to prioritize the public relations professional at the top of the company structure to

ensure that a focus on the company-public relationship was maintained at every level of the organization (Russell, 2014). This focus on public relations moved the field further away from a singular focus on press releases and one-way communication to a more two-way focus on the relationship that the organization has with the broader public. While seen as a towering figure in the field of public relations in his time and to this day, Page resisted a highly professionalized approach to the field, believing that the role of the public relations officer in an organization should be highly specialized in the unique operational activities of that specific business or organization, rather than trying to adopt an overarching approach too broad to be helpful to the specific practitioner (Russell, 2014). The connection between the operations of the company and its relationship with the broader public is a hallmark of Page's approach to the profession. Page emphasized the need for any business to have a good relationship with the broader public in order to effectively operate, not just have a good image, and this drove his insistence on a strong public relations focus at every level of the organization. The role Page played in developing the role of the in-house public relations expert guided his contribution to the practice and established some of the earliest ethical standards in the field (Myers, 2021). More modern public relations studies and critiques have come from individuals like Richard Tedlow, Marvin Olasky, and Scott Cutlip, all of whom have looked at public relations from a variety of scholarly and theoretical perspectives, seeking to understand how the field has evolved and changed in the last half of the twentieth century (Myers, 2021).

Günter Bentele (2015) worked to expand the study of public relations history through a stratification model that described how public relations activities take place outside of official public relations roles in organizations and are seen in the broader social and political systems of a country. Bentele sought to show that a host of other social movements seek to engage and

persuade the public, but these are not specifically identified as public relations efforts (Bentele & Nothhaft, 2010). For example, religious revivals in America use certain strategic communication and persuasive activities, but these are not typically brought into the study of public relations history and theory. The history of public relations through the lens of concepts that have guided the framing of public relations from interpersonal communication to a developing social system has been the subject of a number of different contributors.

Professional Public Relations

The growth of the role of public relations as a profession is a reflection of the scope of businesses that arose from the Industrial Revolution. The larger the organization or business, the larger the percentage of the public interacting with and having some sort of relationship with the business. This growth of organizational scope and impact is evident in the efforts of certain companies in the early twentieth century to provide a way for these large-scale companies impacting a large swath of the broader public to effectively manage and understand their relationship with the public. This professional role became a staple within large and successful companies, and understanding how these officers were to act and engage in their profession became necessary.

A number of public relations societies were established in the early twentieth century. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), International Public Relations Association (IPRA), and the Institute for Public Relations (CIPR) all began after World War II (Myers, 2021). These organizations sought to provide clearly defined principles for how public relations professionals should act and engage the public. The Public Relations Society of America developed a code of ethics for professionals that provided clarity and expectations regarding how professional public relations officers should engage the public. Through definitions and

expectations regarding honesty, advocacy, disclosure of information, and other topics, the PRSA brings greater accountability to these important roles (PRSA Code of Ethics, 2023).

A number of definitions might be used to describe this aspect of organizational communication, but Theaker and Yaxley (2017) provided a helpful definition in describing it as “...being able to convey information in an appropriate way to a specific public - which may include announcing the news, narrating stories or engaging in discussion - in order to build relationships that help achieve relevant aims and objectives” (p. 8). One of the key aspects of this definition is relationship-building. This relationship dynamic is an especially relevant aspect of public relations to this study, as it sets it apart from marketing or advertising as a form of organizational communication.

Grunig and Hunt (1984) described the goal of public relations in terms of the communication that takes place between an organization and the stakeholders or the public. Additionally, Grunig and Hunt (1984) provided a helpful explanation of the characteristics of the four models of public relations. Table 2 below lists an adaptation of these models from Theaker (2016).

Table 2

Characteristics of Four Models of Public Relations

Characteristic	Press agency/Publicity	Public Information	Two-way asymmetrical	Two-way symmetrical
Purpose	Propaganda	Dissemination of information	Scientific persuasion	Mutual understanding
Nature of communication	One-way; complete truth non-essential	One-way; truth important	Two-way; imbalanced effects	Two-way; balanced effects
Communication model	Source to receiver	Source to receiver	Source to receiver with feedback	Group to/from group

Nature of research	Limited	Basic; readership	Formative; evaluative of attitudes	Formative; evaluative of understanding
Where most often applied	Sports, theatre product promotion	Government; non-profit associations; business	Competitive business; agencies	Regulated business; agencies

The above chart provides a means whereby the various aspects of public relations may begin to be understood. Each category represents a different model or function of public relations, providing a way to understand how organizations communicate with the public. The chart displays an increasing level or depth of the relationship between the organization and the public with the first category—press agency/publicity, or one-way communication that is not meant to provide truth or to solicit a relationship but rather to promote a particular perspective at the exclusion of others. However, the two-way symmetric model is focused on communication of a more dialogic nature, and it is this model of public relations activities that is most relevant to this study.

Rather than acting as a positive force for the healthy and beneficial exchange of ideas in a free society, the public relations strategies of an organization can be not only unhelpful but destructive. Edwards (2016) stated that public relations “is most widely used as a strategic tool for corporates and governments to realize self-interest and advantage in competitive environments” (p. 60). Public relations can be a means of protecting the brand or the reputation of the organization, whether it is a privately owned or government agency, and the communication strategies do not lend themselves to a positive force in society insofar as the interests of the organization may not align with the interest of the broader culture in which they operate.

Public relations strategies have been a subject of recent research, as those in the public relations community have sought to determine if the efforts of public relations managers have had a negative impact on the overall society by prioritizing the interests of the organization over those of the broader society (Berger, 2005). This tension between the goals and interests of the organization and the best interests of the broader community has led to criticism of public relations managers, as there may be a conflict of interest between the company and the stakeholder (Stauber & Rampton, 1995). The activities of public relations managers may be seen as a tool for manipulating and deceiving the broader public in service of the company's interests and goals. Berger (2005) challenged those in the public relations industry to ensure that they act not only in the best interest of the company but also take the community of affected stakeholders into account.

This tension between the best interests of the company and those of the broader society has compelled the public relations field to re-establish industry goals. Believing that the interests of the company should not be placed higher than the interests of the society, some have seen public relations as a vital part of the symbiotic relationship between company and stakeholders. By recognizing the potential power discrepancy between companies and stakeholders (Alvesson & Willmott, 2012), the emerging focus of the public relations industry has been balancing company and community interests. While public relations research and practice have focused primarily on the interests of the organization, there exists an opportunity to learn which relationships public relations activities should develop and what that development should look like. It is in this aspect of public relations activities that a more robust understanding may be helpful, and the research of Heath (2006) seeks to provide that understanding.

Public Relations and Internal Organizational Communication

Understanding stakeholders as agents interacting with public relations personnel allows for discussion of both internal and external stakeholders. Ruck (2019) provides a foundation for understanding the theoretical basis of internal communication public relations in saying that “internal communication is a function that goes beyond efficient distribution of information and incorporates relationship building through dialogue” (p. 16). In an organizational context, communication among various strata of the organization should not only work to ensure that all policies are communicated efficiently throughout the business, but should also ensure that there is a relational aspect to that communication. In other words, the focus should be on developing a more effective means whereby the various layers and personnel within an organization communicate.

We can see from this description that the focus is not exclusively the means whereby information is distributed within in an organization, but also includes the interaction and engagement occurring within the organization. The public relations literature has contributed less to this internal communication dynamic than the human relations field. However, the principles of effective external public relations activities can be useful in effective internal organizational communication. The need for dialogic engagement strategies in an internal communication capacity helps facilitate a healthy and robust internal communication strategy. However, this does not mean that internal and external communication are the same thing, as the need for a greater level of openness and employee well-being is needed for internal communication activities. This increased focus on the unique experience and elevated relationship with the organization presents unique challenges for internal communication strategies and separates them from traditional external public relations activities.

Public Relations and Society

The role that public relations plays in the broader social framework, especially in a democratic society, is captured by the concept of the public sphere. The public sphere is described as a discourse that takes place between state and society (Habermas, 1996). The channels that hold and maintain communication in the public sphere help to provide those interacting with the state with a means to discuss, critique, and give a counterweight to the state through a public and multifaceted discussion.

Additionally, the role that public relations plays in helping to provide a positive direction for the broader society is reflected in the civil society (Taylor, 2011) and social capital models (Sommerfeldt, 2013, 2017). The role that public relations plays in creating a civil society was promoted by Taylor (2000a), who described the role of public relations as an integral part of building a democratic society. “Public relations is a relationship-building tool and, as a mediated communication activity, it has a central role to play in civil society initiatives” (2000a, p. 2). While the concept of civil society is not new, the role that public relations play in helping to bring about that society is an extension of the relationship-building activities of an organization’s communication activities. Public relations in democratic nation-building offers a means whereby the relationship-building capability of public relations can help establish and maintain a civil and democratic society (Taylor, 2000b). Additionally, Sommerfeldt (2013) described the goal of social capital as providing a normative framework for public relations activities, defining the goal of public relations as follows:

Creating the social capital that facilitates access to spheres of public discussion and policy formation as well as for maintaining networks among those organizations that check the power of the state and maintain social infrastructure. (p. 280)

While the value of competition has been proposed as a valuable and ultimately positive goal for those who live in a particular society, an equally valuable role for cooperation in society is also necessary (Marsh, 2012). Drawing on this positive aspect of mutually beneficial growth and social development, Marsh (2012) describe the pursuit of social harmony as a norming framework for public relations activities. While there are forces in a society and in individuals that push against interdependence, excellence theory (Grunig, 2000) seeks to draw on the two-way symmetrical model (see Table 1) of public relations to help society achieve a level of social harmony that is ultimately more beneficial than a focus on competitive winners and losers. This social harmony goal of public relations is also reflected in the concept of communitarianism, which focuses on how public relations can build communities through effective strategic communications that promote social harmony and community cohesion (Marsh, 2012).

