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Emergent Practice in Online Corporate Reputation Management

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**Emergent Practice in Online Corporate
Reputation Management**

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Abstract

The Internet culture presents a paradigm shift for corporate communicators; organizational success is increasingly dependent on stakeholder activities online. This study examines online corporate reputation management initiatives, through analysis of literature published since 1978. Three overarching principles emerge: (a) demonstrate sincerity and respect as the essence of all exchanges, (b) use a multi-step approach for the most effective online reputation management initiatives, and (c) integrate the corporate communications function within the core of the organization.

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Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine existing online corporate reputation management initiatives (Bunting & Lipski, 2000) in order to identify key factors that influence how stakeholders perceive the organization. A stakeholder, in this study, refers to the customer of an organization (Alwi & da Silva, 2007). Corporate reputation is defined in this study as “a stakeholder’s overall evaluation of a company over time” (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001, p. 29). Bunting and Lipski (2000) characterize an online corporate reputation management initiative as having one or more of the following four features: (a) engaging opposition, (b) direct communication, (c) third-party endorsement, and (d) building relationships.

The study is designed as a literature review that evaluates, organizes, and synthesizes topic-related literature (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Literature published between 1978 and 2009 is examined in the following content areas: (a) Internet culture and social media (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009), (b) corporate communications function (Clark, 2001), and (c) online corporate reputation management (Bunting & Lipski, 2000). The research goal is to examine existing online corporate reputation management initiatives, reported in the literature, as a way to develop a set of three guiding principles for organizations to use in support of online corporate reputation management. These guiding principles align with one or more features of what Bunting and Lipski (2000) characterize as an effective online corporate reputation management initiative.

Problem Area

The information found online about corporations is generally accepted by the business community as a contributing factor in shaping consumer perceptions and opinions of corporations (e.g. Gorry & Westbrook, 2009; Goetzinger, Park, & Widdows, 2006; Chun, 2004; Bunting & Lipski, 2000). Bunting and Lipski (2000) argue that these perceptions and opinions, regardless of the veracity, are equally as impactful on the organization's reputation as the organization's actions.

Recent observations made by Gorry and Westbrook (2009) show how a few vocal opponents could "induce waves of criticism and innuendo against companies"; while, "at the same time, awash in information, online audiences appear to have little inclination to assess the expertise or credentials of opinion sources" (p. 196). According to Lee and Park (2007), this is potentially problematic as a recent upsurge of social media like online third party feedback forums and opinion communities have made commentary on the Internet pervasive and popular. In other words, as Bernhardt, Conway, Lewis, and Ward (2007) describe, social media further shifts the power dynamic to give stakeholders increased ability to mediate or influence corporate messages. Gorry and Westbrook (2009) believe that vocal stakeholders and their commentary if left unchecked, are at best, missed opportunities to strengthen stakeholder loyalty and improve overall market performance; and at worst, may wreak havoc on corporate reputation and possibly lead to substantial economic losses.

With more than seventy percent of consumers using the Internet and social media to find information about a company, specifically their customer care history (Barnes, 2008), online corporate reputation management is a new corporate communications

approach critical for business survival (McCusker, 2007). A survey sponsored by public relations firm Hill and Knowlton shows that only sixteen percent of organizations systematically scan the Internet for commentary about them (as cited in Alsop, 2004). This is a concern since a separate report from Garcia and Hart (2007) reveals that if a company fails to communicate with the stakeholders online, someone – most often nonaffiliated - will communicate for them.

Additionally, many companies that do find online commentary about themselves either wait to decide what the appropriate action is, or do nothing in hopes of avoiding an escalation of the issue (Clark, 2001). A few companies still use a once common initiative of legal action, a heavy-handed tactic, as a way to curtail online criticisms (Burns, 2006). Overwhelmingly, these initiatives backfire as management responses are short term, defensive, and miss the root cause of why consumers voice their opinions online (Bonini, Court, & Marchi, 2009). Since above all else, research (Fearn & Page, 2005) shows, consumers care most about how fair companies are to them.

Significance

Chun and Davies (2001) state that given the evidence, it is important for organizations - especially those where a majority of their stakeholders use the Internet to find and discover information about the organization and its actions - to evaluate how the Internet and social media integrate into their corporate reputation management initiatives.

Bunting and Lipski (2000) contend that public relations professionals and corporate communication managers practicing the traditional ‘command and control communication’ model are unprepared for “the dark side of the Internet [which] has

received little management attention, yet its ramifications for companies are potentially very serious” (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009, p. 195). Clark (2001) insists:

Managing the debate about an organization or key issues relating to it, for a favorable outcome, has always been a key role of the corporate communications function, but new [initiatives] are needed in the virtual environment, where both the frequency and type of commentary are considerably enlarged. (pp. 262-263)

Unfortunately, while the need for these initiatives to guide those with corporate reputation management duties is growing, applicable research remains limited.

Moreover, a preliminary review of literature that pertains to reputation management in the online context confirms this lack of pertinent information.

Audience

This study is intended for management professionals working within the corporate communications function. Bunting & Lipski (2000) note that responsibility to address corporate online reputation falls under the corporate communications function, because corporate communication managers and public relations professionals are charged to manage their organizations’ communication and relationships with their stakeholders. This study defines stakeholder as the customer of an organization (Alwi & da Silva, 2007); in this study, focus is on the online customer.

Clark (2001) believes knowing what is being said about the organization and its activities is a recognized responsibility of corporate communication managers and public relations professionals; however, the time sensitivity of the commentary as well as the scope make it almost impossible for one corporate communications department to

manage. It is critical that these professionals “put new systems in place to permit timely and appropriate response to the increased level of comments on significant issues that the Internet enables” (p. 262).

Outcome

The outcome of this study is framed as a set of three guiding principles for how to manage online corporate reputations. The guiding principles is intended to give corporate communication managers and public relation professionals the framework to develop “strategies that companies [can] use when confronted by negative consumer- and employee-generated content on the Web” (Bennett & Martin, 2008, p. 2). These principles are framed in relation to a pre-defined set of categories, provided by Bunting and Lipski (2000). They characterize an online corporate reputation management initiative as having one or more of the following four features: (a) engaging opposition, (b) direct communication, (c) third-party endorsement, and (d) building relationships. See the Definitions section of this study for further details on guiding principles.

Delimitations

Time frame. In a formal literature review, Leedy and Ormrod (2005) recommend that the collected literature provide the most current perspective of the selected topic. The Internet is a phenomenon of the 1990s (Patetta, 2009); however, literature from that period is limited. Therefore, the majority of the selected literature is after the year 1999 with a copyright or publication date between 2000 and 2009.

Types of sources. Literature is selected from academic journals, trade publications, newspapers, and books.

Selection criteria. This study applies the guidelines Leedy and Ormrod (2005) suggest for searching, reviewing, and selecting appropriate literature. Nearly all of the literature selected is from academic sources; even though, public search engines like Google and Clusty are used, only results from credible sources are selected. For example, journal articles are verified as being peer-reviewed through the qualifications laid out by Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory. Alternatively, highly relevant literature is heavily scrutinized by evaluating the author's affiliations, number of times the article is cited, and quality of the data collection present in the article. Criteria such as publication date, objectivity and coverage, and intended audience are also applied.

Identification of factors. The purpose of this study is to examine types of existing online corporate reputation management initiatives (Bunting & Lipski, 2000) in order to identify key factors that influence how stakeholders perceive the organization. Bunting and Lipski (2000) believe that "companies need to rethink their approach to corporate communications in order to build and protect their online reputation" (p. 175). Factor identification occurs during the data analysis process, and is determined by assessing if the strategy or initiative fundamentally challenges the nature of corporate communication as it relates to cultivating and protecting corporate reputation in an online context. Factors are identified initially in relation to a pre-defined set of features, provided by Bunting and Lipski. They characterize an online corporate reputation management initiative as having one or more of the following four features: (a) engaging

opposition, (b) direct communication, (c) third-party endorsement, and (d) building relationships.

Scope of an initiative. An initiative is described as a single point of communication or interaction, as it relates to online media, between a company's action or statement and subsequent reaction(s) of stakeholders (Bunting & Lipski, 2000). An initiative is also known as a management response.

Topic definition. Unlike traditional media such as television, the Internet makes consumers active participants by freeing them from pre-determined information flows (Bornemann, Hansen, Rezaakhsh, & Schrader, 2006). Bunting and Lipski (2000) recognize that organizations are losing much of their control over information flows online, especially when critics attempt to negatively exploit the Internet and its tools. This is why Bunting and Lipski firmly believe a better understanding of stakeholder communication on the Internet is vital to corporate reputation management.

Focus. The literature review is focused on communication initiatives in an online context; specific research is grounded on the stakeholder activities that influence corporate reputation. Although, the scope of the study is bound to the online context, Clark (2001) asserts that the management response is not limited to online communication strategies and initiatives. However, many proven strategies and initiatives for offline communications are outside the scope of this study. Additionally, literature advocating the dominant marketing practice of communication defined as the seller-push model (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009) is excluded. Instead, the study addresses the customer-pull communication model in the online context, where the "customers have control over their interactions with the company" (p. 197).

Crisis management is not included in this study. Crisis communication, as a management response, is focused primarily on an event that has already occurred; which is considered only a small facet of corporate reputation management (Schreiber, 2008). Nonetheless, the Internet is often the scanning environment used by practitioners to avert a crisis (Doerfel, Perry, & Taylor, 2003). Although crisis management's practices are highly centralized on responding to crises, a new wave of literature and research is focused on the impact the Internet has on stakeholder communication and how practitioners can leverage the technology more efficiently (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008). This is useful to this study since there are overlapping practices between crisis management and corporate reputation management in regards to preventative measures, especially as it relates to the online context. Thus, this study focuses solely on the issues management perspective of crisis management in regards to understanding stakeholder communication in the online context; and, not the underlying construct of crisis management.

Data Analysis Plan Preview

This study employs the content analysis procedure to collect and analyze literature. Content analysis is a research tool that quantifies and analyzes the presence and relationships of words and concepts within the selected literature (Busch, De Maret, Flynn, Kellum, Le, & Meyers, 2005). Busch et al. (2005) further delineates content analysis into two approach types: relational and conceptual. This study uses the conceptual analysis and follows the eight coding steps described by Busch et al. to operationize the approach. The identification of concepts is framed in relation to a set of

key terms and an additional pre-defined set of categories, provided by Bunting and Lipski (2000).

