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Editor's Essay

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This semester I am teaching a graduate level research methods course. Each week as my students and I review the material and talk through the various methods, I am reminded of the importance of building a meaningful body of knowledge through an assortment of methodologies. Quantitative methods give us the ability to generalize our work and to test hypotheses through standardized and scientific methods. The logic of measurement and quantification helps us to develop theory deductively by proposing and testing explanations based on existing and verified knowledge (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019).

In contrast, qualitative methods let us explore topics inductively (Lindlof &Taylor, 2019). Qualitative methods suggest we should study communication as a natural occurrence and the researcher should go where the action is and seek to be part of it (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Research based in qualitative methods allows researchers to develop new concepts or revise existing ones in unexpected says (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Qualitative methods also give participants the ability to speak for themselves and let researchers preserve those words and perspectives without putting them through a lens of our own making. All methodologies and perspectives are necessary and vital to growing public interest communications, and I believe this issue is a showcase of different methods and approaches to research which add to our emerging body of knowledge.

From a quantitative approach, Kim, Pardon, and Overton use content analysis to examine how e-cigarette companies engage with potential customers on Twitter and the implications of such engagement on public interest communications. Li's work takes an experimental design approach and investigates how narrative perspective interacts with valence of intergroup interaction depiction in transgender-related media content to redirect people's attitudes toward transgender people, transportation, and elevation responses. This study contributes to a better

theoretical and empirical understanding of intergroup communication strategies in public interest communications.

The other articles in this issue bring qualitative methods to the table. Morton and Shelton applied a qualitative content analysis to explore the frames associated with child adoption and found that frames about humanity were absent from the coverage of the topic. Through focus group and in-depth interviewing, Pressgrove, Janoske, and Madden explored the connection among narrative, professional identity, and reputation management among public school teachers. Their work suggests a reputation crisis has implications upon the United States' teacher shortage. Demetrious employs discourse analysis to examine Twitter engagement around the 2014 Peabody Energy global public relations campaign Advanced Energy for Life trope "clean coal" in Australia. Her research contributes to a greater understanding of the reach, influence, and limitations of Twitter-based public debate. Stokes explores how PETA uses "on the ground" direct action strategies as public interest communications. For PIC scholars, these strategies are relevant, as direct action provides communicators with experiential ways to persuade stakeholders of new perspectives to push for social change. Finally, Woods examines the process used by activist organizations to pressure target corporations into altering practices and policies that they perceive to be problematic. Using a qualitative approach, her study draws from interviews which are supplemented by organizational documents and news articles. Based on the findings, she introduces the Activist Corporate Campaign Model for use in describing the phases of activists' campaigns.

As always, my work as journal editor could not be complete without the help of my reviewers. Thank you to Shelley Aylesworth-Spink, Pam Bourland-Davis, Myoung-Gi Chon, Kristin Demetrious, Myleea Hill, Christie Kleinmann, Brooke McKeever, Matt Ragas, Amber Smallwood, Katie Stansberry, and Xiaochen Zhang for their guidance and help to bring the best research to our readers.

Lindlof, T. R. and Taylor, B. C. (2019). *Qualitative communication research methods*, 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Changing the Story: Implications of Narrative on Teacher Identity

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Article Information	Abstract
	This study takes a qualitative approach to understanding the connections among narrative, professional identity, and reputation management in public education. Through 15 interviews and five focus groups with high-achieving teachers and administrators, researchers explored the narratives these educators share to understand and improve the story of the teaching profession. Central to the findings are societal, organizational, and community-level factors that have led to a reputation crisis for the profession of teaching and thus contribute to the national teacher shortage. Ultimately, this study points to the notion that a shift in the perception of the value of teaching and teachers can be affected when narratives are understood and the principles of reputation management are applied. Communication interventions that provide a path forward are discussed.

Introduction

For decades, economic research has demonstrated the significant role of primary and secondary education both in terms of private earning potential and economic growth (e.g., Becker, 1964; Denison, 1962; Ozturk, 2001; Psacharopoulos & Schultz, 1984). Of central importance to these societal and economic outputs are classroom educators. Indeed, as some scholars have argued, the success of public education in the United States depends on quality elementary and secondary education teachers (Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006).

As a subsumptive profession, teaching provides the foundation for every occupation, vocation, and career. Further demonstrating the important role of teachers, the National Bureau of Economic Research has found that effective teachers lead to not only lower dropout rates, but also other key quality of life indicators including reduced risk of teen pregnancy, increased lifetime earnings, and improved career satisfaction (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011).