Engagement

One of the emerging factors in effective public relations activities is the concept of engagement. The public relations strategies of organizations should not only focus on one-way communication between the company and the public but also on engagement opportunities (Johnston & Taylor, 2018). Taylor and Kent (2014) defined engagement as “both an orientation that influences interactions and the approach that guides the process of interactions among groups” (p. 348). The study of engagement in the public relations literature centers on a number of themes arising out of various uses and contexts. For example, aspects of engagement figure in social media strategies, corporate social responsibility initiatives, civic activities, and dialogic communication (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

Engagement has its roots in communication studies grounded in interpersonal communication and the larger social ramifications of engagement. The interpersonal origins of

engagement provide the foundation for its broader application to public relations: “Engagement is conceptualized as an iterative, dynamic process, where participation, experience, and shared action emerge as central components of engagement” (Johnson & Taylor, 2018, p. 3). The exchange that takes place between individuals forms the basis for engagement. This exchange is at the heart of communication studies and predates the public relations components of engagement. The ability to co-create meaning and purpose through the interaction of individuals in the form of rhetoric or interpersonal exchanges helps to form individuals and the broader societies in which they operate. This relationship between the individual and the broader society, as well as the relationship between society and the concept of citizenship, forms a fundamental basis for engagement. Engagement is not thus merely an organization working to develop an effective relationship with a stakeholder but is also part of a larger social framework that values the ways in which individuals, organizations, and democratic governance operate with a focus on the ways that those broader cultures use interpersonal engagement to bring together ideas and concepts that may ultimately benefit the broader society (Kennedy & Sommerfeldt, 2018). In other words, engagement is an essential activity among individuals who work together to determine the best possible understanding of the present and the best possible future for their collective society. This civil society component of engagement also guides the ultimate goals and strategies of public relations, as discussed in previous sections. The ability of a society to collectively make sense of the past and future and to work together toward a common future is foundational to the concept of engagement.

The way that organizations participate in and adopt engagement principles into their public relations activities is the subject of this research, specifically how engagement takes place in the context of a mediated forum such as social media. O’Brien and McKay (2018) discussed

the role that media plays in engagement, noting that the different roles that different types of media play in engagement is challenging to assess because a host of variables related to the media, the information, and the users all interact to determine media's effectiveness. Chen (2018) described the various dimensions in which engagement may take place, specifically as it relates to the relationship between consumers and organizations. Cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement are all interactive options between a consumer or stakeholder and a business. When it comes to the role that social media plays in engagement, Chen (2018) noted that there is room for a greater understanding in terms of which aspects of engagement are most impacted by social media.

While social media platforms have varying levels of complexity when it comes to engagement, this study focuses on how dialogic communication takes place in the context of social media activities, and therefore draws from two of these engagement areas. Dialogic communication is a more discursive and multi-dimensional communication process, and if a company's communication strategies focus on stronger relations with consumers or the public, then communication plans should be more dialogic. The following section discusses the literature regarding dialogic communication.

Dialogic Communication

Communication as the creation, transmission, and reception of information between two agents forms the foundation of dialogic communication. The flow of information from one agent to another may be described as monologic. However, when communication and reception take place between two parties, it is dialogic in nature (Taylor & Kent, 2014). While monologic communication may draw heavily from the rhetorical tradition and thus focus more on persuasive types of communication, in a dialogic framework there is a back-and-forth between

the communicating agents, resulting in a level of engagement that may not be present in monologic or one-way communications. This greater depth of engagement between two parties or agents is the hallmark of dialogic communication.

The concept of dialogue has both cosmological and theological foundations. The theologian Martin Buber claimed that two-way communication is a reflection of the inherent dignity and value of each individual. Drawing on Martin Buber's *I-Thou* description (Buber & Smith, 2013), dialogic communication is based on the understanding that others around us have value and that interactions between individuals serve to develop a greater understanding of reality and the world around us through establishing shared meaning and relationships.

This dignity is not created by persons themselves, nor is it given by broader social structures, but is rather a recognition of the *Imago Dei*, which means the Image of God that is present in each person. This image was given to man by God at the creation of the world, and it imbues each person with value and dignity. Dialogic communication recognizes that as an image-bearer of God, each person should respect the communication of another, which is the basis for dialogic exchange between individuals.

When we respect other image-bearers instead of holding them in contempt or disregard, we recognize their value and worth and make space for them to communicate with others and for others to communicate in turn with them. This paper focuses on the dialogic communication strategies of social enterprises, but it is important to note that its fundamental principles are based on effective communication between individual agents. When an organization operates from the fundamental belief that individuals have value and that their thoughts, feelings, and opinions are worth heeding, then an organization can develop effective dialogic communication strategies with its stakeholders.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) emerged in the first half of the twentieth century as a primary contributor to the concept of dialogic communication. Bakhtin described four characteristics of dialogic communication that explain the interaction that takes place between individuals and societies through verbal interaction (Reid, 2013). The first of these characteristics is what Bakhtin calls *heteroglossia*, literally meaning another language or tongue, which describes the belief that the context of the language or utterance is superior to the actual text. This is a relational component of communication that is foundational to the meaning of the communication itself, beyond the words used. The second is the concept of *chronotope*, which describes the unique and unrepeatable time and place in which the dialogue exists. In other words, a dialogue between two people happens at a specific time and place and cannot be repeated in the exact same way, which makes each interaction inherently unique. Third is the ever-changing aspect of truth, which Bakhtin believed could not be ultimately found, but that it was a reflection of the evolving self and others through dialogue. Finally, the fourth reality is that it is in dialogue that both the self and others are fully constructed and understood. The push and pull of communication, whereby we find common ground or intentionally create separation, serve to change both us and others in unpredictable ways (Reid, 2013)

In building on the work of Bakhtin, Taylor and Kent (2014) presented a set of principles to guide dialogic communication in the area of public relations and engagement. They described these principles as “mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk and commitment” (p. 387). The first principle is mutuality, the aspect of dialogue that recognizes a relationship between an organization and the broader public. Propinquity is the proximity between the organization and the individual such that the stakeholder or stake-seeker is involved in the decision-making processes of the organization because of the close relationship between the two. Empathy is the

degree of support that the public and the organization have and the ability to confirm or validate the concerns of each. Risk describes the potential effects of the dialogue, whether positive or negative, and the willingness of the participants to accept those outcomes. The final principle of dialogic communication in public relations, according to Kent and Taylor (2002), is commitment. This principle describes the willingness of the public and the organization to continue with honest and open communication and to “place the good of the relationship above the good of the self (or the client/organization)” (p. 29).

Social Media

Throughout the history of public relations from both rhetorical and professional perspectives there has been a relationship between public relations activities and the technology that has served as the means or medium of communication. The rise of the printing press, the development of the radio, the invention of television, and the rise of the internet have all served to change the nature of communication itself, thereby changing the means by which public relations activities are understood and practiced.

History and Definition

Technology has been a fundamental aspect of mass communication for the entirety of human history. The use of technology related to writing allows an individual to communicate with others across space and time in a way that is not bound by specific geographic or temporal limitations. The invention of the printing press, a technological innovation, allowed for the mass production of written language, and the invention of the television allowed for pictures and audio to be sent across the world. These technologies have had profound impacts on the humans interaction and the structure and formation of our society (Ellul, 1964).

One of the latest iterations of these communication technologies is the internet, and this technology has gone further than others by allowing individuals and corporations to interact in unprecedented ways. Websites (Sommerfeldt et al., 2012) and email communication (Baer 2013) have provided organizations with a greater number of tools to build effective relationships with both stakeholders and the broader public. Websites and email have become not only common but necessary to effective public communication. In recent years, the public relations activities of organizations have also been tailored to engage with stakeholders through social media.

Social media has become necessary to corporate communication with the public. While social media has taken a number of different forms (Aichner et al., 2021), it could be broadly defined as “any online resource with content that is designed to facilitate engagement between individuals” (Bishop, 2019, p. 61). The use of a medium through which social interaction takes place is becoming an ever-increasing aspect of our public and personal discourse. This is especially true of social media, which has not only a unique technological component, but also a variety of platforms with their own sets of rules and methods of communication. These various platforms represent different values and means that both reflect and shape the communication patterns of society. For example, YouTube focuses on the use of video to express and communicate, with other users leaving comments and reacting to the videos. However, X (formerly Twitter) focuses on short-form written communication with comments, reactions, and sharing from others on the platform. These platforms have changed how we communicate with others in a fundamental way. Dijck (2013) stated:

Many of the habits that have recently become permeated by social media platforms used to be informal and ephemeral manifestations of social life. Talking to friends, exchanging gossip, showing holiday pictures, scribbling notes,

checking on a friend's well-being, or watching a neighbor's home video used to be casual, evanescent speech acts, commonly shared only with selected individuals. A major change is that through social media, these casual speech acts have turned into formalized inscriptions, which, once embedded in the larger economy of wider publics take on a different value. Utterances, previously expressed offhandedly are now released into a public domain where they can have far-reaching and long-lasting effects. Social media platforms have unquestionably altered the nature of private and public communication. (pp. 5-6)

Additionally, as technology has changed, so too has the way it operates and functions. For example, while a social media platform may initially be created to function on a desktop device, the use of the social media app on a cell phone changes both the way the app is used and its functionality. A desktop application will not have as much need for geolocation as an app on a phone (Sponder & Khan, 2018), so the use of location tagging and tracking has now become a function of most social media apps. Additionally, advancements in the wireless and cellular infrastructure has allowed devices and applications to be more widely used across geographic and social boundaries, so the social impact of these applications is more broadly felt.

Ultimately, the use of social media involves the integration of technological capabilities to mediate communication in both interpersonal and corporate settings. One of the hallmarks of social media is the concept of *engagement*. As discussed in previous sections, technology could play a key role in the relationship-building necessary for effective public relations and in fostering the level of engagement necessary for effective dialogic communication.

Research on Public Relations and Social Media

There is an inherent connection between the field of public relations and the technology of social media. Looking at the primary definition of social media as given above by Bishop (2019), engagement is a clear hallmark of social media. Social media technology is relatively new to the field of public relations research, and the ever-changing nature of this technology allows new understandings and research avenues to come to the forefront (Khang et al., 2012). In providing a review of the research related to social media in the field of public relations, Wang et al. (2021) determined that there has been a significant increase in the number of articles written on the topic since 2006, studying the topic content, the evolution of social media, and the methodologies used in prior studies.

Three phases emerged in the review in coordination with the development of social media technology. Public relations studies conducted from 2006 to 2009 primarily focused on blogs as the preferred social media platform, Studies from 2010 to 2014 moved to the platform Twitter for their analysis, while studies from 2015 to 2020 relied on a more general conception of social media. The significant rise in social media's popularity took place in the second phase from 2010 to 2014 (Duggan, 2015). This evolution reflects how the social media landscape has changed from websites, blogs, or e-mail platforms to a host of other technologies and applications that fall under the term social media. It is interesting to note that the largest social media platform, Facebook, was studied less than Twitter in the academic literature from 2006 to 2020 (Wang et al., 2021). However, the two platforms share many characteristics and user experience features.

While the platforms studied in this field have shifted, there has been a consistent focus in the topic of the studies. The studies since 2006 have looked at the way that social media use

affects the outcomes of public relations efforts as well as the way that the practice of public relations has been impacted by social media, with content analysis and surveys being the most used data sources. Additionally, the theories found to be most useful for research into social media and public relations are dialogic theory, situational crisis communication theory, uses and gratifications theory, and excellence theory. The primary theory found to be associated with the research on social media in public relations was dialogic theory, which forms the foundation of this study.