Writing Plan Preview

The Review of the Literature section of this study is written utilizing the thematic organizational approach. The thematic approach organizes literature around a topic or issue, rather than through a progression of time (Literature Reviews, n.d.). Key factors derived from the data analysis process, which is initially based on four pre-selected data analysis categories, are examined to determine the themes. Additional themes may emerge during the examination of the results of the data analysis.

Definitions

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) recommend the terms be defined operationally or by their relation to the study. The following terms are defined from selected literature and represent the terminology's use within the study.

Command and control communications model is “characterized by a tendency to communicate only when there are problems, and a resort to legal solutions to respond to hostile comment and opponents’ attacks” (Bunting & Lipski, 2000, p. 175).

Complaint “is broadly defined as an expression of pain or an articulation of dissatisfaction or resentment toward companies and/or third parties” (Goetzinger et al., 2006, p. 194).

Corporate communications is what Bunting and Lipski (2000) explain as communication of “chosen messages, through advertising, PR, their website, logo, media tie-ins, sponsorships and all other devices of modern corporate communications” (p. 171).

Corporate reputation is defined as “a stakeholder’s overall evaluation of a company over time” (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001, p. 29).

Crisis communication is to respond adequately to crises should they arise by using all available online tools and to establish appropriate Internet-based actions once the crisis dies down (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008).

Customer-pull model “places the information in a central Internet repository – often a set of web pages – from which customers can draw what interests them” (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009, p. 197).

Guiding principles in the context of this study represents the corporate communication approach of building and protecting corporate reputation on the Internet. Guiding principles allow organizations to meet the threats to credibility and reputation by proactively engaging “the culture of the Internet, fully embracing its value as well as its technologies that enables widespread participation by consumers and workers” (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009, p. 196).

Heavy-handed tactic is a corporate communication approach focused on winning stakeholders over through insistence or attack. This tactic fails to take into consideration stakeholders’ viewpoints and is, most often, without an option of non-hostile dialogue (Bunting & Lipski, 2000).

Infomediaries help less informed users by providing expertise through online tools such as shopbots (e.g. shopping.com), virtual advisors (e.g. activedecisions.com), and opinion communities (Bornemann et al., 2006).

Internet culture is “a distinct culture that favors participation, egalitarianism and new conceptions of authority. Recently developed technology - for example, tools for

blogging and social networking - has strengthened inclinations toward sharing and collaboration” (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009, p. 195).

Issues in this study, are the gaps or discrepancies between a corporate action or message and the stakeholder’s expectations (Regester & Larkin, 2002).

Issues management is the active monitoring of the Internet in order to identify, track, and manage any issues that have the potential to cause damage by guiding their outcome (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008).

Online corporate reputation management is characterized by Bunting and Lipski (2000) as having one or more of the following four features: (a) engaging opposition, (b) direct communication, (c) third-party endorsement, and (d) building relationships.

Online commentary “is defined as a single instance of an author making a posting relating to any message, through any medium of the Internet” (Clark, 2001, p. 263).

Opinion communities (e.g. eopinons.com) enable consumers and other corporate stakeholders to read opinions of others as well as post and share their own opinions about companies, their products and services and other corporate aspects (Einwiller & Will, 2001).

Negative consumer-generated content, for the purposes of this study, is also known as a complaint.

Public relations is defined as “those charged with maintaining the reputation or favorable public perception of an organization [as well as] need to know, and manage the response to, what is being said about it” (Clark, 2001, p. 262).

Seller-push model is where “companies have directed persuasive message at customers irrespective of their interests” (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009, p. 197).

Social media is defined as tools that increase the propensity towards sharing and collaboration such blogging and social networking (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009) as well the technology behind third party feedback forums (Goetzinger et al., 2006) and opinion communities (Einwiller & Will, 2001). (See also *Web 2.0*).

Stakeholder, for the purposes of this study, is defined as the customer of an organization (Alwi & da Silva, 2007).

Third-party feedback forum is a new method for customers to “communicate their opinions online thereby making them publicly available” (Goetzinger et al., 2006, p. 193).

Virtual environment today, is a “more sophisticated [environment] in terms of the way people communicate and how they exchange opinions, ideas, and advice” (Patetta, 2009, p. 50).

Warranting principle “pertains to impression formation in Internet communication. It posits that perceivers’ judgments about a target rely more heavily on information, which the targets themselves cannot manipulate than on self-descriptions” (Hamel, Shulman, Van Der Heide, & Walther, 2009).

Web 2.0 “offers a variety of venues for companies to communicate with customers...including user groups, message boards, forums, blogs, wikis and social networks such as MySpace and Facebook” (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009, p. 197). For the purposes of this study, it is also known as social media.

Research Parameters

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) describe research as a systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data about a selected topic. The following research parameters are part of the research methodology that provides structure and understanding of the investigation approach. These research parameters describe the research question, search strategy (search terms and results), evaluation criteria (documentation approach), data analysis plan, and writing plan.

Research Question

In order to successfully present guiding principles for organizations to use in support of online corporate reputation management the following research question must be addressed: What are the key factors for consideration, as identified in selected online corporate reputation management initiatives, for cultivating and protecting corporate reputation online?

Search Strategy

The literature search strategy consists of examining a combination of academic databases and public search engines. Since this is an academic literature review, the goal is to find articles from peer-reviewed journals, industry respected publications, or credible authors. With this goal in mind, the University of Oregon (U of O) Library's OneSearch is an ideal resource. The U of O Library interfaces into many academic databases, indexes, and catalogs. In addition, many of the full-text articles are accessible

to this researcher. The filter by business category search proves to be very successful, yielding the first set of quality literature. Each search result is denoted with title, brief description, and whether the article came from a peer-reviewed journal or not.

Search terms. There are several different types of queries performed with the following search terms:

- online reputation
- online corporate brand image
- social media AND firm reputation
- e-reputation
- corporate reputation AND cyberspace
- internet AND organization reputation
- managing web reputation
- digital corporate reputation
- company reputation AND web 2.0

The public-facing search engine Google Scholar is also accessed to ensure maximum coverage of the topic. Google Scholar provides a broad reach of scholarly literature by searching across multiple disciplines and sources. It does not specify the article type, but it does provide a count of the number of citations and sources; both of which assist in identifying the quality of each search result. Without the ability to filter on the subject matter, additional search terms are added to the search phrase as needed. As a result, many searches are performed using a wider variety of term combinations. One of drawbacks from using this public search engine is that several of the promising articles are inaccessible and require membership or purchase for full-text access.

Clusty, another public facing search engine, is next in conducting research for this study. Clusty is a meta-search engine that combines and applies common topic sort for results from multiple search engines like Bing.com and Ask.com. Clusty implements a filter mechanism based on popular concepts, chosen by Clusty that, in turn helps speed up the scan of results. Although the huge number of results can make Clusty inefficient, it does produce some useful literature. Unfortunately, for this study, several articles from Clusty come from unreliable or anonymous sources. However, the articles introduce several useful new terms. Clusty as a public search engine also presents the same drawback as Google Scholar; there are a few promising pieces of literature where only the abstract is available.

The Business and Company Resource Center (BnCRC) is a very useful database. As a niche database for business-related literature, BnCRC produces quality results for each relevant search phrase used. Even though no additional filtering is required, the key word category must be selected to produce topic-related literature. Phrases with four or more words or with quotes are less effective and return a very limited set of results. As an academic database from the U of O catalog, many of the full-text articles are available for download.

These initial search terms are from the broad-topic area, which is to explore the notion of corporate reputation in the online context. The search terms corporate reputation and online reputation are too general as they are producing very large result sets with a diverse range of applications. However, the combined phrase of online corporate reputation and its permutations is proving to be very fruitful. From the resulting literature, additional search terms like e-reputation and corporate brand image

are found. Another quality set of search results is found when terms such as Web 2.0, social media, and social networking when used in conjunction with corporate reputation. These industry and technology terms are a contribution from this researcher’s work experience as a social media strategist. Additionally, synonyms for keywords online and corporate are also being tried. Although it yields very little, there are a few pieces of obscure literature related to the original search. Table 1 presents a report of the search results.

Search Engine/DB	Search Terms	Results	Quality of Results	Comments
OneSearch: Business	online reputation management	47	Fair	This is a good resource and is usually the first search anytime a new term is discovered. However, many of the results are truncated and only the first one hundred or so are displayed.
	brand online AND reputation	124	Good	
	e-reputation	55	Poor	
	corporate reputation AND internet	133	Good	
	Web reputation	132	Good	
	internet AND organization reputation	127	Fair	
Business and Company Resource Center	e-reputation	31	Good	This is a good resource but not as easy to use as the others. However, it does provide literature not seen at other repositories.
	online reputation	35	Good	
	social media AND reputation	9	Poor (duplicates)	
	corporate reputation AND online	1	Poor	
	online brand AND reputation	2	Poor	
	digital reputation	5	Poor	
Google Scholar	corporate reputation AND Internet	3820	Good	This is a great resource for the proposed topic.
	corporate reputation AND social media	99	Fair	

	online reputation management	77	Poor	
	e-reputation	380	Fair	
	managing reputation AND web	222	Fair	
	digital strategies AND reputation	169	Poor	
Business Source Premier	online AND reputation	92	Poor	This is a great resource for the proposed topic. Many of the articles and authors are from academic and peer-reviewed journals.
	internet AND corporate reputation	5	Fair	
	social media AND reputation	13	Fair	
	online brand AND reputation	2	Poor	
	web AND company AND reputation	19	Good	
	internet AND company AND reputation	31	Good	
UO Libraries' Catalog	online reputation management	3	Poor	This catalog is not useful for the proposed topic.
	internet AND corporate reputation	2	Poor	
	brand AND reputation AND online	0		
	corporate brand image AND online	0		
Clusty.com	online reputation	4760000	Fair (top 178)	This is a useful resource for the proposed topic. This search engine produces many types of literature and new search terms.
	managing web reputation	11500000	Fair (top 187)	
	social media AND reputation	9400000	Poor (top 166)	
	corporate reputation AND cyberspace	4230	Good (top 163)	
	digital AND corporate reputation	462000	Fair (top 162)	
	managing reputation AND web	11000	Poor (top 169)	
	organization reputation AND social networking	93	Poor (top 88)	
Summit Union Catalog	online reputation	97	Fair (professional-only)	This is a good resource. However, many of the results are duplicates from other

	e-reputation	5882	Good (duplicates)	databases and indexes.
	corporate reputation AND cyberspace	3	Poor	
	web AND reputation	12	Poor	
	social media AND reputation	21	Poor	
	corporate brand image AND online	7	Poor	
JSTOR	corporate reputation AND social networking	2	Poor	Most of the literature is from articles and trade magazines.
	online reputation	5	Poor	
	e-reputation	25	Poor	
Google.com	corporate reputation AND online AND research	198000	Good	This is a useful search engine with many good articles. However, most of the articles are from unreliable sources; great source for ideas and related information though.
	corporate reputation AND web 2.0	24200	Good	
	e-reputation	33400000	Good	
	corporate reputation AND social media	29900	Fair	
	digital strategies and corporate reputation	669	Poor	

Table 1: Report of Search Results

Evaluation criteria

This study applies the guidelines Leedy and Ormrod (2005) suggest for selecting appropriate literature. Literature is selected based on the relevance of the topic and reliability of the source repository. Generally, journal articles are verified as being peer-reviewed through the qualifications laid out by Ulrich’s International Periodicals Directory. Relevant literature from non-academic repositories is scrutinized by

evaluating the author's affiliations, number of times the article is cited, and quality of the data collection present in the article. All selected references are checked for accuracy through comparisons of literature from established academic researchers and senior practitioners.