Despite the importance of the profession, recruitment and retention strategies have fallen short. Each year fewer high school students are pursuing education majors (American College Testing [ACT], 2015) and a decreasing number of college students pursue teaching careers (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Further, reports indicate that attrition rates of educators in their first four years of teaching are between 17 and 20 percent (Brown, 2015). This attrition has led to a shortage so dramatic that in some states classroom educators are still studying for their credentials or are training in the classroom (Rich, 2015). This shortage has been attributed to reasons as disparate as an improving economy and erosion of teaching as a stable career (Westervelt, 2015), concentration on standardized tests and related teacher evaluations focused on these test scores (Walker, 2014), and outside reforms creating stress within the profession (Moeny, 2015).

To address these issues, Teach and the Ad Council launched a public service advertising (PSA) campaign, which seeks to redefine teaching as a top career choice for talented students (Ad Council, 2013), and campaigns such as Teach Like Me use social media as a channel to redefine and professionalize the teaching profession (Sheehan, 2017). Inspired by campaigns such as these, this study empirically explores the teacher shortage issue through the lens of narrative and reputation management. First, the authors explore the narratives surrounding education as a mechanism for understanding the professional identity of teachers. Then, the authors employ reputation management to better understand how the narrative surrounding the profession might be enhanced. The findings help chart a path forward to enriched teacher identity as well as improved educator recruitment and retention.

Literature review

The concept of narrative has been defined differently by a multitude of scholars (e.g., Abbott, 2002; Foss, 1996; Onega & Landa, 1996; Prince, 1982; Scholes, 1981). Two common themes in many definitions include narrative as representation and as a sequence of events. However, Rudrum (2005) challenged these commonly held views of narrative as limiting and that "such classifications as 'narrative' and 'non-narrative' are at best provisional, inconsistent, and not mutually exclusive" (p. 200). Therefore, rather than offering a strict definition of narrative for this study, we explore the narrative paradigm and functions of narrative.

One of the most prominent understandings of narrative in communication is Fisher's (1984) narrative paradigm, which

> insists that human communication should be viewed as historical as well as situational, as
> stories competing with other stories constituted by good reasons, as being rational when

they satisfy the demands of narrative probability and narrative fidelity, and as inevitably moral inducement." (p. 2)

To understand the narrative paradigm it is important to acknowledge Fisher's notion of narrative rationality, which stands in contrast to traditional models of rationality relying on formal logic. Fisher's narrative rationality relies on narrative probability, which is a story's coherence and integrity, and narrative fidelity, which deals with how well a narrative resonates with its recipients so that they can align a given narrative with other stories they have known to be true and meaningful (Fisher, 1987). Tensions arise when larger societal narratives do not fit with an individual's lived experiences (Mumby, 1987), which is a violation of narrative fidelity.

Narratives have the ability to function both instrumentally and constitutively. They function instrumentally when responding to exigencies and manifesting arguments and persuasive appeals (Jasinski, 2001). For example, there has been much research in public relations and marketing about the instrumental use of narrative in the form of storytelling to achieve organizational goals (e.g., Gill, 2015; Papadatos, 2006; Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008). Of greater importance to this study, though, is the constitutive function of narrative that helps shape how "a community understands its world and when they offer inducements to create, recreate, or transform the social world" (Jasinski, 2001, p. 393). In this way, narratives ultimately implicate an ideology. The constitutive function of narrative is thus on a continuum with one end reinforcing the status quo and the other end challenging and subverting dominant ideological beliefs (Jasinski, 2001). Narratives can help shape individual identity as well as a community's identity and culture, even within an occupational setting. In the next section, we explore narrative and the development of a professional identity.

Narrative and professional identity

Narrative finds utility across a broad range of disciplines because of its ability to bind together the facts of our experience and organize our existence, establishing relationships between or among things over time (Fisher, 1987; Jasinski, 2001). Within public relations, Heath (2009) expanded upon this idea by writing that "narratives voice expectations regarding how organizations should act toward one another and people of society" (p. 40). Importantly, narratives also voice expectations regarding professional identities for groups such as teachers, because of their ability to reify societal values and beliefs.

Professional identity is defined as one's professional self-concept based on attitudes, beliefs, values, experiences, and motives (Ibarra, 1999; Schein, 1978). An important aspect of developing a professional self-concept comes from the socialization process and discourses provided surrounding the meanings associated with the profession—a core function of narrative (Fine, 1996; Hall, 1987). Such narrative identities are "the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life" (McAdams, 2011, p. 99). Relatedly, because gender identity is a cornerstone of this kind of self-conceptualization (McGowen & Hart, 1990), the narratives surrounding who can be a teacher, what a teacher does,

and leadership opportunities within school districts are often highly gendered (Dillabough, 1999). For example, women make up 76 percent of teachers and 52 percent of principals but account for less than a quarter of superintendents nationwide (Superville, 2016).