Dialogic Communication and Social Media

While the use of these social media technologies provides corporations with a powerful tool to reach out to and engage with stakeholders, these tools also increase the ability of stakeholders and consumers to interact with the corporation. In addition to distributing information to the public, these technologies have allowed stakeholders to reach a level of collaboration with the organization that was not previously available. Aichner et al. (2021) stated that, “Customers give feedback, ask questions, and expect quick and customized answers to their specific problems” (p. 215). The greater the ability to interact with others in a dialogic situation, the greater the opportunity for engagement and relationship-building.

The use of social media for dialogic communication in public relations has been studied from a number of different angles. Navarro et al. (2018) showed that the availability of these social media tools does not mean that practitioners will make the most of them for public relations activities. Yue et al. (2021) assessed through a dialogic framework the Twitter postings of 35 nonprofits and found that the executive leaders in the organizations employed dialogic principles to some degree, but there was still room for improvement in some areas. Additionally, Abukari et al. (2021) studied the use of dialogic principles on corporate websites. The use of

social media as a tool for relationship-building has been studied in the context of Fortune 500 companies (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010) and as part of a broader integrated media campaign (Shin et al., 2015).

Kim et al. (2014) described the various dialogic principles used in social media platforms, specifically listing, conservation of visitors, generation of return visits, useful information to media, useful information to the public, and dialogic loops. Saxton and Waters (2014) described how stakeholders interact with the content of Facebook postings from nonprofits, with the public preferring dialogic communication that encourages the recipient to comment or “like” the postings. Yue et al. (2021) created a similar instrument when performing a content analysis of the social media postings of nonprofits, but the information useful to the public and information useful to media were combined into a single category called “information for stakeholders.”

Relevant Theories

Fully Functioning Society

Fully functioning society theory as described and established by Heath (2013) focuses on how public relations activities of organizations engage and interact with the broader societies in which they operate to bring about a more informed public and better align the activities of the organization and the broader community. The role that fully functioning society plays in guiding the public relations activities of an organization helps public relations managers or designated public relations personnel to depart from the natural or traditional tendency of public relations, which is taking an adversarial or business-centered approach to the company stakeholders. The role of public relations may be to drift toward a type of propaganda campaign, which does not

ultimately work to the benefit of the broader society, but instead to the narrow interests of those individuals who benefit from the propaganda.

The role that corporations play in society is important, and the organization should recognize the responsibility that comes along with that role. For Heath (2006), “organizations play a substantial role in creating ideas—the shared sense of social reality that serves the making of choices, individual and collective” (p. 95). The way communication takes place between individuals and corporations in the society helps to establish the norms and rules that govern that society, and corporations, just like individuals, should cooperate to ensure that the norms and values that reflect shared reality are beneficial to the most people.

By describing a well-functioning society, which Heath (2006) explains as a set of blended and interconnected relationships, resources, risks, and meanings devoted to the concept of enlightened choice or a fully informed decision-making process, public relations can be seen as a participant in and a contributor to this fully functioning society rather than a force pushing against the broader society. In other words, if a society is to operate best and most effectively, the corporations must see themselves as an essential part of bringing about that goal, and the public relations activities of the corporation play a key role in that goal because it is the area of the corporation that interacts with the stakeholders and stake-seekers.

Heath (2006) described the need for public relations activities to focus on helping stakeholders or consumers to be more informed and therefore able to make a more enlightened choice when it comes to their own decisions and actions. This concept of enlightened choice is a key component of a fully functioning society. The ability to effectively cooperate with and engage in effective discourse with the broader public is not only beneficial for society in general, but it is also important for business. Heath (2013) presented fully functioning society theory to

guide organizations toward a more engaging and helpful path, believing that fully functioning society theory “presumes, fundamentally, that no organization can long be successful if it places its interests above those of the community(ies) where it operates” (p. 369).

Heath’s approach to public relations draws on field theory (Lewin, 1947), social exchange theory (Thomas & Iding, 2012), and systems theory (Adams et al., 2014) in that it intentionally acknowledges the reciprocal relationship between a corporation and the broader society in which it operates (Etzioni, 1993). By expanding the role that public relations strategies play in the effective operations of society, the company provides agency to the stakeholders and allow them to be seen as a co-client of public relations activities. The public relations of the company can thus represent not only the interests of the company to the stakeholders but also the stakeholders to the company, forming a more symbiotic relationship between the two.

To provide guidance for this new type of public relations activity, Heath (2013) sought to provide a list of characteristics to define this approach, listing eight premises upon which a public relations strategy could build to more effectively contribute to a fully functioning society. These premises are described as follows:

- Management should demonstrate the ability to be reflective in ways that foster their legitimacy, being collaborative, proactive, and responsive to others’ views, interests, and needs.
- Be willing and able to understand and achieve standards of corporate responsibility that make them legitimate brokers of community resources.
- Focus on the paradoxes of power, which have implications for the right and ability to influence outcomes, including processes, operations, and perhaps more importantly, the ideology that justifies or denies power resource management.

- See the community as conflicting and conjoined interests and expectations.
- Acknowledge a relationship is symmetrical when the fit between stakeholder and stake-seekers reflects the dynamics of *communitas* rather than *corporatas*.
- Recognize that society is a complex of collectivities engaged in variously constructive dialogue and power resource distribution through meeting socially constructed and shared norm-based expectations whereby individuals seek to make enlightened choices in the face of risk, uncertainty, and reward/cost ambiguity.
- Emphasize the importance of responsible advocacy.
- See the virtue of narratives and other rhetorical forms used to coconstruct enlightened choice. (pp. 368-371)

Each of these premises guides the public relations activities of organizations to work toward greater positive social value for the company and the stakeholders. The relationship between the company and the stakeholders is indeed explicit in the premises, and the framework of fully functioning society theory serves as the foundation for the research questions.

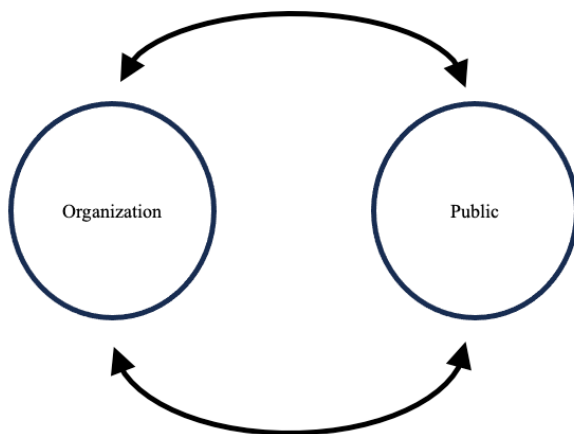
Dialogic Communication

The principle of constructive dialogue in fully functioning society theory allows for the introduction of dialogic principles of communication. Kent and Taylor (2002) worked to frame and study the principles associated with dialogic communication, the goal of which is for the corporation, simply the collection of individuals who represent the organization or business, to recognize the *I-Thou* dynamic. It grants agency to those in the broader social context by engaging in a two-way communication dynamic with the broader society and the stakeholders that are affected by and a part of the organization. This collaboration generates changes in both

the corporation and the larger society as the dialogic nature of back and forth, of sending and receiving information, allows the corporation to engage with the public to work toward a more desirable and mutually beneficial goal or solution (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009). The public relations and strategic communication goals of the corporation are therefore purposefully engaged in bringing about a more fully functioning society (Heath, 2018). The relationship with the broader society through the work of the public relations strategies of the organization for the purposes of *communitas* and stakeholder engagement allows for the involvement of dialogic communication theory, as this will yield a clearer picture of what developing a relationship with stakeholders might look like if it is to contribute to a more fully functioning society.

Dialogic communication is rooted in the concept of engagement. Taylor and Kent (2014) proposed that “engagement is a part of dialogue and through engagement, organizations and publics can make decisions that create social capital” (p. 384). This engagement is reflected in the specific means by which an organization interacts with stakeholders on social media. The principle of the dialogic loop, another principle of dialogic communication, is represented in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3



The principle of the dialogic loop serves as an effective model for the broader concept of dialogic communication. The specific elements of this principle, as it is expressed in the social media activities of the social enterprise, will be described and operationalized in the following chapter.

Summary

The preceding sections served to explain some of the ways that the field of communication is organized through the lens of the seven traditions, and to position the study within the communications field by presenting relevant traditions and theories. While study of dialogic communication strategies in the public relations activities of a social enterprise draws on a number of communication traditions and theories, the socio-psychological and sociocultural traditions are the most relevant, with cybernetic and rhetorical traditions of secondary relevance (Craig, 1999).

The theoretical foundations of the study begin in field theory (Lewin, 1939), which describes the forces that interact to create a specific situation in a society. This theory is important because it is the goal of a social enterprise to understand the current social situation to effectively make changes to that society. These social enterprises exist to create sustainable social change, and the means whereby organizations engage with stakeholders and promote their mission is a fundamental part of the organization. Public relations is a necessary and integral part of the unique mission of these corporations. Heath (2006) proposed that the goal of public relations is to contribute to a more fully functioning society, which runs parallel to the mission and vision of the social enterprise.

One of the premises of fully functioning society theory is constructive engagement with the broader society. Engagement is not established by a one-directional communication strategy,

but is rather reflected in two-way communication. While the traditional goals of public relations strategies have focused on brand management and reputation, by giving agency to society and the stakeholders, the corporation engages in a two-way communication strategy, or dialogic communication (Taylor & Kent, 2014). The following chapter will describe how the study will be operationalized for effective inquiry and analysis.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

Effective development of a research study requires a generally agreed-upon method whereby the process truly identifies the most relevant questions and how to go about answering those questions. Punch (2014) stated, “empirical research is driven by research questions” (p. 58). This section describes the methodology used to address the research problem and research questions. The alignment among the stated problem, the research questions, and the methodology is a key component of any research project. For this study, the research problem reflects a review of the literature on an emerging business model known as a social enterprise, which has a unique mission and purpose and a specific social goal. However, little research has been conducted on how the unique mission is reflected in the public relations activities of these organizations. Through the lens of dialogic communication and fully functioning society theory, this paper aims to understand whether the social media activities of these social enterprises reflect the dialogic communication principles needed to establish effective engagement and positive social interactions.

The level of data collection available to researchers in the era of the internet, specifically social media, has allowed a high degree of analysis of the communication activities of organizations (Sponder & Khan, 2018). This data collection has allowed researchers and practitioners to answer research questions related to online activity and public relations effectiveness. Using a previously validated instrument for quantitative measurements, this study seeks to shed light on dialogic communication activities of social enterprises on social media. The following sections will show the functional and operationalized means whereby this study will be conducted.