Documentation approach. This study stores all collected literature in computer folders organized by category. A Microsoft Excel sheet is used to track all search details including topic sub-categories, productive resources, and other pertinent data.

During the data analysis process, coding of texts is conducted manually. For each electronic document, Apple's Preview application is used to highlight terms and phrases defined in the data analysis plan. In a working copy of Microsoft Word, a table is used to organize highlighted terms and phrases along with key data points, article's name, related concepts, author, and publication year. Additionally, as concepts continue to be identified and analyzed, a master Microsoft Excel sheet is used to track the study's overall progress.

Data Analysis Plan

Busch et al. (2005) describe two content analysis types: conceptual analysis and relational analysis. This study utilizes the conceptual analysis to determine the existence and frequency of one or more concepts within the selected literature (Busch et al., 2005). A conceptual analysis gauges the relevance of concepts within the context in relation to the research questions. The following are the eight coding steps Busch et al. describe for text or set of texts during a conceptual analysis:

1. Level of analysis – The level of analysis includes coding for both single words, such as "influencer" and "transparency" as well as phrases such as "online reputation management" or "online corporate reputation" or "online communication techniques". These words are selected during preliminary reading of the literature as potentially related to the concept of an initiative.
2. Pre-defined set of concepts and categories - Categories and concepts applicable to this review are modified and added during the conceptual analysis process. Initially, only words relevant to these concepts are coded: online corporate reputation management, online issues management, Internet culture and social media, and corporate web communications. The coded terms are then analyzed for the identification of key factors, which are aligned with Bunting and Lipski's (2000) characterization of the features of an online corporate reputation management initiative, including (a) engaging opposition, (b) direct communication, (c) third-party endorsement, and (d) building relationships.
3. Code for existence - Emphasis is placed on coding for existence of a concept, rather than coding for frequency. For instance, the concept "third-party advocates" is coded once, regardless the number of times it appears within the collected literature.

4. Level of generalization - Similar concepts and categories, such as "third-party advocate" and "influencer"; "sincerity" and "transparency"; and "consumer", "activist", "campaigner", "stakeholder", and "disgruntled employee" are recorded as the same. However, similar terms that appear in different forms, such as "crisis management approach" and "communication techniques" are coded separately because their meanings differ according to the context.
5. Translation rules - Translation rules are developed to help the researcher insure that categorization occurs consistently and coherently. For instance, translation rules govern the coding coherence of "online corporate reputation management initiatives" and "online communication techniques" consistently across all selected literature.
6. Irrelevant information - Irrelevant information is ignored, unless a later examination shows it does influence the final analysis results.
7. Code the texts - Coding of texts is conducted by manually. Using Apple's Preview application, each digital article is highlighted per terms and phrases previously defined. Then, each term or phrase is recorded in a Microsoft Word document according to author and publication year. This is then organized in a table that contains key data points, article's name, related concepts, coding terms, author, and publication year.
8. Analyze results – Data is analyzed and assessed to produce ideas and statements. These are classified according to key factors and themes detailed in the Writing Plan section. Unused data is separated and stored in case coding alterations are made.

Writing Plan

With the goal to identify key factors, literature is reviewed and data is coded, during the data analysis process. Results are presented in the form of a set of key factors, initially aligned with four pre-selected data analysis categories: (a) engaging opposition, (b) direct communication, (c) third-party endorsement, and (d) building relationships (Bunting & Lipski, 2000). Additional key factors may emerge.

Key factors are further examined and grouped into themes, in relation to the set of three sub-questions designed for the study. A preliminary review of the selected literature points to three potential themes, framed as questions, relevant to the main research question. As a group, these themes are intended to address the use of technology to reach online stakeholders and build virtual relationships by: identifying issues and evaluating their impact, instilling a two-way dialog, and preparing proactive action plans and responses (Cilliers, Grobler, & Steyn, 2005). The final set of themes may evolve, based on the actual analysis outcome. Potential themes include:

1. What are the implications of online monitoring and issues management as it relates to online corporate reputation?
2. What are the drivers that make engaging a broader set of influencers vital to managing corporate reputation in an online context?
3. Why are employees best positioned to build relationships with stakeholders online, and what are the factors for consideration when utilizing employees for this purpose?

Themes and key factors are then reviewed in a final step, as a way to develop a set of three guiding principles intended to give corporate communication managers and public relations professionals a framework to operate in a multifaceted environment that goes beyond traditional corporate communications and focuses on the delivery of value - not mere messages (Cilliers et al., 2005). An overview of a set of three guiding principles is presented in the Conclusions section of the paper.

Annotated Bibliography

A literature review discusses published information in a particular subject area, and covers a range of sources (Literature Reviews, n.d.). A literature review, Obenzinger (2005) adds, does not include all literature on the topic but only the most significant. The sources listed below are deemed vital to the overall literature review. Each annotated bibliography entry includes the abstract, reasons for its inclusion, and criteria used to establish credibility.

Alsop, R. J. (2004). Corporate reputation: Anything but superficial – the deep but fragile nature of corporate reputation. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 25(6), 21-29.

Abstract. Corporate reputation has never been more valuable – or more vulnerable. All of the corporate malfeasance of the past few years in the US not only showed how precious and fleeting reputation is, but it also demonstrated how one company's misdeeds taint an entire industry. Some businesses with superb reputations have found themselves unfairly lumped with the pack of fraudulent companies, and some executives have been dismayed to learn that they are viewed as greedy and unprincipled. One of the most important rules of reputation management is the need for constant vigilance. Companies today are exposed to unprecedented scrutiny through the Internet and 24-hour all-news television channels. Business is truly global and information, especially gossip, travels fast. Many people mistakenly equate reputation with corporate social responsibility and ethical behavior. While certainly of growing importance, ethics and social responsibility are but two elements of the equation. Financial performance, the workplace, quality of products and services,

corporate leadership, and vision also figure into reputation. There's also that elusive emotional bond between a company and its stakeholders that is central to the most enduring reputations. If they ever hope to maximize the value of their reputations, companies must make reputation management a fundamental part of the corporate culture and value system. Companies must spread the message of reputation management throughout the organization and make employees cognizant of how each and every one of them affects reputation on a daily basis. Reputation must be central to the corporate identity, not merely clever image advertising and manipulative public-relations ploys.

Comments. This article is useful to this study as it proposes a drastic shift in communication strategy in order to maintain corporate reputation in the modern age. This article provides background while describing each initiative. The article is included as part of the coding set for data analysis, and the initiatives this author describes are examined in the Review of Literature section of this paper. This article is deemed credible because it is published in a peer-reviewed journal. In addition, the author is a writer and editor at the highly respected Wall Street Journal; and, is the writer of the highly regarded book on corporate reputation as well.

Argenti, P. A. (2006, July). How technology has influenced the field of corporate communications. *Journal of Business and Technical Communications*, 20(3), 357-370.

Abstract. This commentary serves as a sequel to and an update of the author's earlier article "Corporate Communication as a Discipline: Toward a Definition." In addition to presenting new information about the field of corporate communication, the author

discusses the particular effect that technology has had on the field as both a function in business and a discipline within the academy. He focuses specifically on the challenges and opportunities that new technologies have brought to the field and explores possibilities for teaching and research.

Comments. This article provides insight into how technology has had a profound affect on corporate communications. The information is used to understand the impact stakeholders' activities have on corporate reputation, as well as what corporations are doing today as a result. This article is published by a peer-reviewed journal. Also, the author's first published article on the topic is more than a decade old, which indicates long-term examination of the topic.

Bennett, N., & Martin, C. L. (2008, March 10). Corporate reputation – What to do about online attacks: Step no.1: Stop ignoring them. *The Wall Street Journal*.

Retrieved from

http://global.factiva.com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/aa/?ref=J000000020080310e43a00048&pp=1&fcpil=en&napc=S&sa_from=

Abstract. The article analyzes the basic strategies that companies use in dealing with negative consumer- and employee-generated content on the Web. It suggests to companies to monitor the Web for criticism and move quickly on issues that could negatively affect their reputation or brands. It advises the examination of practices in addressing grievances, gripes and concerns. It recommends training managers to understand the risks posed by attacks to the brand.

Comments. This article is selected as it helps describe online corporate reputation management initiatives used today. Two of the strategies qualify, for this study, as an online corporate reputation management initiative: “invite and engage the critics” and “stop it before it happens” (para. 2). The other remaining strategies provide background into the problem area by contrasting current practices with previously used methods. This article is included in the coding set for data analysis. The Wall Street Journal is not a peer-reviewed journal, but its reputation within the business community tends to make it viewed as a reliable source. This article is also published in the MIT Sloan Management Review Online Journal, which is a peer-reviewed journal. In addition, the authors’ experiences and backgrounds are considered. Dr. Martin is the professor at the Frost School of Business, Centenary College of Louisiana, and Dr. Bennett is the professor of management at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

Bernhardt, A., Conway, T., Lewis, G., & Ward, M. (2007, September). Internet crisis potential: The importance of a strategic approach to marketing communications. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 13(3), 213-228.