The narrative surrounding teachers often describes the profession as a calling and something people were born to do (Alsup, 2006; Chong & Low, 2009). This focus on relational and emotional reasons for joining the teaching profession often creates environments where teachers are supposed to be self-sacrificial at all times (McGowen & Hart, 1990). Professions that include a focus on caring for others, such as social work, nursing, and teaching can fall into the categorization of dirty work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Hughes, 1951). Dirty work has been defined as tasks that are "physically, socially or morally" tainted (Hughes, 1958, p. 122). Physical taint includes positions such as garbage collectors and funeral directors. Social taint occurs in positions that involve contact with stigmatized groups (e.g., prison guard, social worker) or subservient positions (e.g., maid, customer complaints). Positions such as exotic dancers or tabloid reporters are most often affiliated with moral taint. Importantly, dirtiness here is a social construction; it is not inherent in the work or the workers. We argue that teaching can be included within the class of dirty work because of its social taint as a subservient position. Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) noted that dirty work may be regarded as noble, but people "generally remain psychologically and behaviorally distanced from that work and those who do it, glad that it is someone else" (p. 416), which can be seen within reactions and responses to the teaching profession.

What is interesting, and possibly counterintuitive, about dirty work is that the stigmas associated with it often foster strong occupational and workplace cultures (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). In fact, an abundance of research has found those who perform dirty work retain high occupational self-esteem and pride (e.g., Emerson & Pollner, 1976; McIntyre, 1987; Thompson, 1991). Because of this dynamic, strong occupational group cultures often exist. However, there are inhibitors to this group formation in dirty work professions, which include "physical isolation, high turnover, and interpersonal competition for rewards" (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). The teaching profession includes each of these inhibitors to a strong group formation, seen through the prevalent myth that individual teachers can and should transform the educational system through "sheer will, dedication, and selflessness" (Steudeman, 2014, p. 477). However, this focus on individual identity as an educator may be precluding exploration into how organizations work to perpetuate this heroic teacher ideal (Steudeman, 2014), which ultimately scapegoats individual teachers and does not reflect on organizational and societal impacts on teacher success or failure.

Past research on organizations has uncovered that organizations are essentially narrative and that organizations "work hard to enact the persona that they are in charge of their destinies and aware of the interests and concerns of the other characters...in the narrative" (Heath, 1997, p. 317). Changing the organizational and societal narratives around teaching may help to address issues of burnout and retention faced in the teaching profession.

Furthermore, because of teacher shortages around the country, teachers are not only being recruited from university-based teacher education programs but also from other fields as career changers (Castro & Bauml, 2009). This recruiting of career changers is because graduates from teacher education programs often choose not to teach in high-demand fields (such as math and science) or in rural or urban school districts (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ng, 2003; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Research indicates that key motivating factors to consider teaching as a second career include memories of school and individual teachers, changing perspectives on life (such as having children), wanting to use specialized subject knowledge, and dissatisfaction with current careers, among others (Priyadharshini & Robinson-Pant, 2003). Given this diverse pool of prospective candidates, understanding the narratives surrounding the profession of teaching is key for recruitment efforts and tapping into why teaching is not always viewed as a viable career option.

Importantly, though, narratives are not static, meaning there is an opportunity for public relations to assist organizations' narrative enactments (Heath, 1994; Weick, 1987). Narrative is subject to temporality, or the idea that its meaning and adaptation will likely change over time (Paulus, Woodside, & Ziegler, 2007). Thus, it is important to provide individuals the opportunity to "construct a continuous self" where the past and present are connected and lead toward a particular future (Jarvinen, 2004, p. 57).

In sum, the importance of understanding the narratives surrounding the field of education cannot be understated. As Mumby (1987) wrote, "Because of their embeddedness in the everyday practice of organizations, narratives are not easily perceived as legitimating devices—they often articulate an organizational reality that is accepted as 'the natural order of things'" (pp. 113-114). It is possible that these narratives can help explain why many teachers leave the field despite feeling they are called to the profession, while others never consider the profession a possible career path despite myriad motivations to do so. Thus, to better understand the narrative surrounding the profession of teaching, the following research question is advanced:

RQ1: How, if at all, do narratives surrounding the profession of education influence teachers' professional identity?

Reputation management

Embedded narratives create and reinforce meanings both inside and outside of an organization (Marshak, Keenoy, Oswick, & Grant, 2000). Therefore, changing negative perceptions of the teaching profession requires reputation management both inside of the profession (for retention efforts) and outside of the profession (for recruitment efforts). An effective change strategy must involve the ability to determine important embedded narratives that need to be addressed, mitigated, modified, or linked to alternative narratives (Marshak et al., 2000).