Philosophical Assumptions

This study is based on a number of philosophical assumptions about epistemology and the way that knowledge is pursued and communicated. The epistemological foundation for a research design is a function of assumed and stated presuppositions about the world, known as a worldview. Aerts et al. (1994) described a worldview as “a coherent collection of concepts and theorems that must all us to construct a global image of the world, and in this way to understand as many elements of our experience as possible” (p. 8). Part of the context of a broader worldview is the concept of epistemology, defined as the study and pursuit of knowledge (Abercrombie, 2006; Johnson et al., 2011). The epistemological foundations of this study adhere to the worldview model described by Vidal (2008), in which a number of philosophical constructs undergird and precede the epistemological functions of a research design. Vidal lists the following components that work together to create a cohesive and fully-formed worldview:

- Ontology: The model of reality
- Cosmology: The model of the past
- Eschatology: The model of the future
- Axiology: The theory of values
- Praxeology: The theory of actions
- Epistemology: The theory of knowledge (Vidal, 2008)

The presuppositions of this study are based on fundamental beliefs about the ontological component of a worldview that reflect a theistic model of reality. Building from this basic assumption about reality, the origins, possible futures, values, and actions are therefore derived from this foundation. The pursuit of knowledge consistent with those assumptions provides the goals and values of the proposed study. Ultimately, the epistemological construct is based on the

assumption that the pursuit of what is true and what is false is a positive goal and that the pursuit of this goal, when undertaken with an understanding that the truth, is desirable for humanity's best possible future. The design of this study is therefore grounded in a metaphysical reality with established values focused on the best possible future.

Research Method and Design

The method of scientific inquiry reflects the assumption that truth is valuable and can be known. The scientific method has arisen as an effective means to reduce the impact of personal bias or subjectivity on the interpretation of observed facts. While a number of methods may be employed in the pursuit of objective explanations of reality, the quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches are considered the most useful (Creswell, 2009).

The research design will use a quantitative approach to the collection and analysis of the data to effectively address and answer the research questions. The problem statement is devoted to determining if the social media content of social enterprises uses dialogic principles of communication. As stated in previous chapters, the problem is that if a social enterprise is not using dialogic communication principles in its public relations activities on social media, then the corporation may not realize the social good that its mission requires. This problem is rooted in communication practices and theories (Heath, 2006). Although the field of communication uses different research designs (Punch, 2014), the following sections will describe the method and design that best fits the identified research problem.

Establishing an effective methodology entails properly establishing the questions raised by the problem, as these questions drive the study and determine the acceptable methodology (Creswell, 2009). The methodology will draw on previous studies of similar content and should

be derived from the problem statement and research questions. From the identification of the problem, the following research questions are presented.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1. What dialogic principles are present in the Facebook postings of a social enterprise?

H1. Social enterprises Facebook postings will have the *Conservation of Visitors* principle present.

H2. Social enterprise Facebook postings will have the *Generation of Return Visits* principle present.

H3. Social enterprise Facebook postings will have the *Dialogic Loop* principle present.

H4. Social enterprise Facebook postings will have the *Information of Interest to Stakeholders* principle present.

RQ2. Do traditional and social enterprises differ in utilizing dialogic principles on organizational Facebook pages and postings?

H1. There is a significant difference in the use of the dialogic principle of *Conservation of Visitors* between social and traditional enterprise Facebook postings.

H2. There is a significant difference in the use of the dialogic principle of *Generation of Return Visits* between social and traditional enterprise Facebook postings.

H3. There is a significant difference in the use of the *Dialogic Loop* principle between social and traditional enterprise Facebook postings.

H4. There is a significant difference in the use of the principle of *Information of Interest to Stakeholders* between social and traditional enterprise Facebook postings.

Setting

There are two populations represented in this study. The first population is the businesses that identify as social enterprises, which are taken from the membership directory of the Social Enterprise Alliance (SEA, 2022), one of the largest membership organizations devoted to social enterprises in the United States. The membership criteria for inclusion in the SEA will serve as the criteria for inclusion in the relevant population in this study.

Additionally, for comparison purposes, a sample will be taken from corporations listed as Fortune 100 (Fortune, 2024) companies. These corporations represent those organizations that do not self-identify as having a specific socially focused value proposition or mission and would be more likely to have a corporate-focused approach to public relations activities on social media.

Sample

The sample for the social enterprise organizations was taken from the membership directory of the Social Enterprise Alliance (SEA), one of the leading organizations devoted to the growth of social enterprises. Organizations described as consultants or supporters of social enterprises were excluded, as were organizations that did not have a company Facebook page. Any pages without a posting in the past 30 days was removed and considered inactive. This study will use a sample size of 91 Facebook accounts from social enterprises that are members of the SEA and have a company Facebook page. This sample size represents a confidence interval of 1 and a confidence level of 99% of the total population. A total of 10 posts per company were analyzed, using every other post (Rybalko & Selzter, 2010). The sample of the traditional

companies is taken from the list of top 100 U.S.-based companies from the Fortune 500 list (Fortune, 2024), which is a list of the largest companies in the U.S. by revenue. These organizations represent the sample of more traditional organizations, as they are more likely to be focused on financial return on investments rather than a specific and co-valued social mission. To ensure that the social media page was the official page for the organization, the link to the page was taken from the official company website for both samples.

Instrumentation

The dialogic principles of *Conservation of Visitors*, *Generation of Return Visits*, *Dialogic Loop*, and *Information of Interest to Stakeholders* are adapted from previous coding methods used for assessing social media content (Boortree & Seltzer, 2009, Kim, et al., 2014; Yue et al., 2019; Yue et al., 2021). The principle of ease of interface was omitted, as the interface for all the companies is the same because only a single platform was assessed (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). Appendix 1 describes the items assessed in the postings for the companies. These categories represent different aspects of the dialogic communication principles that might be present in social media postings (Kim et al., 2014, Yue et al., 2021).

A total of 17 items underwent the coding procedure, and each fell into one of the four dialogic principles as established by Kent and Taylor (1998). The information of interest to stakeholders principle is drawn from the useful information to media and useful information to public items described by Kim et al. (2014), but they are brought together in a manner consistent with the format used by Yue et al. (2021). The 17-item list allows the researcher to take dialogic principles into account in a manner most fitting for the social media platform and the integration of multiple similar content analysis instruments for determining the presence of dialogic principles on a social media platform (Kim et al., 2014; Men et al., 2018; Yue et al., 2021).

Analysis of the postings for the social and conventional enterprises allows the researcher to compare the two groups to test the hypotheses for RQ2. The data will be collected using the sampling technique described above using a content analysis method (Kim et al., 2014; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010), and the results will be collected and analyzed with the statistical analysis software SPSS.

Data Analysis

Krippendorff (2019) provided a helpful description of content analysis when he stated, “Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p. 24). The content for this study will be the social media postings of social enterprises. One of the goals of content analysis is to provide current and future researchers with a technique that is reliable, replicable, and valid (Krippendorff, 2019). Toward that end, this study will employ content analysis principles that allow for effective analysis and reproducibility of the findings in future studies.

The content analysis of social media postings is quantitative, as it is an assessment of content that is ultimately numerically based and focused on comparing groups (Punch, 2014). In other words, the content is qualitatively analyzed by the researcher, but the specific content is coded with a 1 for *present* or a 0 for *not present*. Each sample of 10 postings per company is reviewed, and the presence of any of the items for each principle is coded as either *present* or *not present*. The coder then moves on to the next organization’s Facebook page and repeats the process until all the organizational postings have been reviewed. Once the information has been coded and analyzed, the outcomes for traditional and social enterprises can be compared quantitatively. The chosen methodology is a quantitative approach that employs a content

analysis of the social media postings of social enterprises, along with a t-test statistical analysis for comparison between the means of the samples taken from the two populations.

One of the primary items serving to support or reject the hypotheses is the definition of *present* in the content of the postings. This study defines *present* as a condition whereby each item related to the dialogic principle is represented by the company. For example, there are a total of four items in the *Generation of Return Visits* principle in the instrument. For the principle to be considered present, the organization should include each of the four items; if there are no items associated with the principle, then it will be *not present*, and if some of the items are present the principle will be partially present. For the hypotheses to be accepted, the number of organizations that have the principle fully present will be greater than zero. If the number of organizations that have the principle fully present is zero, then the hypothesis will be rejected.

The dependent variable in this analysis is the company being analyzed, and the independent variable is the total score for each dialogic construct. The analysis of the data will consist of assessing the presence of each item in the instrument from the social media postings and assigning a number to the item (0 or 1). The total number for each category and for each company will be calculated and used to determine overall scores to evaluate the hypotheses. The use of a shared spreadsheet for the data collection allows the coders to ensure that the same data is reviewed. The spreadsheet lists the companies on the far-left column, with each of the principles and items represented in subsequent columns. The scores are tabulated both vertically for the items and horizontally for each organization.

Ethical Considerations

This study will be conducted within the bounds of accepted ethical practices of research by adhering to the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI, 2023) standards for

research. The content analysis will draw samples for analysis from publicly accessible social media posts, and no surveys or analysis will directly involve human participants. The study will be conducted with the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and will comply with all requirements regarding the collection and care of the data to be analyzed.

Summary

Establishing an effective methodology is a fundamental aspect of any research project. Following generally accepted principles of research that remove as much personal bias as possible gives the researcher and the broader academic community confidence that the study results reflect the true state of the problem rather than a projected or assumed state. The research questions aim to discover the presence of dialogic communication principles in the Facebook postings of social enterprises and comparing the results of that data collection to the Facebook postings of traditional enterprises. The use of a content analysis methodology through adapting previously used instruments allows for a numerical output, allowing for a quantitative methodology to be used to determine the presence of the dialogic principles and the difference between the frequency of use between the social enterprises and conventional businesses.

Chapter 4: Results

Overview

While this study is quantitative in nature, the data was taken from qualitative sources: the social media postings of two different groups, specifically social enterprises and the companies on the Fortune 100 list. This chapter focuses on the collection and analysis of the data needed to answer the research questions proposed in the study. The samples were taken from the two groups using two different coders, which required a discussion of coding procedures and a test of intercoder reliability to help determine the level of differences that may arise in the data because of different coders. Statistical analysis methods were used to answer the research questions, and the hypotheses and the results are presented and described.