Abstract. The Internet as a communications medium has the ability to instantaneously distribute information to a mass audience at low-cost and provides a powerful basis for Internet Crisis Potential (ICP) when stakeholders negatively affect the reputation of a corporation and/or its brands. This paper focuses on an exploratory study that analyses current ICP management practice. More specifically, primary research investigates how the ICP is currently perceived and managed by

corporations. The findings highlight a gap between corporate attitudes in terms of the necessity to manage the ICP and business practice. Online monitoring is undertaken irregularly and stakeholder and issues management on the Internet are not conducted on a constant basis by the majority of corporations. These elements, however, are regarded by managers as important for Internet crisis prevention. Although the integration of the Internet into the corporate crisis communication strategy is realized by the majority of corporations, only a minority has it fully integrated, for example, by having a “dark site” prepared. The implications of the findings are that communications professionals should gain knowledge and expertise of using and understanding the Internet medium. The strategic importance to manage the ICP needs to be communicated at all levels in the organization. An ICP management process is also recommended.

Comments. ICP management is noted to be a critical part of the reputation management process. The core preventative approach positions ICP as one of the central themes of online corporate reputation management. The initiatives of ICP provide information on two of the four types of initiatives examined in the Review of Literature. This article is also useful for background as well as an explanation into how crisis management and corporate reputation management are similar. This article is included in the coding set for data analysis. This article is accepted as credible since it is published in a peer-reviewed journal. Additionally, the authors are either department faculty or professors at universities, which also adds credibility for this article.

Bonini, S., Court, D., & Marchi, A. (2009). Rebuilding corporate reputations. *McKinsey Quarterly*, 3, 75-83.

Abstract. The article discusses the need for companies to improve their reputation management. Survey data indicate declining levels of trust in both corporations and free markets. Firms held in low popular regard will be impaired in their ability to influence discussions on important issues such as protectionism. Nongovernmental organizations, bloggers, and Web-based media all present challenges to reputation management that can overpower traditional corporate public-relations efforts. Companies need to adopt more sophisticated approaches that place an emphasis on listening and action.

Comments. This article presents several existing online corporate reputation management initiatives. This article is utilized in the Review of Literature section and included in the coding set for data analysis. Also, this article is useful in describing the Significance section of this study. The article is published by a well-respected industry analyst company; McKinsey's success and name recognition within the business community suggests that the information in the article is reliable.

Bornemann, D., Hansen, U., Rezabakhsh, B., & Schrader, U. (2006). Consumer power: A comparison of the old economy and the Internet economy. *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 29(3), 3-36.

Abstract. From the very beginning of the Internet, a decisive shift from supplier power to consumer power was predicted by several authors and is still maintained in recent literature. Although the Internet has grown rapidly within the last years and

electronic markets have evolved, a theoretical framework for consumer power on the Internet still cannot be identified. Few authors have taken efforts to apply common concepts of power theory to the characteristics of the Internet. Based on the concept of French and Raven, this paper analyses consumer power in traditional markets and then compares it to the situation on the Internet. This comparison shows that the Internet enables consumers (a) to overcome most information asymmetries that characterize traditional consumer markets and thus obtain high levels of market transparency, (b) to easily band together against companies and impose sanctions via exit and voice, and (c) to take on a more active role in the value chain and influence products and prices according to individual preferences. A broad literature review reveals that empirical findings confirm these hypotheses to a great extent. The authors conclude by summarizing the results and drawing implications from two different angles, namely from a marketing and a consumer policy perspective.

Comments. Understanding the stakeholder within the Internet context is a vital component of stakeholder communication. In this article, the authors provide in-depth information on stakeholders and their activities. This stakeholder background is used in several different sections within this study, including Outcome and Significance. Also used is the authors' case that the fundamental reason why corporate reputation management has changed so drastically is due to power gains of the consumer. The article is published in a peer-reviewed journal. Further credibility is exhibited by noting that Hansen and Schrader both have PhDs and are professors at a university; while Bornemann and Rezagakhsh are senior practitioners in the field.

Bunting, M., & Lipski, R. (2000, September). Drowned out? Rethinking corporate reputation management for the Internet. *Journal of Communication Management*, 5(2), 170-178.

Abstract. The Internet has radically altered the dynamics of corporate reputation formation and management. In the growing hubbub of consumer, media and activist dissection of corporate behavior, companies are finding it increasingly difficult to make their voices heard. By creating newly accessible channels of communication and organization, the Internet has shifted the balance of power of voice. The result is that corporate reputations are increasingly defined not by what companies do or say, but by how others perceive and respond to their actions and words. This paper argues that the underlying challenge facing reputation managers is that traditional conceptions of corporate communications and corporate relations are unsuited to the developing online environment. Effective online corporate reputation management requires companies to develop new relationships with their online stakeholders, with very different characteristics from traditional top-down communications models. The paper concludes with an attempt to describe a new conceptual framework for online reputation management.

Comments. This article is critical to the study as it lays the framework for describing and identifying an online corporate reputation management initiative. The authors take a public relations point of view to describe how to communicate with the stakeholders, with consideration of the Internet and its emerging technologies. This article is part of the coding set for data analysis. Also, in this article, the authors provide a conceptual framework within which to examine existing online corporate

reputation management initiatives, as presented in the Review of Literature section.

This article is deemed credible because it is published in a peer-reviewed journal. As senior managers at Infonic, the authors are seasoned practitioners of corporate communications and Internet strategy. Roy Lipski is also a regular speaker at industry conferences, which assumes some validation from peers.

Burns, T. (2006, March). Holding companies to account in cyberspace: The threat posed by Internet-based, anti-corporate campaigners. *International Review of Law Computers & Technology*, 21(1), 39-57.

Abstract. Companies are taking advantage of the opportunities offered by globalization to reach new markets and to lower their costs. It is common for large companies to establish overseas subsidiaries. The different legal regimes and law enforcement policies that exist in many developing economies and the current weaknesses of international regulation means that it can be difficult to hold international companies to account when they transgress. However, this may be changing to some extent as a result of the Internet. This paper proposes to examine the extent to which the Internet can act as a medium for non-governmental organizations and pressure groups to bring about changes in corporate behavior where the law or law enforcement has proved to be ineffective in curbing corporate abuses. New developments on the web (and particularly the rise of the 'blog') have been strengthening the persuasive power of pressure groups and the NGOs with regards to companies. However, this state of affairs may not last as companies seek new ways to limit the impact of these groups on their corporate strategies. This paper shall

examine how companies are currently dealing with the threat to their corporate reputations from the Internet and shall consider whether companies can succeed in keeping effective regulation of their international commercial activities in the global market place at bay.

Comments. This article is valuable to this study as it describes initiatives from a legal perspective. There is a lot of information on legal action and even some insight into why it fails in the online context, which adds background to the Problem Area section of this study. Also, this article is included in the coding set for data analysis and examined in the Review of Literature section. This article is deemed credible because it is published in a peer-reviewed journal. In addition, Tom Burns is a senior practitioner, as well as, a lecturer at the law school of Aberdeen University, both of which add to the credibility of this article.

Chun, R. (2004). The e-reputation mix: Building and protecting retailer brands online.

European Retail Digest, 41, 1-4.

Abstract. Examines the claims used by organizations to build the image and reputation of their corporate Web sites. Significance of the Internet in reputation management; Role of the mission and vision of a company in promoting reputation on the Web;

Comments. This article's author argues that corporate reputation online is best measured by using the personality characterization approach, as defined by Gary Davies. This argument provides useful information by proposing both an internal (i.e. company website) and external (e.g. third party forums) communication

approach with stakeholders. This article is from a quarterly trade journal published in the United Kingdom. Although not a peer-reviewed journal, the article's credibility is established by examining the credentials of the author, who is a well-respected author. Dr. Chun is the Professor of Business Ethics & Corporate Social Responsibility at Manchester Business School. She is the winner of many awards and an elected Representative-at-Large member for the SIM (Social Issues Management) division of the Academy of Management.

Clark, A. (2001). They're talking about you: Some thoughts about managing online commentary affecting corporate reputation. *Journal of Communication Management*, 5(3), 262-276.

Abstract. Corporate reputation managers need to put new systems in place to permit timely and appropriate response to the increased level of comment on significant issues that the Internet enables. Collecting the commentary is a preliminary step only. Most of public commentary is on the World Wide Web or in Usenet. The originator's choice of medium is revealing of their objectives and motivations. The management response may be pre-emptive or consequential, but essentially it is limited to six options, which may be supported by protocols prepared for timely response. The key factors in protocol design are indicated. The need for systematic response mechanisms will increase in future, as the capacity of the Internet to foster debate and create issues is predicted to develop further.

Comments. This article is included in the coding set for data analysis. The author's description and examination of the roles associated with corporate reputation

management is useful in defining the audience for this study. Another critical component is the key factors of protocol design; the author's investigation into the properties and tendencies of online commentary gives the necessary background into the stakeholders' activities online. This article is selected from a peer-reviewed journal and thus deemed credible. Alison Clark's twenty-plus years of experience in the field adds to the credibility of this article. In addition, she is a founding member of the Institute of Public Relations Commission on the Internet, which makes her one of the pioneers of the subject matter.

Doerfel, M. L., Perry, D. C., & Taylor, M. (2003, November). Internet-based communication in crisis management. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 17(2), 206-232.

Abstract. This article examines how organizations integrate the Internet into crisis communication. Results suggest four findings about Internet usage in crisis. First, a majority of the organizations studied are turning to the Internet to communicate with the public and the news media during a crisis. Second, organizational type does not appear to be a factor in the integration of the Internet in crisis response with financial organizations, new technology organizations, and consumer product organizations as the most frequent adopters. Third, crisis type does not appear to be a factor in an organization's decision to use the Internet in its immediate crisis response. Fourth, although most organizations are incorporating both traditional and new media communication tactics into their responses to crisis, there is a continued preference for traditional tactics. These findings illustrate how mediated communication may

create new possibilities for crisis response and are translated into suggestions for how managers can integrate new media into their mix of communication tactics in crisis management.

Comments. This article is useful to this study because several practices of crisis management overlap with how corporate reputation is managed on the Internet. There are fundamental insights into why some corporate communication practices are so reactive and responses so short-term and ad hoc; which helps to make a clear delineation between the two. This article is examined in the Review of Literature where existing initiatives are presented. By being published in a peer-reviewed journal, this article is regarded as credible. The authors Maureen Taylor and Marya Doerfel, are both PhDs and professors at Rutgers University, which establishes further credibility.