Although reputation management has been studied primarily within a corporate context (e.g., Campbell, Herman, & Noble, 2006; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Murray & White, 2005),

reputation is an intangible asset affecting all types of organizations—including schools and school districts. Within the context of communication, reputation has been studied predominantly within the realm of organizational crises (e.g., Coombs, 2007; Kim & Sung, 2014; Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Sisco, 2012). However, some scholars have explored reputation in other contexts such as a country's reputation (Yang, Shin, Lee, & Wrigley, 2008). If viewing the teacher shortages across the country as a crisis, reputation management becomes an appropriate framework within which to understand efforts to change narratives of the teaching profession.

To begin to understand the role of reputation management in the context of teacher recruitment and retention, it is important to first understand the ways in which reputation has been defined and measured. In a corporate communication context, reputation has been defined as a constituencies' image of a company built up over time (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004, p. 369), or "a stakeholder's overall evaluation of a company over time" (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001, p. 25). Although some scholars question if reputation can be managed and how important reputation is for accomplishing organizational goals (Hutton, Goodman, Alexander, & Genest, 2001), others posit that reputation is central to building and sustaining market share and relationships with important publics (e.g., Black, Carnes, & Richardson, 2000; Kitchen & Laurence, 2003; Roberts & Dowling, 2002; Srivastava, McInish, Woods, & Capraro, 1997).

Although the factors involved in reputation management have evolved over time, myriad central defining elements remain. For instance, drawing attention to the importance of the interplay between internal and external reputation management, Murray and White (2005) pointed out that strong communication from organizational leaders and effective feedback loops for stakeholders are essential. Other research has highlighted factors such as recognizing the importance of key internal and external stakeholder audiences, as well as strategic communications management for effective reputation management (Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Gardberg & Fombrun, 2002a; Kiousis, Popescu, & Mitrook, 2007; Yang, 2007). In recent years, scholars interested in assessing stakeholder perceptions of relationship management have focused on six attributes of reputation including vision and leadership, social responsibility, emotional appeal, product and services, workplace environment, and financial performance (Gardberg & Fombrun, 2002b; Lee & Park 2013).

Both in terms of internal and external reputation management, the teaching field faces challenges. First, internal reputation management begins with those working within the organization to ensure that employees serve as key ambassadors (Cravens & Oliver, 2006). Next, for those outside of the profession, reputation management is central to recruitment opportunities. For states struggling with teaching shortages, a "resistance to change is often cited as a reason for difficulties in implementing and the failure of change initiatives" (Erwin & Garman, 2010, p. 39) and that the relationship to change agents, rather than the issue, is what drives the acceptance of change (Battilana & Casciaro, 2013). Externally, media narratives that teachers are underpaid, underappreciated, and overworked (Falla, 2013) negatively impact the reputation of the teaching profession. Further, successful recruitment requires effective communication to potential teachers, although the role of strategic communication is often

overlooked by the recruiters. Organizations such as the National School Public Relations Association exist to promote "comprehensive two-way communications processes involving both internal and external publics" ("Why School Public Relations?," n.d., para. 2), and encourage all school districts to hire a professional communicator to do so. Tough budget conditions may prevent a specialized public relations professional within many school districts. In those cases, school leaders (such as principals, administrators, and respected teachers) can play an important role in reputation management for the profession (Kowalski, 2011).

To better understand the potential role of reputation management in shifting perceptions of the teaching profession, the following research question is posed. It is anticipated that the findings will aid school and district level leaders to focus their efforts and affect positive change both internally and externally.

RQ2: How, if at all, can improving the fit between the societal teaching narrative and teacher's lived experiences help improve the reputation of the profession?

Method

Data collection & analysis

Data were collected through a combination of focus groups and interviews to discover how teachers and members of the education community develop personal narratives and/or interact with and understand organizational and societal narratives about teaching and the teaching profession. Focus groups allowed for narratives to build upon and off of one another; interviews allowed for in-depth understanding and processing of one person's narrative experience (Berg, 2009). Focus groups took place in the state where the research was based; interviews were with individuals from different states in a variety of regions around the country (see Table 1). Information was triangulated across data sources. Multiple researchers read and analyzed the same transcripts and found that information found in the focus groups also was reflected in the interview responses (Patton, 2002). Overall, five focus groups and 15 interviews were conducted, with 21 men and 28 women participating. Participants included 23 teachers (most of whom had achieved Teacher of the Year[1] status in their specific state), eight superintendents, six principals, four union and political leaders, and eight business/PTA leaders and leadership from universities with master's programs in teaching. The research received IRB approval before beginning.