Coding procedure and intercoder reliability

Data collection took place over a period of three weeks, and the postings were taken from those companies with official Facebook accounts that were considered active, meaning that postings had been made within the past 30 days. A total of 10 postings were used in the sample for each company, choosing every other posting to produce a more random sample (Rybalko & Selzter, 2010). Since the data were collected by two different coders (primary and secondary), there is a need to test for intercoder reliability. Regarding acceptable ranges for intercoder reliability, Malviya et al. (2021) stated,

Although the threshold for quality differs from context to context, most researchers follow guidelines in literature suggesting that an intercoder reliability (Cohen's Kappa) of 0.41 to 0.6 is moderate, 0.61 to 0.80 is substantial, and 0.81 to 1 as almost perfect (with 1 being the maximum) (Gwet, 2008; Zapf et al., 2016). Other scholars (Fleiss, 1971) instead posit that Kappa values of 0.40-0.75

as fair to good, and above 0.75 as excellent. After calculating intercoder reliability, researchers must then use judgement to determine if the intercoder reliability is high enough to signify that the coding scheme is reliable across coders, or if further honing of the coding schema is required. For our studies, we achieved ICR in the moderate to substantial ranges, indicating our coding process is reliable but we may need to modify the code book or re-train the coders for more convergent results. For our contexts, which are not related to human health, slightly lower values of intercoder agreement may be acceptable. (p. 13)

Using Cohen's weighted kappa, the intercoder reliability falls within an acceptable range of moderate to substantial as described by Malviya et al. (2021) across the principles for this study. However, there exists an opportunity for even greater alignment and agreement for future studies. Tables 3 and 4 below show the weighted Kappa of the totals for the samples, as well as the totals for each principle between Coder 1 and Coder 2. To effectively integrate the pilot samples into the overall sample, the pilot sample from the primary investigator served as the dataset for integration of the pilot data with the final dataset (Lombard et al., 2005; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). The analysis shows that there is moderate to substantial agreement between the coders, which was sufficient to proceed with the sample collection. However, a discussion between the two coders after the pilot sample was collected helped to further clarify some areas of potential deviation.

Table 3*Pilot Sample Analysis Totals*

	Weighted Kappa ^a	Std. Error ^b	Asymptotic z ^c	Sig.	95% Asymptotic Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
PilotCoder1- Coder2	.433	.092	3.237	.001	.254	.612

- The estimation of the weighted kappa uses linear weights.
- Value does not depend on either null or alternative hypotheses.
- Estimates the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis that weighted kappa is zero.

Table 4*Pilot Analysis Principles Totals*

	Weighted Kappa ^a	Std. Error ^b	Asymptotic z ^c	Sig.	95% Asymptotic Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
P1-Coder1- Coder2	.657	.149	4.342	<.001	.365	.950
P2-Coder1- Coder2	.561	.097	3.710	<.001	.371	.751
P3-Coder1- Coder2	.633	.129	4.132	<.001	.381	.885
P4-Coder1- Coder2	.473	.106	3.649	<.001	.265	.681

- The estimation of the weighted kappa uses linear weights.
- Value does not depend on either null or alternative hypotheses.
- Estimates the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis that weighted kappa is zero.

Social Enterprise Total Analysis

The initial sample of relevant social enterprises (SE) was 91, but after removing the organizations from the sample that were not considered active on Facebook (they either had no organization page or had no new posts in over 30 days), a total of 65 organizations from the SE

sample were considered valid for data collection and inclusion in the analysis. The descriptive statistics of the social enterprise sample are presented in Table 5. A total of 650 postings were collected and included in the analysis. The average mean for each principle is included, with Principle 4, *Information of Interest to Stakeholders*, as the only one present in each organization.

Table 5

SE Principle Statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Number of Posts	650	10	10	10.00	.000
P1. Conservation of Visitors	65	0	2	.86	.659
P2. Generation of Return Visits	65	0	4	1.83	1.084
P3. Dialogic Loop	65	0	4	1.65	1.110
P4 Information of Interest to Stakeholders	65	1	5	3.02	.976

Table 6 breaks down the presence of each item for each principle and provides a descriptive statistic for each across the social enterprise sample. The information in Table 6 shows that the item *Events, activities or services related to the organization* was the most prevalent across the sample of social enterprises, appearing 90.8% of the time. In the Dialogic Loop principle, the item *Providing survey or other channel for users to express opinions on the organization* was not present in any of the postings for any of the organizations in the sample. Also of note is the consistent presence of the use of hashtags (84.6%) and the expression of the organization's goals, values, or mission (84.6%) in the sample.

Table 6*Item Statistics for SE*

Dialogic Principle	N	Frequency	Percentage	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
<u>Conservation of Visitors</u>							
Link to organization's official website	65	45	69.2	0	1	.69	.465
Links to organization's other social networking sites	65	11	16.9	0	1	.17	.378
<u>Generation of Return Visits</u>							
Links to other websites for additional information	65	29	44.6	0	1	.45	.501
Links to news/opinion pieces related to the organization by external media sources	65	25	38.5	0	1	.38	.490
Links to other Facebook pages: use of @	65	45	69.2	0	1	.69	.465
Option to request information	65	21	32.3	0	1	.32	.471
<u>Dialogic Loop</u>							
Reply to user's posts	65	18	27.7	0	1	.28	.451
Providing survey or other channel for users to express opinions on the organization	65	0	0	0	0	.00	.000
Use of hHashtags	65	55	84.6	0	1	.85	.364
Request to ask a question or leave a comment (request can be via text or video)	65	9	13.8	0	1	.14	.348
Questions posed by the organization to solicit feedback	65	9	13.8	0	1	.14	.348
Organization tagging/@ someone engaged in the conversation	65	16	24.6	0	1	.25	.434
<u>Information of Interest to Stakeholders</u>							
Events, activities or services related to the organization	65	59	90.8	0	1	.91	.292
News, reports, opinion pieces, press releases related to the organization's employees, or the industry the organization is in.	65	47	72.3	0	1	.72	.451
Job announcements	65	11	16.9	0	1	.17	.378
Expression of the organization's vision/mission/goals	65	55	84.6	0	1	.85	.364
Expression of the director or executive's personal opinions/thoughts/reflections on an issue/population relevant to the industry the organization is in.	65	24	36.9	0	1	.37	.486

Fortune 100 Total Analysis

For the sample taken for the Fortune 100 companies, each of the Facebook pages was accessed via the organization's website to ensure that the page was the officially recognized social media account for the organization. A total of 17 of the Fortune 100 organizations did not have a Facebook Page associated with the organization linked from their website, and nine of the accounts were considered inactive with no posting within the past 30 days. This resulted in a total of 74 viable Facebook pages included in the dataset for collection and analysis.

Fortune 100 Principles Analysis

Table 7 below provides descriptive statistics for the subtotals of the principles. Each principle was included in the analysis, with the highest average represented by the *Information of Interest to Stakeholders* principle. Additionally, each principle had a minimum of 0 in each principle, meaning that the principle was not present at all in at least one organization.

Table 7

Fortune 100 Principle Statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Number of Posts	740	10	10	10.00	.000
P1. Conservation of Visitors	74	0	2	1.15	.459
P2. Generation of Return Visits	74	0	4	1.18	1.012
P3. Dialogic Loop	74	0	4	1.80	1.020
P4 Information of Interest to Stakeholders	74	0	5	2.70	1.144

Table 8 provides the descriptive statistics for the representation of each of the items in the dialogic communication framework for the Fortune 100 companies sample. The most represented item in the sample was *Link to the organization's official website* (91.9%), and the least represented item was *Providing survey or other channel for users to express opinions on the organization* (1.4%). Of special note also are the items *Expression of the organization's vision/mission/goals* (86.5%) and the *Events, activities or services related to the organization* (71.6%), both represented over 70% of the time in the sample.

Table 8*Item Statistics for Fortune 100*

Dialogic Principle	N	Frequency	Percentage	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
<u>Conservation of Visitors</u>							
Link to organization's official website	74	68	91.9	0	1	.92	.275
Links to organization's other social networking sites	74	17	23	0	1	.23	.424
<u>Generation of Return Visits</u>							
Links to other websites for additional information	74	12	16.2	0	1	.16	.371
Links to news/opinion pieces related to the organization by external media sources	74	19	25.7	0	1	.26	.440
Links to other Facebook pages: use of @	74	46	62.2	0	1	.62	.488
Option to request information	74	10	13.5	0	1	.14	.344
<u>Dialogic Loop</u>							
Reply to user's posts	74	46	62.2	0	1	.62	.488
Providing survey or other channel for users to express opinions on the organization	74	1	1.4	0	0	.01	.116
Use of Hashtags	74	53	71.6	0	1	.72	.454
Request to ask a question or leave a comment (request can be via text or video)	74	19	25.7	0	1	.26	.440
Questions posed by the organization to solicit feedback	74	5	6.8	0	1	.07	.253
Organization tagging/@ someone engaged in the conversation	74	9	12.2	0	1	.12	.329

<u>Information of Interest to Stakeholders</u>							
Events, activities or services related to the organization	74	53	71.6	0	1	.72	.454
News, reports, opinion pieces, press releases related to the organization's employees, or the industry the organization is in.	74	48	64.9	0	1	.65	.481
Job announcements	74	19	24.3	0	1	.24	.432
Expression of the organization's vision/mission/goals	74	64	86.5	0	1	.86	.344
Expression of the director or executive's personal opinions/thoughts/reflections on an issue/population relevant to the industry the organization is in.	74	17	23	0	1	.23	.424

Comparison of Social Enterprise and Fortune 100 Data

The descriptive statistics show some differences in social media activity between the two samples, with the Fortune 100 companies seeming to prioritize the organization’s website over the social media platform itself. This may reflect a greater investment in the website by the organization and a desire to direct the stakeholders to that aspect of their public relations activities rather than to the Facebook platform itself. We can also see this reflected in the difference in the use of hashtags between the two samples, with the social enterprises using hashtags in the postings about 13% higher than the Fortune 100 companies. This may reflect the more social and community-based nature of the social enterprises, as well as a willingness to leverage the platform rather than direct stakeholders to the organization’s website or to other potential competitors in the industry.

Total Sample Analysis

Tables 9 and 10 provide descriptive statistics of the total sample of the social enterprises and the Fortune 100 companies. The total number of accounts for both organizations was 139. Table 9 displays the frequency statistics for each of the principles of dialogic communication, and Table 10 shows the breakdown of each of the items associated with each principle.