Einwiller, S., & Will, M. (2001, May 17). *The role of reputation to engender trust in electronic markets*. Conference. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Corporate Reputation, Identity, and Competitiveness, Paris, France. Retrieved from <http://www.communicationsmgt.org/modules/pub/download.php?id=communicationsmgt-11>

Abstract. In this article we discuss the role of trust as a crucial success factor to meet the challenges faced by companies engaging in electronic commerce. Reputation is proposed a key vehicle to engender trust. We particularly stress the social aspect of reputation and the decisive part electronic markets play when it comes to generating

social network effects. Based upon a theoretical conceptualization of trust and reputation, methods for reputation management in electronic markets are discussed, supplemented by practical examples.

Comments. This paper is included in the coding set for data analysis. This paper is from proceedings of the 5th International Conference for researchers and practitioners of corporate reputation management. By being recognized in this highly respected and visible conference, this article is regarded as credible. Furthermore, Dr. Einwiller is a professor of communication management at the University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland. Dr. Will is a senior lecturer for communications management and a faculty member of the University of St. Gallen.

Fearn, H., & Page, G. (2005, September). Corporate reputation: What do consumers really care about. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 45(3), 305-313.

Abstract. Do consumers really care about corporate reputation when it comes to purchasing decisions? This study tests that hypothesis by comparing consumers' perceptions of companies to the consumer equity of brands owned by those companies, using international studies of brand equity and corporate reputation. The results show that poor corporate reputation makes building strong brands difficult, but a good reputation is no guarantee of success. The elements of corporate reputation that seem to matter most to consumers in practice are perceptions of fairness toward consumers, and perceptions of corporate success and leadership, rather than public responsibility. Consumers want good business practice but when it comes to brand strength and purchasing, more personally relevant factors take precedence. So

pushing a corporate social responsibility agenda to consumers may not reap the strongest rewards. But "ethical" brands that bring no penalty in cost or quality are likely to be more successful.

Comments. The information presented in this article, to understand the desires of the consumer within the online context, is useful in this study. It is used to help develop the Problem Area and Significance sections of this study, mainly to provide background into the stakeholders' intents as well as supplements the motives behind their activities online. This article is published in a peer-reviewed journal and regarded as credible.

Forman, C., Ghose, A., & Wiesenfeld, B. (2008). Examining the relationship between reviews and sales: The role of reviewer identity disclosure in electronic markets.

Information Systems Research, 19(3), 1-43

Abstract. Consumer-generated product reviews have proliferated online, driven by the notion that consumers' decision to purchase or not purchase a product is based on the positive or negative information about that product they obtain from fellow consumers. Using research on information processing (Chaiken 1980) as a foundation, we suggest that in the context of an online community, reviewer disclosure of identity-descriptive information is used by consumers to supplement or replace product information when making purchase decisions and evaluating the helpfulness of online reviews. Using a unique dataset based on both chronologically compiled ratings as well as reviewer characteristics for a given set of products and geographical location-based purchasing behavior from Amazon, we provide evidence

that community norms are an antecedent to reviewer disclosure of identity-descriptive information. Online community members rate reviews containing identity-descriptive information more positively, and the prevalence of reviewer disclosure of identity information is associated with increases in subsequent online product sales. In addition, we show that shared geographical location increases the relationship between disclosure and product sales, thus highlighting the important role of geography in electronic commerce. Taken together, our results suggest that identity-relevant information about reviewers shapes community members' judgment of products and reviews. Implications for research on the relationship between online word-of-mouth and sales, peer recognition and reputation systems, and conformity to online community norms are discussed.

Comments. This article is used in the Review of Literature section where identification of online commentary is described. The sheer size and variety of online commentary requires that corporate reputation practitioners understand and are able to gauge the potential significance of online commentary. Implications into the characterization of an online corporate reputation management initiative are developed using the information from this article. This article is published in a peer-reviewed journal and regarded as reliable. Additionally, credibility is enhanced due to the positions the authors hold as professors at accredited colleges.

Garcia, F. H., & Hart, L. (2007). Beware (and prepare for) the blogosphere era. *Strategy & Leadership*, 35(6), 500-502.

Abstract. C.K. Prahalad, the noted corporate strategy guru, recently introduced the powerful concept of co-creating unique value with customers to create competitive advantage. Consider, however, what happens when customers are furious at a firm for service or product failures and are armed with the latest digital technology including personal blogs, anti-corporate blogosphere campaigns, YouTube and similar websites, and picture phones. So what can leaders do to anticipate and manage through such threats? This article presents six principles for protecting your reputation and strategic focus in the blogosphere.

Comments. This article is coded as part of the data analysis process. The explanation of principles is important to this study as it describes existing initiatives that are employed today. Also, an argument about why corporation should use social media presents background into the technology and adds context into how the Internet is used today. This article is from a peer-reviewed journal and thus deemed credible for use in this study.

Gonzalez-Herrero, A. & Smith, S. (2008, September). Crisis communications management on the web: How Internet-based technologies are changing the way public relations professionals handle business crisis. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 16(3). 143-153.

Abstract. This article analyses how Internet-based technologies can help companies to: monitor their business environment online in search of potentially conflictive issues that need to be managed (issues management); to prepare a crisis communications plan that considers the Internet side of today's business landscape

(crisis communications planning); to respond adequately to crises should they arise by using all available online tools (crisis response); and to establish appropriate Internet-based actions once the crisis dies down (post-crisis). The article also questions whether the traditional one-way corporate approach and tone is still suitable in the new, more participative, online business environment, or whether companies should use a different tone, language, and attitude when engaging with their audiences on the Internet in a crisis situation.

Comments. Crisis communication is a management response to build, protect, and repair corporate reputation. In this article, the authors provide context into why crisis communication must change in order to account for the Internet. Indirectly, this article provides background as well as explores existing initiatives used by organizations today. This article is part of this data set for coding, and is examined in the Review of Literature section because it provides examples of initiatives utilized today. This article is from a peer-reviewed journal, so the information is viewed as dependable.

Gorry, G. A., & Westbrook, R. A. (2009). Winning the Internet confidence game.

Corporate Reputation Review, 12(3), 195-203.

Abstract. In major organizations today, senior management is increasingly apprehensive about the threats to company reputation from Internet criticism and rumor rapidly spreading through online communities. We believe the source of the threat lies in the emerging culture of the Internet, which has been largely ignored by practitioners and academics alike. In particular, the Internet has fundamentally altered

the notion of authority. Where it once vested in the few, authority has now become the claim of many, who are empowered and emboldened by the Internet. Managing damage to company reputation, however, requires more than adapting traditional media relations to the Internet. In addition, we believe it requires business leaders to re-invigorate their connections with customers and encourage their employees to speak to customers directly and forthrightly about their own work, plans and aspirations related to company's products and services.

Comments. This paper is one of the cornerstones of this study. The authors take an in-depth examination of current Internet technologies and Internet culture, which is useful when describing the problem area. The explanation of new ways to communicate with online stakeholders in the most effective manner is paramount to the study's focus. The authors go further to expand the concept of an online corporate reputation management initiative by arguing for the empowerment of employees. This paper is coded as part of the data analysis process. This paper is a selection from an academic journal that is peer-reviewed. In addition, both authors are PhDs and highly experienced in the subject matter. Dr. Westbrook is a professor with tenure at Rice University. He is widely published and is the winner of several awards and grants for his research in the field. Dr. Gorry is the Vice President of the Computer Science Department at Rice University. Currently, he acts as the Director of the W. M. Keck Center for Computational Biology.

Griffin, A. (2008). *New strategies for reputation management: Gaining control of issues, crises and corporate social responsibility*. Philadelphia, PA: Kogan Page.

Abstract. This book explores the very important area of corporate communications and aims to delve into the most recent techniques and practices used in the public relations industry. *New Strategies for Reputation Management* demonstrates how our approach to crisis and issues management needs to change in light of recent terrorist threats, corporate scandals and major disasters – and it examines the different ways various countries/companies handled these threats.

Comments. In the book, the authors argue that reputation management is changing rapidly due to social media, therefore corporations need to adapt to this change. Moreover, the authors claim that the audience's attitude is also changing rapidly which is reinforcing the new strategies that they put forward. This book is part of the coding set for data analysis. Practitioner Andrew Griffin is a senior manager at Register Larkin. Clients of Register Larkin such as Exxon Mobil, General Motors, and American Airlines show a marketable competence of public relations and reputation management.

Lee, K. M., & Park, N. (2007, April). Effects of online news forum on corporate reputation. *Public Relations Review*, 33, 346–348.

Abstract. This study tests the effects of online discussions about a company in an online news forum on people's perception of the corporate reputation of the company. The study is a 2 (tone of comments: negative versus positive) by 2 (number of comments: one versus five) factorial design experiment (n = 80). We found significant interaction effects between the two factors (tone versus number of

comments) with regard to people's perception of the company's social responsiveness and employee treatment.

Comments. In this short article, the authors provide a useful experiment on third-party forums and the online commentary found there. This article coded as part of the data analysis process and examined in the Review of Literature as it gives insight into some initiatives used today as well as initiatives that could be useful in the future. The experiment results also provides some empirical evidence into why a well-designed initiative could be successful. Although this article is not from a peer-reviewed journal, the authors are PhDs with Lee, a professor a USC and Park, a professor at University of Oklahoma.

Nancherla, A. (2009, September). Social networking's net worth: Employers and employees have different expectations when it comes to spending time online. *T+D*, 63(9), 18-19.

Abstract. The article presents information on the use of the Internet in the workplace. It focuses on conflicts which can arise due to differences between the perceptions which employees and employers may have in terms of appropriate personal Internet use. Examples are presented which emphasize online social media. The implementation of corporate policies featuring best practices is recommended, and the results of industry surveys on such issues are analyzed. The risk of corporate brand scandals is also discussed. A case is described in which fast food workers deliberately contaminated some food, as a practical joke. They posted videos of their

antics on YouTube, an Internet video sharing site, damaging their employer's reputation.

Comments. This is a very important survey for this study to understand what leaders and employees believe about social media and its correlation to corporate reputation becomes critical to describing the Problem Area section. One of the features of an online corporate reputation management initiative is to engage the stakeholder, in their environment, using the bonds of a common purpose – social media is showing to be the best online resource to achieve this. This article is selected from *T+D*, a peer-reviewed journal. *T+D* is owned by American Society for Training & Development (ASTD), which is an established leader in training and development for professionals since 1943.