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[1] Teacher of the Year is a prestigious national honor that focuses on excellence in teaching in the United States.

Table 1. States and regions where research was conducted

Regional Division	States Included in Study
South Atlantic	Georgia, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia
East North Central	Michigan
East South Central	Kentucky, Tennessee
Pacific West	California
West South Central	Texas
Western Mountain	Arizona, Idaho
West North Central	Iowa, Nebraska

Focus groups

In June 2016, five focus groups were conducted, one with each of the following groups: union and political leaders and the business community; leadership from universities with colleges offering master's programs in teaching; teachers; principals; and superintendents. Participants were identified as experts on the public school system by Department of Education leadership in the state where the research was being conducted. The size of these groups ranged from four to nine participants.

Each focus group was conducted by an experienced moderator familiar with the topic who used a semi-structured guide. To better understand the narrative that educators use to describe themselves and the profession, questions included motivators and deterrents for entering the profession of teaching, reasons for low retention rates, effective recruitment and retention initiatives, as well as insight on common school-, district- and state-based retention programs such as teacher appreciation, evaluation, and mentorship. Each focus group lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was recorded and fully transcribed.

In-depth interviews

From July to September 2016, 15 in-depth interviews were conducted by phone with education stakeholders in geographically dispersed states. Participants were selected because they represented their state as a State Teacher of the Year and, therefore, were thought to be experts and familiar with crafting and negotiating teacher identity (Beabout & Carr-Chellman, 2007). These individuals, because of their top-teacher status, served as role models for their colleagues, advocates for their communities, and leaders in education in the state where they reside. Each individual was contacted by telephone or email with a request to participate in this research. Interviews were conducted by a graduate student who had been trained by the researchers and was familiar with the topics and ideas being discussed.

In-depth interviews followed a semi-structured protocol with items mirroring those asked during the focus groups. Based on initial focus group analysis, additional questions were

included to understand the relationship between teachers and administrators in decision making as well as teacher leadership. These questions shed additional light on the role of communication in understanding narrative surrounding the profession of teaching. The interviews each proceeded with the understanding that as topics emerged they would be explored and exhausted. Interviews lasted an average of 40 to 60 minutes. Each interview was recorded and transcribed.

Analysis

Content analysis strategies spearheaded by Corbin and Strauss (2008) were utilized, as the discussion of narrative fits well within their belief that knowledge is socially constructed and the importance of the narrative that occurs as knowledge is passed among persons (Kvale, 1995). Open coding was completed by the team of researchers with frequent meetings to discuss progress, ideas, and to compare new or emergent themes and to determine consistency across the large number of data sources (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These ongoing meetings, discussion, and collaboration on codes throughout the coding process were used as the test of intercoder reliability.

Reflexivity

While none of the researchers is a K-12 educator, the researchers are college professors, familiar with the rhythms and unique predicaments of being in charge of a classroom. This experience did come into play when reading through the transcripts and engaging in coding and discussion. Personal experiences and identification with the narratives being told allowed the researchers to delve deeper into the information being presented and to be more familiar and in tune with how certain connections or findings might be relevant and worth discussing.

Findings

To protect the respondents' identities, while also demonstrating similarities in responses across geography, the authors only identify participants by the U.S. Census Bureau's region where they reside.

RQ1: How, if at all, do narratives surrounding the profession of education influence teachers' professional identity?

In response to the first research question, which explores the implications of how narratives surround teacher identity, themes included *dirty work,* the view of the *education system as a*

complete failure, a *culture of fear*, *positive experiences in the classroom*, and *teaching as a calling*.

Dirty work

The narratives surrounding the profession of education are often negative, particularly as they relate to what it takes to do the job of teaching. As one focus group participant said, "I mean, the rhetoric that's out there is just like anybody can do this job, and we don't need educators in the classroom. We just need educated people in the classroom, which is different." This lack of discussion of teaching as a skilled profession, in comparison to fields such as medicine or law, contributes to this negative narrative of what it takes to be a teacher. As one educator from the West North Central region said, "I think part of it is an image problem, right? I think teaching is under professionalized and overly martyrized."

The specific skills required to be an effective educator are often downplayed. The following exchange between two teachers during a focus group gets at this experience:

PARTICIPANT A: It seems though that our legislature has a little bit too much power when it comes to education. These are just everyday people from all sorts of the walks of life without a lot of background in the area.

PARTICIPANT B: But they were all students. That's their answer. "We've been in a classroom."

Other interview respondents lamented the common narrative that "teachers only work until 3 and they get the summer off," or that students who could "do anything" are encouraged away from the profession, "like teaching is beneath you because you're so smart." As one educator from the Western Mountain region stated, "What the media are doing to the teaching profession, I don't know anyone who would want to become a teacher the way they treat us. It's like we are gutter garbage."