Table 9*SE & F100 Principle Statistics*

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
P1. Conservation of Visitors	139	0	2	1.01	.577
P2. Generation of Return Visits	139	0	4	1.48	1.092
P3. Dialogic Loop	139	0	4	1.73	1.076
P4 Information of Interest to Stakeholders	139	0	5	2.85	2.049

Table 10*Item Statistics for SE & F100*

Dialogic Principle	N	Frequency	Percentage	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
<u>Conservation of Visitors</u>							
Link to organization's official website	139	113	81.3	0	1	.81	.39
Links to organization's other social networking sites	139	28	20.1	0	1	.20	.40
<u>Generation of Return Visits</u>							
Links to other websites for additional information	139	41	29.5	0	1	.29	.46
Links to news/opinion pieces related to the organization by external media sources	139	44	31.7	0	1	.32	.47
Links to other Facebook pages: use of @	139	91	65.5	0	1	.65	.48
Option to request information	139	31	22.3	0	1	.22	.42
<u>Dialogic Loop</u>							
Reply to user's posts	139	64	46	0	1	.46	.50
Providing survey or other channel for users to express opinions on the organization	139	1	.7	0	0	.01	.08
Use of Hashtags	139	108	77.7	0	1	.78	.42
Request to ask a question or leave a comment (request can be via text or video)	139	28	20.1	0	1	.20	.40
Questions posed by the organization to solicit feedback	139	14	10.1	0	1	.10	.30
Organization tagging/@ someone engaged in the conversation	139	25	18	0	1	.18	.39

<u>Information of Interest to Stakeholders</u>							
Events, activities or services related to the organization	139	112	80.6	0	1	.81	.40
News, reports, opinion pieces, press releases related to the organization's employees, or the industry the organization is in.	139	95	68.3	0	1	.68	.47
Job announcements	139	29	20.9	0	1	.21	.41
Expression of the organization's vision/mission/goals	139	119	85.6	0	1	.86	.35
Expression of the director or executive's personal opinions/thoughts/reflections on an issue/population relevant to the industry the organization is in.	139	41	29.5	0	1	.29	.46

To effectively address RQ1 and RQ2, a further analysis was performed between the samples from the social enterprises and the Fortune 100 companies. The discussion and analysis of the research questions and hypotheses is presented below.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

In calculating the data for answering the hypotheses associated with RQ1, two tests were performed. A means test of the organizations showed the average presence of each principle, which was performed along with a Chi-square test to determine if the presence of the principles in the sample was significant.

Table 11

Presence of Principles in SE

	N	Mean	Min	Max	Std. Dev
P1. Conservation of Visitors_Fully Present	65	.15	0	1	.346
P2. Generation of Return Visits_Fully Present	65	.03	0	1	.174
P3. Dialogic Loop_Fully Present	65	.00	0	0	.000
P4. Information of Interest to Stakeholders_Fully Present	65	.06	0	1	.242

The table above shows that each principle was fully present to some degree in each of the organizations, except for the *Dialogic Loop* principle. The *Conservation of Visitors* principle was fully present in 15% of the organizations, while the *Generation of Return Visits* and *Information of Interest to Stakeholders* principles were fully present in 3% and 6% of the sample postings, respectively. In addition to the means test of the principles, a Chi-square test of the presence of the principles was performed. Table 12 shows that the presence of the *Conservation of Visitors*, *Generation of Return Visits*, and *Information of Interest to Stakeholders* was more than 0, and that the results of that test were statistically significant. The *Dialogic Loop* principle was not included in the Chi-square, as the total number of organizations with that principle fully present was 0, as Chi-square analysis cannot be performed on a constant variable.

Table 12

Chi-Square Test for Principles in SE

	P1 Fully Present	P2 Fully Present	P3 Fully Present
Chi-Square	31.154 ^a	57.246 ^a	49.985 ^a
Df	1	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	<.001	<.001	<.001

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5.
The minimum expected cell frequency is 32.5.

The hypotheses related to RQ1 are as follows:

H1. Social Enterprises Facebook postings will have the *Conservation of Visitors* principle present.

H2. Social enterprise Facebook postings will have the *Generation of Return Visits* principle present.

H3. Social enterprise Facebook postings will have the *Dialogic Loop* principle present.

H4. Social enterprise Facebook postings will have the *Information of Interest to Stakeholders* principle present.

Keeping in mind the standard of *present* as previously discussed, for the hypotheses to be accepted, the number of organizations that have the principle fully present will be greater than zero. If the number of organizations that have the principle fully present is zero, then the hypothesis will be rejected. Tables 11 and 12 show that **H1**, **H2**, and **H4** are accepted, but **H3** is rejected, as the presence of principles 1, 2, and 4 are present to a statistically significant degree.

However, as we analyze the data further, we can see that other information is relevant to the analysis, specifically as it relates to the items within the principles. Within each principle, there are multiple items; for example, the *Conservation of Visitors* principle has two items, and the *Dialogic Loop* principle has six items. If we calculate the percentage of each principle the organization displayed, we can see the results in Table 13.

Table 13

Average Percentage of Principle Present in Each SE Org

	Percent of P1	Percent of P2	Percent of P3	Percent of P4
Mean	.4308	.4577	.2754	.6031
N	65	65	65	65
Std. Deviation	.32926	.27088	.18447	.19523

The results of this table show that the average percentage of the *Conservation of Visitors* items was 43%, with some organizations having 100% of the items present and some organizations having 0% present. We can see from this table that P4, which is the *Information of*

Interest to Stakeholders principle, was the most represented of all principles across the organizations, averaging 60% of the principle items present. While not specifically related to the hypotheses in RQ1, this information is relevant in that it shows how each item across principles is represented in the social enterprise sample.

The comparison in Table 14 below shows differences in the ways that the Social Enterprises (SE) and the Fortune 100 (F100) companies employ dialogic principles in their social media postings. The F100 company postings had more content related to the items in the *Conservation of Visitors* and *Dialogic Loop* principles than the SE organizations, but the SE organization postings had more content related to the items in *Generation of Return Visits* and *Information of Interest to Stakeholders* principles than the F100 groups. While these findings do show some differences in the content of the different organizations, further analysis is needed to determine if these differences are statistically significant.

Table 14

Comparison of Group Statistics

	Org Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
P1. Conservation of Visitors	SE	65	.86	.659	.082
	F100	74	1.15	.459	.053
P2. Generation of Return Visits	SE	65	1.83	1.084	.134
	F100	74	1.18	1.012	.118
P3. Dialogic Loop	SE	65	1.65	1.110	.138
	F100	74	1.80	1.020	.119
P4. Information of Interest to Stakeholders	SE	65	3.02	.976	.121
	F100	74	2.70	1.144	.133

Table 15*Independent Samples Test*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						One-sided p	Two-sided p			Lower	Upper
Conservation of Visitors Subtotal	Equal variances assumed	8.244	.005	-3.011	137	.002	.003	-.287	.095	-.476	-.099
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.943	112.307	.002	.004	-.287	.098	-.480	-.094
Generation of Return Visits	Equal variances assumed	.687	.409	3.685	137	<.001	<.001	.655	.178	.304	1.007
	Equal variances not assumed			3.668	131.792	<.001	<.001	.655	.179	.302	1.008
Dialogic Loop Subtotal	Equal variances assumed	1.869	.174	-.836	137	.202	.404	-.151	.181	-.508	.206
	Equal variances not assumed			-.832	130.978	.204	.407	-.151	.182	-.511	.208
Information of Interest to Stakeholders Subtotal	Equal variances assumed	4.273	.041	1.721	137	.044	.087	.313	.182	-.047	.672
	Equal variances not assumed			1.739	136.896	.042	.084	.313	.180	-.043	.668

When analyzing the information from Table 15, we can see that the *Conservation of Visitors* and the *Information of Interest to Stakeholders* principles show a significant (<.05) difference between the means of the two groups. The test also shows that there is no significant difference between the means of the groups related to the *Generation of Return Visits* and the *Dialogic Loop* principles. When compared with Table 14, the F100 organizations contain significantly more content related to the *Conservation of Visitors* principle than the SE organizations, but the SE organizations contain significantly more content related to the *Information of Interest to Stakeholders*.

However, one of the assumptions of an independent sample t-test is that the data is normally distributed (Rosenstein, 2019). To test this, a Shapiro-Wilk (Corder & Foreman, 2014) test of normality was performed on the data. Table 16 shows the results of the test.

Table 16*Shapiro-Wilk Test for Normality*

	Statistic	df	Sig.
P1. Conservation of Visitors	.747	139	<.001
P2. Generation of Return Visits	.894	139	<.001
P3. Dialogic Loop	.892	139	<.001
P4 Information of Interest to Stakeholders	.922	139	<.001

The results of the normality test showed that the sample was not normally distributed, so a Mann-Whitney test and a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were both performed on the data to test for significant differences. These are non-parametric statistical tests used for data that is not normally distributed (Corder & Foreman, 2014). The results of the Mann-Whitney and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests are given below.

Table 17*Non-Parametric Tests*

Principle	Test	Sig. ^{a,b}
Conservation of Visitors Total	Mann-Whitney U Test	.004
Conservation of Visitors Total	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	.025
Generation of Return Visits	Mann-Whitney U Test	<.001
Generation of Return Visits	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	.003
Dialogic Loop Total	Mann-Whitney U Test	.253
Dialogic Loop Total	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	.324

Information of Interest to Stakeholders Total	Mann-Whitney U Test	.114
Information of Interest to Stakeholders Total	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	.373

-
- a. The significance level is .050.
 - b. Asymptotic significance is displayed.

As a result of the tests above, we can evaluate the hypotheses in the following manner.

H1. There is a significant difference in the use of the dialogic principle of *Conservation of Visitors* between social and traditional enterprise Facebook postings.

H1 is accepted, as there is a significant difference between the use of the *Conservation of Visitors* principle between the two groups.

H2. There is a significant difference in the use of the dialogic principle of *Generation of Return Visits* between social and traditional enterprise Facebook postings.

H2 is accepted, as there is a significant difference between the use of the *Generation of Return Visits* principle between the two groups.

H3. There is a significant difference in the use of the *Dialogic Loop* principle between social and traditional enterprise Facebook postings.

H3 is rejected, as there is no significant difference between the use of the *Dialogic Loop* principle between the two groups.

H4. There is a significant difference in the use of the principle of *Information of Interest to Stakeholders* between social and traditional enterprise Facebook postings.

H4 is rejected, as there is not a significant difference between the use of the *Information of Interest to Stakeholders* principle between the two groups.

Summary

The use of dialogic principles in the social media postings of social enterprises formed one of the primary pillars of this study. In analyzing the data, the results show that social enterprises employ three of the four principles of dialogic communication, but do not make full use of the *Dialogic Loop* principle in the postings. This study can provide an opportunity for social enterprise managers and directors to reassess their social media platforms' content to integrate the items associated with the *Dialogic Loop* principle to a greater extent to maximize the engagement potential of the platform and to advance the overall engagement strategies of the organization, with the ultimate goal of specific social change.