Schreiber, E. S. (2008, December). *Reputation [Electronic version]*. Retrieved from Institute for Public Relations:

http://www.instituteforpr.org/essential_knowledge/detail/reputation/

Abstract. The purpose of this paper is to review the academic and trade literature on the concept of reputation, in particular as it relates to the effective practice of communications, and then to build from this literature a proposed approach that will have value to the communications practitioner. We will not attempt to cover the literature or comment extensively on trust, ethics and crisis management, even though these topics are interrelated with reputation. These topics have already been well covered in other Essential Knowledge sections. While the communications profession touts the importance of reputation and wants to lead these efforts within

organizations, there is little universal agreement within the profession on the definition of reputation, how one goes about building a reputation, and the role of communications with regard to reputation management. Communications professionals have, historically, focused on messages and programs with external stakeholders to build trust and reputation. We agree with The Authentic Enterprise (2008) publication of the Arthur W. Page Society that corporate communicators need to move from being reactive and responsive to becoming strategic and proactive. As this document notes, the current and future needs will be for corporate communicators who are able to work across the enterprise to influence values, not just articulate them, and to become full-fledged members of the senior management, strategy team. If communications professionals are to take the lead for their organizations on reputation, they will need to: 1) enhance their ability to work across disciplines, and 2) understand how reputation is seen from the perspectives of management strategy, financial management, marketing strategy, and other disciplines that are the educational backgrounds of most of the management team.

Comments. This article is important to this study as it helps to make a distinction between crisis management and corporate reputation management. Also, in this article, the examination into social media, such as how blogs and social networks affect reputation, is needed to define the background and audiences for this study. This article is selected to be part of the coding set for data analysis. The Institute of Public Relations is a recognized entity in the corporate communications industry since 1956. Elliot Schreiber, Ph.D. is a professor at Drexel University as well as a senior practitioner.

Review of Literature

According to Clark (2001), online corporate reputation management is still in its infancy with few confirmed practices available to practitioners. However, Bunting and Lipski (2000) have developed a conceptual framework that can be used to assist with the examination of online corporate reputation management. The authors characterize an online corporate reputation management initiative as having one or more of the following four features: (a) engaging opposition, (b) direct communication, (c) third-party endorsement, and (d) building relationships.

Bunting and Lipski (2000) define engagement with the opposition as responding to stakeholder concerns, involving a situation in which online audiences expect quick and transparent responses that take those concerns into consideration. Direct communication means communicating with stakeholders within the social media context. Third-party endorsements refer to the need to expand beyond a “closed” corporate voice, as the Internet mediates the flow of information within it; to reach stakeholders and to build reputation online, corporate communicators need to utilize third-party endorsements and advocacy. Building relationships translates into successful online corporate reputation management as it relies on identifying and proactively working with stakeholders for mutual benefit (Bunting & Lipski, 2000).

This Review of Literature uses Bunting and Lipski’s characterization of an online corporate reputation management initiative as a way to organize key factors that influence how stakeholders perceive the organization. Key factors are derived during the coding analysis of a selected set of literature (see Annotated Bibliography). Coding results are reported in Appendix A. A set of research questions, designed to further

explore the meaning of these factors, is then addressed.

Key Factors That Influence How Stakeholders Perceive the Organization

Engaging the opposition through partnerships. Today's Internet culture demands transparent and authentic communication from organizations (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008). Regardless of whether stakeholder comments have any veracity or the author's identity is obscured, organizations operate in a whole new communication paradigm where not responding is wrought with potentially negative consequences. Clark (2001) points to several examples where not responding resulted in the accelerated propagation of commentary, and subsequent comments became proportionally difficult to correct or refute with the passage of time.

Organizations must accept the fact that corporate messages are being mediated online, so unidirectional communication is no longer effective (Bornemann et al., 2006). They must also accept that there is no 'silver bullet' approach, because although there is risk in not responding, Doerfel et al., (2003) show that there is also risk in the way the organizations respond. As a first step, Bornemann et al. (2006) recommend that stakeholder complaints not to be taken as attacks, but rather as insightful and honest feedback about an organization's products and services. With this change in mindset, organizations are more likely to be able to develop emotional bonds with and be responsive to their stakeholders, especially those that fall into the category of the opposition.

This change in perspective increases the organization's chances of maintaining a positive reputation (Alsop, 2004). A key factor is the willingness of organizations to

partner with their stakeholders, to invite them to participate in the development of products and policies, and most of all, to view them as integral parts of the value chain (Bunting & Lipski, 2000). If this key factor is successfully incorporated, organizations are more likely to be able to gather reliable intelligence from outside the organization as a means of tracking issues, social trends, and activities of their markets. In addition, by receiving real-time reports of sensitive changes among their stakeholders, organizations are more likely to maximize their chances for a timely and proper response (Cilliers et al., 2005).

By far the highest return on this investment is the historical record of the organization's willingness to respond and enable a two-way dialogue with their stakeholders. In the same way that negative commentary is searchable and archived on the Internet, positive responses, corrections, and visible attempts to remedy stakeholder concerns should be as well. This is important as an experiment by Lee and Park (2007) shows that people are more compelled when there is a balance of commentary types, and are more likely to be convinced when there is a dialog between parties as opposed to a single-sided argument.

Direct Communication and feedback mechanisms. Social media is the force behind the dynamics between organizations and their stakeholders (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009). Social media, such blogging and social networking, allows organizations to easily address stakeholder interests and concerns (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009), all the while making communication highly effective to reach niche audiences (Bunting & Lipski, 2000). Huffman and Prentice (2008) argue that social media ensures organizations' messages are heard. Argenti (2006) suggests that organizations that take advantage of

new technologies to communicate with their stakeholders are more effective with their communications. As noted by Bunting and Lipski (2000), before the advent of social media it was not cost effective to attempt to reach niche audiences. Furthermore, these niche audiences, in the form of online communities, often connect organizations with opinion-leaders (Einwiller & Will, 2001). These opinion-leaders or influencers may act as gateways to developing relationships with stakeholders, by identifying potential opportunities, and preventing crises (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008).

There are several points to consider when designing an organization-sponsored feedback mechanism to enable direct communications with stakeholders (Chun, 2004). Levine, Locke, Searls, and Weinberger (2000) note that the Internet culture always finds a place to speak out; whether it is on an organization's website or another feedback mechanism the organization does not control. This is a potential key factor for those organizations that are willing to accept and display negative commentary on their web presence. Organizations that host their own feedback mechanism are able to turn a potentially harmful dialogue into an opportunity to provide quick responses that may strengthen the image of transparency and openness; both of which, are claimed to positively affect reputation (Einwiller & Will, 2001). An additional consideration for an organization with their own feedback mechanism is that they may be better able to identify the author as well as moderate the discussion. In summary, "social media technology allows organizations to communicate their information (good or bad) directly with their constituents, and in near real-time, receive feedback from the people who care the most about the issue" (Huffman & Prentice, 2008, p. 3).

The role of third-party endorsement. Identifying key factors of third-party

endorsements first requires an investigation into the contextual elements that make third-party endorsement and advocacy effective on the Internet culture. Organizations are not the only ones that have felt the effects of the decentralized authority that has evolved on the Internet (Garcia & Hart, 2007). As stakeholders search for transparency and sincerity in online communications, they often look elsewhere than organization-distributed media (Clark, 2001). The general public is fully cognizant of recent corporate deception and displays of greed, and expects some sort of spin in every organizational communication (Alsop, 2004). Generally, organizational messages are presumed to lack credibility and so audiences look to other sources that do not have a direct stake in the organization's reputation for assistance (Dholakia, Leavitt, & Sternthal, 1978). Alas, assistance may be provided by the most vocal, which includes brand fanatics, anti-corporate campaigners, and dissatisfied customers (Burns, 2006). Within a context in which 84 percent of consumers that admit to being affected by commentary online (Opinion Research Corporation, 2009), the organizational voice is not enough and most often lost, especially for those organizations that still rely on the traditional broadcast media. Furthermore, the sheer number and scale of commentary online is too vast for one organization to manage on its own (Clark, 2001).

Third-party endorsements help organizations effectively communicate with much larger circles of like-minded stakeholders (Bornemann et al., 2006). Organizations must identify and ally with third-party organizations and individuals (e.g. bloggers) to assist in providing a balanced view of a debate (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008). Studies like Dholakia et al. (1978) and Hamel et al. (2009) show that messages from outside the organization are more highly regarded and make communication more effective.

Additionally, Bornemann et al. (2006) believe that the Internet has given rise to the ‘online infomediaries’, defined as online tools that provide product and service expertise. Infomediaries such as virtual advisors and opinion communities help consumers retrieve information from the web. Lee and Park (2007) also show that it is in the best interest of the third-party feedback forum to minimize extremely negative and defamatory postings in general, as these also have a negative impression on the third-party host. In other words, there is a correlation between how diverse and varied the sources of commentary are, and the relative perception of information quality and accuracy.

Building relationships as a way to build credibility. There was a time when organizations, particularly the larger ones, spent their money on “refining and disseminating their messages, exploiting a wide range of communication channels” (Bunting & Lipski, 2000, p. 171) in order to communicate their messages effectively. Very rarely was time and energy spent on building relationships outside of media outlets and a few highly influential stakeholders. The Internet has changed this dynamic; stakeholders today seek a very different kind of interaction (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009). Today’s stakeholders expect an organization to listen and engage with them authentically (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008). Building relationships with stakeholders is a key factor that lies at the heart of the proactive nature of effective online corporate reputation management. Relationships with stakeholders create advocacy to protect the organization when it needs it the most (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009). The willingness to exchange ideas, accept criticism, and respond to customers’ needs builds credibility and demonstrates the ability to deal with any other situation that may arise (Burns, 2006). This preparedness and investment in relationships ensures the longevity of an

organization's positive reputation in a number of important ways: (a) by helping to spread the word of newly released products, (b) by providing useful feedback on products and services, (c) as an early warning system for potential problems, and (d) through advocacy when problems do arise (Alsop, 2004).

Even with the Internet, building relationships with stakeholders is a costly endeavor that takes time and offers no guarantee of success (Bernhardt et al., 2007). To build lasting relationships, organizations must create emotional bonds with stakeholders. Notwithstanding, emotional bonds are elusive and require the organization to be transparent and sincere; meaningful communication must not be twisted or spun, and must be backed by real changes mandated from senior management (Alsop, 2004).