Education system as a complete failure

In addition to the narratives that devalue teachers, participants in the focus group taking place in the South Atlantic indicated media promote a "belief that our education system is a complete failure." Similarly, another teacher said, "I think the society as a whole is kind of [negative], and the media have beat up on education so much that it just becomes less and less attractive to go into an occupation that everybody's complaining [about]." Because these media messages are being consumed by parents and other members of the community, as one educator said, "When you talk to parents about the education system in the United States, the data show that most people think that the education system in the United States is broken."

Culture of fear

Because of this narrative of the education system as broken, education remains a highly politicized issue. Teachers saw this as "an easy thing for political candidates to beat up on, how I'm going to be the education [candidate]—I'm going to fix education, but it, you know, just seems to turn." Consequently, the education system becomes focused on accountability and punishing teachers for the failures of students. As one teacher said, there is a "culture of fear for teachers and this culture of fear for administrators at the district and school level." In addition to this culture of fear created, content standards and education policies are in continual flux because of political expediency. Rather than supporting this culture of changing expectations for teachers, "We should be taking the content standards and helping teachers learn how to develop lessons based on the new standards, as opposed to let's just keep changing the standards."

This narrative of teaching as a rigid and test-driven environment may be driving away "some super creative and intelligent people [who] don't want to work in that sort of environment." This rigidity leads to feelings of disempowerment as "the teacher's creativity and ability to make instructional decisions is hampered because teachers are compelled to, sort of, teach to the test because they're believed to increase test results."

Positive experiences in the classroom

Although some of the broader societal narratives were seen as negative, often the narrative identities that teachers had for themselves were positive because they were formed through the educational experiences that they had. As one educator noted, a strong motivator to becoming a teacher "is having a great classroom experience. Having great teachers who do have that passion."

This episodic rather than thematic framing of the education narrative created more opportunities for teacher empowerment. As one educator said:

I never saw the whole education picture, but, see, there are people who see the whole picture because they're creating it and framing it, but as an educator, I was just seeing a small piece, and I said, what would happen if every educator got to know what I just saw and heard.

Other educators recognized the disconnect between the larger media narrative of education and their personal experiences in the classroom. As one teacher said, "Sometimes the news wants to gravitate toward negative stories about what's going on in our schools. So, we try to share the positive things that are going on in the classroom to help with the image of the profession."

Teaching as a calling

For many educators, the narrative existed that they were born to teach, with an accompanying innate desire or ability. An educator from the South Atlantic said most teachers "see education as a calling," where although it might be "hard to quantify what kind of impact that has. . . we want people to feel valued and feel like their hard work makes a difference." Because of that calling, some of the teachers were willing to overlook some of the deterrents they faced—one West Mountain teacher noted that "for me, teaching's a calling, and if teaching is a calling for you, then you will go wherever you're called." Another from the South Atlantic said that "I am a

teacher because it is a calling. I am here because I love what I do. I'm not here for the money." In many ways, these narratives focus on the fulfillment offered from the job as its own form of currency rather than material benefits. As another teacher said, "I have never felt more fulfilled in my life, and, I mean—and I love what I'm doing, and I see the impact every day in my students."

RQ2: How, if at all, can improving the fit between the societal teaching narrative and teachers' lived experiences help improve the reputation of the profession?

In response to the second research question, four factors emerged related to creating an environment within and surrounding educational institutions that can provide a foundation for reputation management to take place. These factors were *shared vision*, *collaborative work culture, sense of community,* and *union/political involvement.*

Shared vision

Reputation offers a way of building narrative through a shared vision among the diverse publics involved in education—teachers and administrators, but also parents and the political and union members who were included in this research. One participant explained that "what teachers want also is to have a better voice in making decisions," to help improve the reputation of their field to others. Additionally, as one teacher in the South Atlantic articulated, they wanted to know if their organizations were "emotionally safe place[s] to be, you know, can you really speak your mind, do you really feel like you're contributing, and I think that's a big part of making a safe working environment where people are committed, people are engaged." Contributing to a shared vision, which includes feeling listened to, empowers teachers to see the vision they helped develop come to fruition.

Another way to see vision interact with reputation is by giving teachers direct access to decision-making bodies. One teacher in a South Atlantic state discussed their school improvement team, which consisted of two principals, eight teachers, and four parents. This body was important because "pretty much most major decisions about our school have to go through the school improvement team. . . so that's another area where teachers have an ability to have a say." These sorts of teams can be ways to improve the relationships with important publics, such as parents, and allow all individuals to feel heard and respected.