Additionally, the results of the data collection and analysis show differences in the way that social enterprises and traditional companies employ dialogic principles in social media postings, specifically on the Facebook platform. However, the data does not indicate that social enterprises are more likely to employ all the principles to a greater degree than traditional companies. While there were differences in the averages between the samples as they related to the four principles studied, there were only two statistically significant differences. The results show that social enterprises are more likely to employ the principle of *Generation of Return Visits* than traditional companies in a statistically significant way, but that the Fortune 100 companies employed the principle of *Conservation of Visitors* in an even more statistically significant way. The differences between the use of the other principles were not significant, and as a result, H1 and H2 for RQ2 were accepted, and H3 and H4 for RQ2 were rejected.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

This chapter is devoted to discussing the overall implications of the study and suggesting directions for future studies. The previous chapters established the relevance of the research to the current body of literature on the topic and to advance a specific area of inquiry within the emerging industry of social enterprise organizations. By establishing that social enterprises are part of a broader concept of social change and that social change is affected by public relations strategies focused on engagement, the principles of dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002, 2016) within fully functioning society theory (Heath, 2013) emerged as the guiding theoretical framework for the study. Additionally, the study was situated within the field of public relations, and a brief history of the field of public relations was presented accordingly to show the evolution of that field from its early stages to the modern understanding of the discipline. Each of these aspects of the literature review provided the context necessary to validate the relevance of the study to the field of communication.

Summary of Findings

The overall goal of the study was to analyze the social media postings of social enterprises to determine the degree to which dialogic principles were employed to drive effective engagement with stakeholders, and to determine if there was a difference in the ways that social enterprises employed these principles from traditional businesses. The following research questions arose as a result:

RQ1. Which dialogic principles are present in the Facebook postings of a social enterprise?

RQ2. Do traditional and social enterprises differ in utilizing dialogic principles on organizational Facebook pages and postings?

These research questions guided the creation of hypotheses in an effort to effectively answer the questions. A quantitative methodology was selected as most appropriate for the study, and samples were taken to represent the broader populations. The samples were taken from members of the Social Enterprise Alliance and the list of Fortune 100 companies. Facebook served as the primary platform for analysis, as it exhibits the properties necessary for dialogic communication (Kim et al., 2014). This data and the resulting statistical analysis were used to answer RQ1 and RQ2. The results of the data collection and analysis showed that the answer to RQ1 was that the social enterprises used three of the four principles of dialogic communication (*Conservation of Visitors, Generation of Return Visitors, and Interest of Information to Stakeholders*), but did not fully employ *Dialogic Loop* in the postings.

RQ2 was devoted to understanding the possible differences between the use of dialogic principles in the social media postings of social enterprises compared with those of traditional enterprises. The sample of traditional enterprises was taken from the list of Fortune 100 companies, and the resulting analysis showed that while social enterprises did employ the principle of *Generation of Return Visits* to a greater extent than the traditional companies, the Fortune 100 companies were more likely to employ the *Conservation of Visitors* principle in their social media postings. While this study primarily focused on the public relations activities of social enterprises, there are nonetheless advantageous takeaways for those who wish to extend the literature related to the use of dialogic communication principles by traditional organizations.

Discussion

As was discussed in the previous chapters, the use of strategies to increase engagement with stakeholders is a key aspect of effecting positive change in individuals and societies. The broader concept of social change as described by Lewin (1939) is predicated on the ability of

individuals and societies to move from one state to another, and communication between agents in that society, whether individuals or corporations, serves as a catalyst for that movement.

Drawing on research by Heath (2006) and Taylor and Kent (2014), a path to change through the use of dialogic communication was established. Dialogic communication forms an important function in society, as it allows not only for the understanding of ourselves and others but also for a broader system of order co-created among those who live in and operate in that system. When recognizing the agency inherent in others, we open up opportunities for individuals to change as a result of dialogue with others.

However, this dialogue is not confined to individuals in the system. If we begin to think of organizations as having agency and the ability to dialogue, then we can see the potential for a co-created future between organizations and stakeholders. This engagement with stakeholders in an organization centers on its public relations activities. Public relations in an organization is focused on relationship-building with not only the customers of the company or those who exchange goods and services, but with all stakeholders, those who are impacted by the actions and decisions of the organization, which is true of for-profit, nonprofit, traditional, and social enterprises. By intentionally and strategically focusing on changing attitudes and perceptions of stakeholders with respect to their agency (Russell & Lamme, 2016), public relations activities can be an integral part of intentional social change when aligned with the social mission of an organization.

The emerging class of organizations known as social enterprises seeks to establish a financially sustainable model for intentional social change by leveraging market forces through the sale of goods or services to help support a specific social mission for an organization (Dees, 2001). This intentional social focus of an organization, while engaging in market-oriented

activities, provides a unique opportunity for public relations activities to take an important role in advancing the social change intended by the organization. Additionally, advancements in technological communication methods such as websites and social media allow for a greater level of engagement with stakeholders than ever before possible for these organizations. Dialogic communication through social media represents a recent technological development that allows individuals and organizations to interact with and engage stakeholders in ways that have not been available to previous generations. This engagement with stakeholders forms the foundation of this study and the resulting research questions. However, if these organizations are not leveraging this technology to the fullest extent, engagement opportunities may be left unfulfilled. In analyzing the data and answering the research questions, a clearer picture of the presence of dialogic principles in social enterprise postings on social media emerges.

This study showed that while some aspects of dialogic communication are present in the social media activities of social enterprises, there is nonetheless room for growth, specifically in the items associated with the principle of the *Dialogic Loop*. Such items include the use of hashtags, questions posed to solicit feedback, and replying to user's posts. There are a total of six items in this principle, and social enterprises may see a greater level of engagement with the stakeholders if they intentionally integrate these items into their social media postings on a regular basis.

Social media platforms such as Facebook allow for a variety of ways that organizations and stakeholders may engage in two-way dialogic communication. The ability of the stakeholders to answer questions, pose questions, solicit feedback, and respond to inquiries from the organization represent new opportunities for dialogic communication, but data from this study shows that these organizations may not be maximizing the potential of the platform,

instead remaining content to allow communication to be more unidirectional, as described by Grunig and Hunt (1984). This study may prove helpful to those social enterprises that are interested in developing more effective engagement strategies for their stakeholders. While traditional companies may be no less interested in stakeholder engagement, as evidenced by the data collected for RQ2, the unique social mission of social enterprises implies a greater level of interest in the potential social change that can occur as a result of effective dialogic communication.

Implications

Theoretical

In building on the existing literature related to field theory (Lewin, 1939), fully functioning society theory (Heath, 2006), and dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 2014), this study drew heavily upon studies based on social psychology and communication theory. The theories for this study drew heavily on those aspects of communication related to change. The work of Heath (2006) integrated the principles of dialogic communication into the field of public relations, as he saw public relations as focusing not just on the interests of the corporation, but also taking an active role in the interests of the broader communities in which the organization operates. The principles of dialogic communication in an online platform were compiled by Kent and Taylor (1998), but recent studies by Kim et al. (2014), Yue et al. (2021), and Rybalko and Seltzer (2010) adapted the principles for use in their studies. This study sought to do the same, ultimately establishing four principles (*Conservation of Visitors*, *Generation of Return Visits*, *Dialogic Loop*, and *Information of Interest to Stakeholders*) as the most useful and relevant to the study.

The lack of presence of the *Dialogic Loop* principle in the samples may indicate the need for researchers to more closely examine the use of each item in this construct for social media postings in future studies. Specifically, neither sample included the *Providing survey or other channels for users to express opinions on the organization* item in any of the postings sampled for this study. This aspect of dialogic communication as it relates to social media may need to be reconsidered as a vital part of dialogic communication, as the industry and those who practice social media creation in organizations may not see the benefit of this item for their social media and public relations engagement strategy. Further refining not only the broader principles of dialogic communication but also the specific means by which those principles are expressed and used in social media may be useful and relevant to future theoretical developments in the area of dialogic communication.

Additionally, in the initial stages of this study, multiple points of intersection were identified in relation to communication traditions as presented by Craig (1999). This study finds common ground primarily with the socio-cultural and socio-psychological traditions, but has a secondary connection to the cybernetic and rhetorical traditions. As the study progressed, it became clear that the study was more fully positioned in the socio-cultural tradition than the others, as the aspects of social and cultural change through a dialogic framework more fully reflect the implications of this study. While aspects of the other traditions are present in the study, its contribution to the socio-cultural tradition is the most meaningful.

Methodological

The primary driver for the methodology was the framework of dialogic communication through online public relations activities as established by Kent and Taylor (1998) and further integrated into quantitative studies by Kim et al. (2014). This study drew heavily on the latter for

the quantitative methodology and the instrument used for data collection and analysis. The assessment and categorization of the social media postings were completed manually, and the results of the categorization were coded to make quantitative analysis possible. The categories of the dialogic principles as described in Appendix 1 were adapted for this study, and future studies may find the instrument to be helpful or relevant to their own research agenda. It may also be of interest for researchers to adopt the instrument used in this study for research using other social media platforms, as those may have similar functionality and use by social and conventional enterprises. Of note is the fact that the *Dialogic Loop* principle had the highest number of items on the instrument, which may have affected whether organizations were able to fully integrate that principle. Although the principle of *Information of Interest to Stakeholders* had a higher average number of items used by both social enterprises and conventional companies with fewer items. Additionally, the use of a specific sample of self-identified social enterprises was a novel aspect of this study and may be helpful for future studies that wish to expand the literature related to this emerging business model.

While this particular study was quantitative in nature, there are possibilities for qualitative study of the social media postings of social enterprises, not only looking at the content of the postings through the lens of dialogic communication but also in determining the major themes that present themselves through an analysis of the postings. Additionally, there may be an opportunity for interviews with the social media managers or executive directors of the organizations to determine main goals and strategies as they relate to social media content. These types of qualitative studies may help to expand the breadth of future quantitative studies to the dynamics of public relations and social enterprises.

Practical

This study integrated a number of different disciplines to advance research in the area of communication and public relations related to social enterprises. The results of the study may be of practical value to practitioners and researchers, both of whom wish to understand and more fully develop the means and methods in which these unique businesses operate and interact with stakeholders. An executive director of a social enterprise or a delegate may apply the information and results of this study to the overall engagement strategy of the organization to maximize the return on investment in social media activities. The use of the *Dialogic Loop* principle specifically represents an area of potential growth and opportunity for an organization looking to increase its social media engagement, specifically through activities related to requesting comments, soliciting feedback, and providing surveys to stakeholders. These activities were not well represented in the sample, and adjusting the content of the postings for the organizations on Facebook may generate a greater level of engagement with the company, which may in turn help to advance the overall social mission of the organization.

Delimitations

This study established a number of delimitations to more effectively address the research questions in an effective and practical way. The samples themselves reflect the current membership in the Fortune 100 companies and members of the Social Enterprise Alliance as of the dates of data collection. Additionally, the collection of the data took place over a period of two weeks to get a more accurate snapshot of the current situation, rather than taking a longitudinal approach to data collection. The use of the Fortune 100 as a representation of traditional companies provided a list of well-established companies that were highly likely to be devoted to financial return on investment rather than a social mission, offering a counterweight

to the specific missions of the social enterprises. Additionally, the sizes of the samples were similar, which helped to make more accurate comparisons.