Although organizational changes, as a key factor, must be instituted by the leadership (Griffin, 2008), in most cases it is not the CEO or senior management that is the most credible spokesperson for an organization (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009). People want to take part in conversations with others who are not commonly associated with organizational communication, such as people with values similar to theirs, and most of all, with people who offer the time and willingness to listen to them (Smith, 2007). As a key factor, employees can be an organization's most valued resource in this regard. Many times, they are the primary interface with the stakeholder (Chun, da Silva, Davies, & Roper, 2004). They are also using social media, the same tools as the stakeholders (Nancherla, 2009). These are some of the reasons why employees are best suited to build relationships with stakeholders and help to protect the organization from potentially damaging commentary.

Questions for Further Examination

The results of the data analysis are examined further and then organized in relation to three sub-questions in the research study: (1) what are the implications of online monitoring and issues management as it relates to online corporate reputation, (2) what are the drivers that make engaging a broader set of influencers vital to managing corporate reputation in an online context, and (3) why are employees best positioned to build relationships with stakeholders online, and what are the factors for consideration when utilizing employees for this purpose?

#1: What are the implications of online monitoring and issues management as it relates to online corporate reputation? Many of the key factors described above assume the stakeholders and their commentary are known or easily discoverable. Yet, it is repeatedly stated in the selected literature that the Internet has a vast diversity of content nearly impossible to aggregate. Data analysis reveals that issues management is the best approach to use to find and identify the stakeholders and commentary vital to the organization and its reputation. Regester and Larkin (2002) define issues as the gap between what stakeholders expect and the practices of the corporation. The existing strategies employed today to address this gap and to listen to stakeholders involve: (a) monitoring, (b) identification, and (c) addressing of issues found online.

To understand the stakeholder and their concerns, an organization must first find them online. Monitoring is frequently examined under the framework of issues management, and is often used by public relations and communication professionals as a crisis prevention tactic in relation to a broader crisis communication strategy. If corporations do not undertake regular monitoring of the Internet and analyze what is

found, it can become extremely difficult and costly to manage issues and stakeholders after the fact (Bernhardt et al., 2007). Bernhardt et al. report that the current distribution of tools used to monitor and analyze the Internet are: press clippings of online media (68%), search on key stakeholder websites (72%), search of corporate information in key search engines (70%), and the subscription to potential newsletters (80%); with monitoring potential newsgroups, chat rooms, and anti-websites receiving minimum attention (p. 221). However, this information is pulled from a group of organizations that actually monitor the Internet. Hill and Knowlton reported in 2004 that only 15 percent of all surveyed organizations actual do so (as cited in Alsop, 2004).

Monitoring the Internet is a requirement of online corporate reputation management. A prerequisite for monitoring is the identification of an organization's stakeholders, which means organizations must assemble enough facts to provide a rich understanding of key stakeholder segments including information elements such as political attitudes of relevant consumer groups (Bonini et al., 2009). However, identifying relevant stakeholders is not an exact science (Garcia & Hart, 2007). Debatin (as cited in Bernhardt et al., 2007) mentions one reason people online are difficult to identify is due to the degree of anonymity the Internet affords its users.

The follow-up to monitoring is to respond to feedback from consumers. It is important for organizations to collect data on a commentary in order to analyze it. Clark (2001) recommends answering five main questions to help analyze the significance of commentary:

- Who said it?
- Where is it said?

- Does it contain new information (anything relevant)?
- Am I a major player in this arena?
- Is it on a topic of rising interest? (pp. 269-270)

If commentary is perceived as harmful, then companies should try to address it directly and quickly. It is critical that this response be at the website where the commentary originated as well (Bennett & Martin, 2008).

Again, it can be very difficult to identify a potential risk posed by a particular stakeholder, commentary, and even website. Figure 1 provides a matrix, adapted from Bernhardt et al. (2007), designed to assist in the analysis of when it is appropriate to address an online commentary.

Probability of use of the Internet	HIGH	Important Stakeholder/ Issue	Key Stakeholder/ Issue
	LOW	Non-relevant Stakeholder/ Issue	Less Important Stakeholder/ Issue
		LOW	HIGH
		Impact on Organization	

Figure 1: When is it appropriate address online commentary (Adapted from Bernhardt et al., 2007)

Any commentary that is important or key to the organization must be addressed. Less important commentary is optional, organizations may choose to respond or not -

depending on time and resources. Non-relevant commentary can be ignored, but should be recorded as data for future reference.

For the most part, monitoring websites is like monitoring commentary (see Figure 2).

Extent of Reaction	MAJOR	<p>Embrace React continuously Offer to host the site Link to the site</p>	<p>Litigate Sue the site owner</p>
	MINOR	<p>Placate Find out what caused the problem and try to remedy it</p>	<p>Capture Buy URLs of the firm's name preceded by "I hate" or followed by "sucks"</p>
		CONCILLATORY	ANTAGONISTIC

Nature of Reaction

Figure 2: Strategies for handling potentially harmful websites (Berthon, Pitt, Watson, & Zinkhan, 2002)

In some cases, websites are much more difficult to identify as potentially harmful due to the variety of subjects and commentary types within a single website. According to Clark (2001), organizations should then gather as much information as possible such as the owner of the website, its position in search engines, the frequency of updates, and the number and influence of incoming links. Berthon et al. (2002) identify a group of websites, including ‘companysucks.com’, that they consider generally antagonistic. They recommend that these be monitored regularly.

Responding to critics and feedback is encouraged by the Internet culture. In fact,

more and more stakeholders are demanding a two-way interactive conversation with organizations. Nonetheless, organizations also have incentive to respond, as feedback encourages further dialog and interaction, which helps manage conflict more effectively, improves understanding for both stakeholder and organization, and addresses stakeholder concerns (Doerfel et al., 2003). Bennett and Martin (2008) show in their engagement strategy that responses should be cordial, clear, and detailed. More importantly, responses should attempt to correct misperceptions or incorrect facts first.

Although a satisfying resolution isn't always possible for every stakeholder concern, the demonstration of the attempt often times reduces stakeholder complaints and concerns. Stakeholders in general appreciate an organization that does not hide behind lawyers and purposeful obfuscation, yet is open to constructive criticisms and eager to dispel incorrect information. Moreover, a research study by Goetzinger et al. (2006) shows that in some cases the resolution is more impactful than the complaint itself, as consumers see the act of resolving a complaint as a reliable sign of responsibility and responsiveness from an organization. These compelling attributes that signal ethical treatment or consumer fairness are some of biggest contributors to favorable corporate reputation reports, according to Fearn and Page (2005).

#2: What are the drivers that make engaging a broader set of influencers vital to managing corporate reputation in an online context? Many organizations are still trying to understand how the Internet and its technologies are impacting corporate communications and business in general. The data analysis shows that most of the understanding, as well as planning, fails to incorporate the notion of velocity (speed) of the Internet and social media. For instance, Burns (2006) shows that organizations take

too long trying to assemble all the facts to present a coherent case, especially when organizational wrongdoing is circulated online and picked up by traditional media. Stakeholders expect responses and information to be provided quickly, which unfortunately allows little time for packaging (Argenti, 2006). The more recognizable an organization's reputation, the more newsworthy it becomes and thus, the faster the organization must be. For this reason, communication professionals must proactively lead the efforts to ensure their organizations are prepared, regardless if processes have been perfected or not.

One key-proactive initiative often cited that helps organizations not fully prepared, is building relationships with stakeholders. Since the Internet eliminates geographical friction, online communities and networks can form and be based on shared interests rather than physical proximity (Bornemann et al., 2006). Therefore, Einwiller and Will (2001) note that the opinion-leaders leading these online communities have a special role in the opinion formation process. Organizations must engage with a broad set of influencers and build relationships with them, across many internal departments (Clark, 2001). If possible, a dedicated team should be identified to manage the Internet and all its online communications. If that isn't possible, recommendations suggest that organizations use specialist agencies as a way to address this function.

Regardless of the approach chosen, organizations need to develop communication plans that selectively and decisively address online communities and commentary (Garcia & Hart, 2007). Organizations must learn new media skills, which are the cornerstone to building and maintaining a reputation in the current business environment (Schreiber, 2008). Take for example, how the use of social media provides an organization various

ways to capture the value output from dialog with stakeholders. This exchange is an effective way to develop influencers and advocates where enlightened stakeholders are much more likely to share with others – in some cases, by offering advice many organizations are unable to match. Also, within these shared-interest communities, search technology coupled with online dialog history increases the probability that answers to questions are provided without any organizational intervention (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009).

As a way to find third-party influencers, Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith (2008) recommend diagramming a relationship map that displays the influencer with the issues of interest or concern. Once the diagram is developed, then prioritize the action plan based on the probability of occurrence or the influencer most likely to impact the organization the greatest. Actions might be product promotion or feedback, or mitigation of reputation damage from online gossip.

As transparency is desired, placing back links on the organization's website sends visitors to these third-party influencers and provides alternative perspectives of organizations' messages (Doerfel et al., 2003). It also gives these influencers a vested interest in protecting the organization as well (Bunting & Lipski, 2000). The most important contingency to note is that finding and developing these relationships takes time, so organizations must start early (Regester, 2001). The selected literature shows that waiting to engage these influencers results in valuable time lost. In similar fashion to the concept of insurance, this investment only protects the organization when purchased beforehand, as it operates in this new communication medium full of potential risks and rewards.

#3: Why are employees best positioned to build relationships with stakeholders online, and what are the factors for consideration when utilizing employees for this purpose? It is important to note the vastness of the Internet and the types of potential benefits and pitfalls that can occur in relation to online corporate reputation management. For example, Solis (2009) on TechCrunch reports that there are at least 133 million blogs on the Internet. A combined force of a broad set of influencers and a fully operational communications department may still not be enough to manage this environment. In this context, employees are key components of the management mix.

Data analysis reveals two reasons why employees are best suited to help manage corporate reputation online. From the perspective of organizational strategy, employees are often using social media and thus may already be able to effectively communicate online (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009). Any employee with access to the Internet is a potential publisher or corporate communications specialist, as he or she ostensibly has the rudimentary expertise required to build relationships with stakeholders (Argenti, 2006). Moreover, employees have the added advantage to engage with other stakeholders both as an employee and as an average citizen, with similar viewpoints. This dual perspective may enable them to identify and reverse negative opinions encountered on the Internet (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008).