The idea of "teacher leaders" also emerged across interviews. Rather than strictly administrative positions being the only advancement opportunity for teachers, teacher leaders would still be in the classroom but have some of their time freed up to:

> Take some of those leadership responsibilities in concert with the principal to mentor other teachers or to have some of the, you know, lead the faculty senate or some who design professional development or other things that teachers can do.

This arrangement also would allow teacher leaders to act as change agents who can have an impact on reputation. However, it is important to incentivize the role of teacher leader because

one participant noted that "for some teachers who have the potential to be that teacher leader, they're asking, 'What's in it for me?'"

Collaborative work culture

In addition to having a trusting relationship with administration, teachers also discussed the importance of having time to collaborate with each other. For reputation to improve, organizations must create opportunities for teachers to collaborate and build relationships in a way that is not simply added on top of their other responsibilities. One focus group participant noted that "you have to change the dynamic and the value that is placed on what teachers have. I know we complain about collaboration because it does take away prep time, it does, but if they would build time into schedules to allow us to still keep our prep times, [collaboration could work]." Another participant noted formal meetings that the teachers in their school had once a month to go over teaching standards and other relevant issues, which contributed to positive internal relationships and retention.

Beyond needing collaborative meeting spaces and times, many teachers mentioned either being mentored or mentoring others informally because the benefits were clear in terms of inducting new teachers into the profession and helping with retention efforts. Participants discussed the importance of mentors to help create an environment to both recruit new teachers and for those newer teachers to learn and grow. One participant described the importance of mentoring in the following way:

> Most new teachers, if available, will latch onto somebody close by and in their particular school and ask for help usually, but a lot of the mentoring programs that I'm seeing anyway are targeting much more specific and more organized—in more organized ways to get this— because we see that when mentoring is available and [it is] the right type of mentoring, teachers stay.

Reputation also is based at least partially on the idea of effective feedback, the evaluation or assessment of teaching, or perhaps how to alter that model for additional effectiveness. One participant from the West North Central area explained that "the mentor's role is never evaluation. It's never assessment. It's always support. It's always encouragement. It's always as a resource person. It's always as a—let me know what I can do to help you." Another participant from the South Atlantic described the role of a mentor as:

> More of a coach who's not there to pamper you and make you feel like everything is sunshine and unicorns, but they're there to support your growth as a teacher rather than to evaluate you and punish you if you do something wrong.

Participants mentioned several examples of how mentoring can be better integrated into organizations and made more robust, including having teachers who only teach for part of the day and spend the other part of the day in a mentoring role or employing newly retired teachers as mentors. This approach was deemed as important for teachers who may be struggling in order to "provide community and to provide a professional kind of support for them."

Sense of community

Developing a sense of community through narrative, relationship building, and reputation management was considered vital for teacher retention efforts. One participant said that "the only way that you can get them to stay here is to tie them to the community, make them feel welcomed, like they're a part of this place, and that comes—that comes down to the appreciation factor."

For school districts located in rural communities, creating a broader sense of community not only helped support current teachers but created an environment to recruit "homegrown teachers" to their districts as a way to "help plant the seeds for future teachers." One participant said of the county they teach in that "we grow our own there," meaning that "the kids I taught are now teaching" in that same area. States with large rural areas can capitalize on that sense of community "because it's home. . . A lot of people who've moved away would rather be here. We've known that for a while." As one participant not originally from a rural area, but now teaching in one, said, "I just felt like I belonged here. I still feel like I belong here." That narrative of belonging within a community was vital for teachers to want to stay both in the profession and in communities experiencing teacher shortages and for improved reputation for teachers within the community as a whole.

Union/political involvement

Teachers also wanted this supportive environment and positive reputation for teaching to extend to legislators, which inspired many teachers to become active within their local teaching unions or other forms of political involvement. Involvement with local unions allowed teachers to act as change agents, providing narratives that addressed the structural challenges that created difficulties in the individual classroom environment. One participant from the West North Central area noted the importance of "recognizing the structural challenges that teachers have to deal with. Teachers aren't to blame for failing or for kids who aren't ready. Kids aren't professionals, and they don't need standards."

Another participant discussed the changes they were able to make at the state level when "the teachers started off going to union meetings developing kind of a list of concerns together." In developing this list of concerns, the teachers realized there were structural issues at the state level causing issues. They then were able to sit down and meet with the commissioner of education in their state and establish things to work on collaboratively. This participant explained:

> I think one of the major things that's gone a really long way to make teachers feel appreciated is offering them a seat at the table to talk with somebody like the commissioner of education of the state to try and resolve what they thought were pretty substantial problems. . .So, I think another tool is just that there's an implicit understanding in this state that they care about teacher voice.