The chosen methodology for the study was quantitative, as the methods and measurements matched the central focus of the research questions. Additionally, the existence of a previously studied instrument allowed for a quantitative analysis of the data collected from the social media postings. However, further studies might undertake a more qualitative analysis of the postings to highlight some of the specific content not captured by the instrument chosen for this study.

The theoretical basis for this study are a set of theories related to the content of the communication from a dialogic perspective (Kent & Taylor, 2021). The principles of engagement and dialogue, have been shown to be important aspects of change both in individuals and in the broader society and culture. This study was conceptualized on the belief that the theoretical assumptions associated with field theory (Lewin, 1939), fully functioning society theory (Heath, 2006), and dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 2014) serve to best explain the phenomena and provide the foundation for study and analysis. However, a multitude of other theoretical perspectives may be analyzed in a similar study; some may focus on the specific motives or attitudes of those in the organization or the attitudes of the stakeholders as it relates to the social media activities of the organization, but those were outside the scope of this study.

Limitations

While the methodology and samples used in this study met the needs of the defined research questions, there are nonetheless some limitations to the study. One of the first limitations is that this study sampled only companies based in the United States. Social

enterprises exist in a variety of countries, and this study did not attempt to include organizations that were based or operated in other countries. Future research may focus on using a similar methodology for analysis with a sample of organizations that qualify as social enterprises in other cultures or countries. This study did, however, take a national approach to the sample and did not limit the research to organizations in a particular region of the United States.

Additionally, the sample of social enterprises was taken from those organizations that self-identify as such and are part of a nationally recognized association of organizations that fulfill a specific set of identifying criteria. However, there are likely a large number of organizations that share similar missions, visions, and purposes as these organizations but do not self-identify as a social enterprise. These organizations may operate for all intents and purposes as social enterprises and may be of interest for future research into the use of dialogic principles in their social media postings. In the same way, other listings of traditional enterprises may prove to be of interest to researchers, as organizations that are found on the S&P 500 or the NASDAQ listings may have differing approaches to public relations.

One of the most important limitations of this study is that it reflects the interpretation of the researchers of this study in terms of the categorization of postings. Future researchers may come to differing conclusions regarding the classification related to the items for each principle of dialogic communication, which may lead to different outcomes. While a norming process and intercoder reliability were a part of the study, there may nonetheless be differences in classification that other researchers may find.

The use of a single social media platform presents a limit to this study that must be acknowledged. Facebook served as the single platform being assessed, as it was the most prevalent social media platform used by the sample of social enterprises. This allowed for a

larger sample for the study, but may not reflect the use of dialogic principles in the broader social media activities of these organizations. While there are some differences in the functionality of the social media platforms, there is enough overlap in the fundamental elements of the platform that the researchers believe allowed Facebook to provide reliable data for analysis and study in addressing the research questions.

Future Research

Additional Variables

Industry

In an effort to expound on the foundation presented in this current study, there exists an opportunity to introduce different variables that may lead to different hypotheses and research questions. For example, within the field of social enterprises and, indeed, within the Fortune 100 companies, many different industries are represented. These different industries may account for different levels of engagement. For example, service-centered organizations may be more likely to engage in dialogic communication strategies than financial or commodity industries.

Additionally, the customer bases of the companies may play a role in the level of engagement that takes place on social media. For example, a number of companies in the Fortune 100 may find that their primary customers do not engage with companies on social media, so spending a significant amount of time developing new engagement strategies for social media might not provide a significant return on investment. A company that produces pipelines for gas companies is primarily devoted to business-to-business strategies, and such a company may not find that social media increases engagement with its primary stakeholders in the same way that a grocery store or technology hardware company might. This in turn would affect the overall dialogic engagement strategy for the company.

Resources

When looking at the types of organizations that make up the sample of social enterprises, there is a high probability that these companies operate as nonprofit entities. While not necessarily a requirement to be considered a social enterprise, nonprofit status is a business model used by many of these types of businesses. Many nonprofit organizations are small and may not have the resources necessary to employ a specific individual devoted to public relations strategies and projects. This lack of funding for these positions may impact the time and attention paid to stakeholder engagement strategies employed by social enterprises. If there is a relationship between engagement and impact and a relationship between having a public relations professional on staff and engagement, then there may be a valid rationale for social enterprises to prioritize the hiring of a public relations professional who knows how to increase stakeholder engagement.

Additional Methodologies

Larger Sample Size

Future studies may draw on a larger pool of organizations to determine if the data collected in this study are consistent across a greater number of organizations. As discussed in the previous section, the use of only one organization (the Social Enterprise Alliance) for the sample may be expanded in future studies to obtain a larger sample for analysis. There are many organizations throughout the country and indeed the world that would reflect the characteristics of a social enterprise, but may not self-identify as one of these organizations. Cooperatives, for example, may be included in the samples of future studies. Other countries also have some specific legal designations for social enterprises that may provide samples that are even more accurate, as their criteria are legal rather than organizational. Canada, for example, has a specific

legal designation for organizations that might align with the characteristics of a social enterprise. However, studies that seek to use international samples should be sure to account for any cultural variables that may contribute to differences between the United States and other countries.

Additionally, this study focused on the Fortune 100 companies as the representative sample for traditional businesses, but future studies may be interested in expanding that sample to the S&P 500, or to organizations with the best-performing stocks on the NASDAQ. These samples may provide additional data related to the ways that traditional business models employ dialogic principles in their public relations strategies on social media.

Different Samples

This study focused on the specific social media platform of Facebook. However, there are a number of other social media platforms used by both traditional and social enterprises. Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and X are all technological platforms through which an organization can interact with stakeholders. While each platform has unique characteristics and functions, future studies might focus on the use of dialogic principles in these other platforms by social or traditional enterprises.

Advanced Assessment Tools

Future studies may be inclined to use artificial technology or other language processing tools to categorize the postings of the companies. This study relied on human assessment of the content of the postings. However, there may be opportunities for future researchers to use language processing tools to assess and categorize the content of social media postings. The use of such tools may also allow for larger sample sizes and more consistent categorization of the content along the lines of the principles of dialogic communication. The following section describes the way in which large language processing tools might impact future studies.

Artificial Intelligence in Future Studies

There has been a recent rise in the availability of artificial intelligence tools in the public relations industry (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018). Artificial intelligence (AI) has evolved from its beginnings with early computers, but current developments allow the technologies to take in large amounts of data and use it to draw conclusions and even act on those conclusions. Machine learning (ML) is the use of algorithms to identify patterns in data, which allow a machine to be able to take input and predict the output (Helm et al., 2020), and Natural Language Processing (NL) is a description of the way that machines can take in questions from users using conversational language, extracting from that input the output desired by the user. The ability of machines to take in large amounts of data, potentially the entire internet, and provide answers to specific questions, create new content, and understand complex computations provides the public relations practitioner with a variety of tools to effectively develop relationships with organizational stakeholders. In the context of public relations, we see a host of potential uses for AI and ML tools in the industry. From creating social media posts to taking in large amounts of data to looking for trends in engagement and content, there are a variety of emerging ways that AI can help those engaged in the public relations activities of their organization. The ability of AI-generated content to take over for human-created content has already begun to be realized (Alawaad, 2021), and the uses of this new technology are expanding rapidly.

As it relates to future research opportunities beyond the current study, the way that AI can begin to create engagement with organizational stakeholders is of specific interest. The ability of an AI tool to create content that has the principles of dialogic communication already baked into the outputs would be of interest to researchers. For example, could a Chat GPT-like tool be programmed with the understanding that all social media postings should be created with

an eye toward the principles of dialogic communication, as described by Kent and Taylor (2021), so that when public relations professionals prompt the tool to create a social media post for a specific platform, the output would already include a more engaging and effective posting for the user?

Additionally, the use of AI to engage in data analysis of social media postings might be able to determine which principles of dialogic communication and engagement performed best with the intended audience. For example, are the stakeholders for the organization primarily engaged with postings that focus on principle 2 (generation of return visits), or principle 3 (dialogic loop)? The AI tool might be able to determine which postings would most likely engage stakeholders.

The use of AI in public relations research might also be able to identify any areas of engagement that may be added to the concepts of dialogic communication, perhaps even introducing an additional principle or recategorization of existing principles to more accurately reflect the ways that dialogic communication operates in the technological environment of social media. The ability to take in large amounts of data and extract overall themes or principles is a hallmark of those AI tools that are becoming more commonly available, and the ability to identify new principles of dialogic communication or engagement may be a viable path for future study.

While some may argue that the benefits of AI are significant and that it will serve to enhance the productivity of current public relations practitioners through task automation and content creation, there are also some who caution that this technology could have far-reaching and transformative effects on the industry (Gerbert, 2018). These transformative effects may result in changes to the way that public relations professionals are trained. For example, if a

public relations firm were to begin to train an AI bot to understand not only the company but also the broader industry in which the company operates, then new public relations hires would have to know how to prompt and develop that AI tool to adjust to changes in the organization and to ensure the technology is operating efficiently and effectively. Additionally, the organization may find that there is not as high a demand for public relations content developers, as the AI tool would be able to create content at a much quicker pace. This may result in a loss of certain public relations jobs and a significant change to the qualifications for others.

Summary

The study presented here contributes to the body of knowledge across a number of disciplines. The integration of social change, public relations, and business allows this study to be of use to researchers in a number of fields. The emerging areas of social enterprises and social media, viewed through the lens of public relations and dialogic communication, provide helpful information for others wishing to explore these fields in a meaningful way. While this particular study was limited in scope, we hope it will move and inform future studies in these fields.

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Appendix 1

Dialogic Communication: Dialogic Principles

Principle	Measurement (17 items)
Conservation of visitors	<p>Link to the organization's official website</p> <p>Links to organization's other Social Networking Site(s)</p>
Generation of return visits	<p>Links to other websites for additional information</p> <p>Links to news/opinion pieces related to the organization by external media sources.</p> <p>Links to other Facebook pages: use of @</p> <p>Option to request information</p>
The Dialogic Loop	<p>Reply to user's posts</p> <p>Providing survey or other channel for users to express opinions on the organization</p> <p>Use of hashtags</p> <p>Request to ask a question or leave a comment (request can be via text or video)</p> <p>Questions posed by the organization to solicit feedback</p> <p>Organization tagging/@ someone to engage in conversation</p>
Information of Interest to Stakeholders	<p>Events, activities or services related to the organization.</p> <p>News, reports, opinion pieces, press releases related to the organization's employees, or the industry the organization is in.</p> <p>Job announcements</p> <p>Expression of the organization's vision/mission/goals</p> <p>Expression of the director or executive's personal opinions/thoughts/reflections on an issue/population relevant to the industry the organization is in.</p>