From the perspective of risk management, employees must also be viewed as dangers when it comes to engaging and building relationships with stakeholders. As noted by Nancherla (2009), many employees are using social media without consideration of the organizations for which they work. For instance, they may openly vent their frustrations and activities, which can include inappropriate photos and

comments, that shed a negative light on the organizations in which they work. Bennett and Martin (2008) demonstrate how the accessibility and easy use of the Internet have resulted not only in an increase in the number of customer complaints, but also in employee grievances about a company's products and practices. This situation can become problematic when content is then stored and left searchable on the Internet. On top of that, employees have greater access to sensitive material. Coupled with an increasing comfort level and the lack of privacy online, employees are becoming the greatest threat to organizational reputation (Ihator, 2001). Intentional or not, employees have access to private memos and compromising information on the organization, and may, without consideration or inadvertently, post that information as part of their personal social network sites like Facebook and Bebo. On a more nefarious note, employees are able to go directly to the source of information and broadcast it before an organization can properly understand the situation and package it in a corporate message. Communication channels include not just social media, but also emails, which are very easily spread to the outside world. As a result, what was initially intended for internal audiences can be viewed in the virtual space, where anyone who sees it is able to post it to their blogs or social networking pages (Argenti, 2006).

As representatives of an organization, employees should receive careful consideration from senior managers, who would be wise not to ignore the dangers presented by unparalleled access the Internet allows. Nancherla (2009) notes that more than half of executives believe that social media presents a potential communications hazard; yet less than ten percent actually discuss it in the boardroom. "Central to the success of peer media initiatives are corporate policies that recognize that employees will

use their voices, encourage them to do so but provide them with clear guidelines and a structure to do so” (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008, p. 148). Gorry and Westbrook (2009) firmly believe that empowering and training employees is the key to responsible behavior and the essence of conducting conversations with stakeholders successfully. They note, “With only modest supervision by the company’s HR, Legal or Corporate Communications departments, employees can develop guidelines for use of Web 2.0 tools, particularly social networks and individual blogs. With support from senior managers, effective self-governance will emerge” (p. 199).

Policies must be fair-minded, realistic, and clearly articulated to employees. Regardless whether an organization is host to their own social media or is reaching out in nonaffiliated social media, employees must understand what the organization expects of them, or the lines between employee views and the organization views may get blurred (Garcia & Hart, 2007). For instance, with the inherent anonymity of the Internet, it is tempting to not declare your identity and influence others for the gain of the organization. It is very enticing as the possibility of discovery is low and the rewards high. However, if stakeholders do find out that they have been misled, there can be a huge backlash where the deception is quickly distributed (Einwiller & Will, 2001). Organizations must mandate that whoever is speaking on their behalf clearly identify themselves and their affiliations to ensure transparency and trustworthiness of their communications.

In the end, it is the responsibility of the leadership of an organization to instill that the management of corporate reputation is the shared responsibility of each and every employee (Griffin, 2008). Corporate reputation must be an integral part of the organization’s culture and core values. Gorry and Westbrook (2009) believe that senior

managers must embrace the cultural demands and become more open to their stakeholders by bringing down the barriers between employees and the stakeholders.

And although senior management may become weary of this greater openness, where attacks from stakeholders, employees, and other opposition seem more likely, in the long run, greater openness gives organizations strengthened loyalty from stakeholders as well as employees, which ultimately translates into enhanced market performance.

Conclusions

The purpose of this literature review is to examine existing online corporate reputation management initiatives in order to identify key factors that influence how stakeholders perceive the organization. The conclusion attempts to present the synthesized results from the Review of Literature that sought to answer the main research question: What are the key factors for consideration, as identified in selected online corporate reputation management initiatives, for cultivating and protecting corporate reputation online?

The goal of this section is to present an overview of a set of three guiding principles for online corporate reputation management. Guiding principles are intended to give corporate communication managers and public relation professionals a governing framework for the management of online corporate reputation that allows organizations to meet potential threats to credibility and develop reputation by proactively engaging the Internet culture. Full details are presented in the Review of Literature section of this study.

Principle #1: Demonstrate Sincerity and Respect as the Essence of All Exchanges

With the expected growth and increase in Internet use over the next decade, use of two-way dialog among stakeholders provides organizations with new tactical options for building and protecting corporate reputation online. As a guiding principle, successful online corporate reputation management requires a display of sincerity and respect, as the essence of engaging stakeholders. The Internet has given dissatisfied stakeholders, including disgruntled employees, a voice. A defensive reaction or a pronouncement

without an option for dialog simply fuels further discontent. Bennett and Martin (2008) find that an overwhelming number of organizations wrongly believe that complaining employees and consumers care only about having their grievances resolved, and not about being treated with respect. In the same analysis, a concession or throwing money at an aggrieved stakeholder is not as effective in resolving a conflict. The best way to respond is to make sure that the process used in reaching any resolution is fair. Organizations therefore should not only provide an apology, but an explanation of the company's actions, and attend to other relatively inexpensive procedural and interactional components of the resulting decision.

Principle #2: Use a Multi-Step Approach for the Most Effective Online Reputation Management Initiatives

Reputation management online is a full-time job, governed with a constant vigilance (Alsop, 2004). As a guiding principle, to be successful in online corporate reputation management, organizations should take a multi-step approach to online communications initiatives (Bernhardt et al., 2007). This means that the more features, characterized by Bunting and Lipski (2000), that are incorporated into an online corporate reputation management initiative, the greater likelihood of success.

Organizations must assume a holistic view of online stakeholders by taking into consideration the social networks within which they operate, the impact of third party knowledge on their trusting beliefs about the organization online, and an understanding of how they are all interdependent of each other (Einwiller & Will, 2001). An example, Gorry and Westbrook (2009) show how without this knowledge of interdependence, organizational blogs and other online communication may miss the essence of the

problem and only address symptoms. Social media used for direct communications alone is not effective, but needs to be coupled with building relationships, as third parties heavily influence online communication.

Principle #3: Integrate the Corporate Communications Function Within the Core of the Organization

Organizations need to recognize the evolution of the business environment and restructure their organizations to meet the communications challenges the Internet culture brings. As a guiding principle, successful online corporate reputation management requires integration of the corporate communication function into core operations that manage the entire organization. For example, traditional departmental lines between marketing, advertising, and public relations are becoming blurred. In the online environment, as noted by Schreiber (2008), “As marketing looks for new ways to reach customers, they may well inadvertently do damage to the corporate reputation” (p. 12). By developing a more integrated corporate communications function throughout the organization, managers are more likely to ensure that the organization acts reputably, as a whole. There are additional factors that support the idea to develop a highly-integrated function: (a) an increasing regulatory environment, (b) sophisticated and converging stakeholders, (c) organizational growth with increasing complexity, and (d) the Internet and its wide-ranging technologies (Argenti, 2006).

Communications function integration is also required for improved coordination, and oversight of, employees. Corporate communications departments must work with senior managers across the organization to understand and govern employee communications with stakeholders. Policies and guidelines developed by the corporate

communications department should be utilized by senior management to determine what is problematic, and how to remedy the issue as it relates to the larger communications strategy (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009).

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Appendix A
Data Analysis - Coding Results

Citation / Related Concepts	Online reputation Mgmt	Issues Mgmt	Corp. Web Presence	Online Comm. Techniques	Stakehol der Mgmt	Transp arency/ Sincerit y	Social Media
Alsop, 2004	x	X	x	x	x	x	x
<i>Organization's Core Values</i>		X			x	x	
<i>Corporate Social Responsibility</i>				x			
<i>Emotional Bonds</i>						x	
<i>Employees As Reps</i>	x				x	x	x
Bennett & Martin, 2008	x	X	x	x	x	x	x
<i>Do Nothing Approach is common</i>				x			
<i>Legal or Heavy-handed Approach Fails</i>				x			
<i>Employees as Reps</i>				x		x	x
<i>Emotional Bonds</i>	x			x		x	
<i>Internet's Velocity</i>	x	X					
<i>Inoculation Strategy</i>	x	x				x	
Bernhardt et al., 2007		x		x	x		x
<i>Anonymity Online</i>					x		
<i>Multi-step Approach</i>							
<i>Inoculation Strategy</i>							x
Bonini et al., 2009		x	x		x	x	
<i>Multi-step Approach</i>							
<i>Increased two-dialogue</i>					x		
Bunting & Lipski, 2000	x		x	x	x	x	x
<i>Low-key Approach</i>					x		
Burns, 2006	x	x	x	x	x		x
<i>Legal or Heavy-handed Approach still viable</i>				x			
<i>Multi-step approach</i>	x						
<i>Employees as Reps</i>				x			
<i>Collaborate w/ Stakeholders</i>		x					
Clark, 2001	x	x	x	x		x	x
<i>Do Nothing could be an option</i>				x			
<i>Internet's Velocity</i>	x	x					
<i>Back Links</i>			x				
<i>Legal or Heavy-handed Approach Fails</i>				x			
<i>Content Analysis</i>		x					

<i>Search Engine and Directory Presence</i>	x			x			
Einwiller & Will, 2001	x	x	x			x	x
<i>Opinion-leaders role in opinion formation</i>	x						
<i>Online Community</i>			x				
Garcia & Hart, 2007		x		x		x	x
<i>Do nothing Approach is harmful</i>				x			
<i>Influencers</i>		x					
<i>Emotional Bonds</i>					x		
<i>Employees as Reps</i>						x	x
<i>Internet's Velocity</i>				x			
Gorry & Westbrook, 2009	x	x		x		x	x
<i>Organization's Core Values</i>	x				x	x	
<i>Employees as Reps</i>	x	x			x	x	x
<i>Collaboration w/Stakeholders</i>	x				x		
<i>Multi-step Approach</i>	x						
<i>Permeable Organization</i>	x					x	
Griffin, 2008		x	x	x		x	x
<i>Organization's Core Values</i>				x	x	x	
<i>Employees as Reps</i>		x		x			
<i>Corporate Social Responsibility</i>				x			
Lee & Park, 2007	x	x					x
<i>Single Negative Comment Impacts Reputation</i>	x						
<i>Influencers</i>				x			
Schreiber, 2008		x					x
<i>Employees as Reps</i>				x			x
<i>Corporate Social Responsibility</i>	x						
<i>Search Engine Presence</i>		x					
<i>Organization's Core Values</i>	x					x	
<i>Collaborate w/ Stakeholders</i>				x	x		