Discussion

The primary aims of this study were to better understand the influence of narratives on classroom teachers' professional identity and the factors that would lead to an environment that was conducive for reputation management for the field. Undergirding the importance of this research is the significant role that teachers play in society paired with an ever-increasing teacher shortage in the United States. Findings from this line of inquiry highlight key factors at the societal-, organizational- and community-level that influence the professional identity of classroom educators. Employing the lens of reputation management, these findings then highlight key focal areas for improving the narrative surrounding the profession and thus potentially impacting retention and recruitment efforts. Table 2 clarifies these focal areas as both needs and actions for public relations professionals or efforts within a school or district.

Table 2. Practical applications for influencing teachers' professional identity

Need	**Action**
Improve legislative support and resource allocation	Continuous public image campaign focused on required training and professionalization of field
Encourage a community of colleagues	Engage teachers in vision creation and execution for the school; improve teacher participation in decision making; improve internal communication between teachers and administrators
Feel connected to local community	Communicating teacher/school success into the community; local media coverage of success; empower educators to share via social media

Societal-level factors and actions

A key finding in this line of inquiry relates to societal narratives that marginalize classroom educators and the teaching profession. Two main sources that perpetuate these disparaging narratives are policy-makers and mass media. First, adding to perceived negative public perceptions, teachers internalize a lack of legislative support and diminishing resource allocation, burgeoning responsibilities that are beyond the scope of teaching, and a lack of voice in decision-making processes as synonymous with a message that teaching is not a respected or valued profession. Highlighting the gravitas of this situation, in early 2018 public schools in all 55 districts of West Virginia were closed for 10 days when educators and school personnel went on strike in response to low pay and legislation affording three years of only minimal pay increases and a freeze at the current level for premiums for 16 months (Larimer, 2018). Although this

scenario highlights one approach for impacting change, a report from the U.S. Department of Education (2013) indicates that for true transformation in the field to occur, teachers must be treated as professionals with demanding and complex jobs.

Findings also indicated that disparaging societal-level narratives were spread through mass media. To illustrate, as educators in this study pointed out, media narratives often focus on failures in the education system. Constant coverage of these failures was internalized as decreased feelings of worth and diminished job satisfaction. This dynamic is not surprising as agenda-setting and framing research has consistently demonstrated the role of mass media messaging in the construction of social realities (for a review see Hallahan, 1999; McComas & Shaw, 1993). Further, in classifying dirty work occupations, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) argued that no profession retains a relatively high occupational prestige with a servile relationship taint. We argue that media coverage that fails to highlight the successes of classroom educators reinforces this servile relationship by disempowering teachers and contributing to the social taint of the profession as dirty work.

Although not a comprehensive solution to the national teacher shortage, based on these findings, it seems the profession would benefit from a rebranding and public image campaign. This public outreach effort should not only aim to recruit teachers for the profession but also focus on elevating the field in media coverage and educating policy makers. In other words, this effort should improve reputation management by targeting decision makers, potential future educators, and communities with key information about teacher successes. Further, campaign messaging should not just focus on making a difference in the life of students but also on the required training and high level of professionalization of the field. One example of how this might be replicated in communities facing a teacher shortage is the TEACH campaign that promotes resources for certification requirements and teaching preparation programs for those looking to change professions (TEACH, n.d.).

Organization-level factors and actions

As with any career, teachers want both to be respected and to feel like they are part of a community of colleagues. Further, narratives, and thus identities, are not meant to be static. As time changes, public opinion is swayed. Thus, at the organization level, teachers want to share in the vision creation and execution for moving the school forward. They also want to work in a collaborative environment where resource sharing and mentorship are supported. Teachers want to have their voices heard, to participate in decision making, and to be informed of changes that will affect them. Therefore, another prong in the public relations approach to improving the narratives and reputation of teaching includes opening channels of communication to create a supportive culture where teachers can flourish. This finding is supported by public relations scholarship that identifies listening as fundamental for ethical public communication (Macnamara, 2016) and research indicating listening is a predictor of increased employee retention and productivity (Benner & Tushman, 2003).

Further, improved communication among stakeholders and a greater role in collaboration with leadership would lead to improved teaching environments. Findings indicated that teachers want to be part of a supportive environment of like-minded educators who advocate for larger changes together. Being part of a group advocating for change removes many of the perceived constraints associated with the issues appearing dauntingly large. Having their voices heard at the highest level makes teachers feel empowered. These findings complement relationship management scholarship that indicates factors such as open communication and effective internal relations management (Yang, 2007), as well as vision and leadership and workplace environment (Lee & Park, 2013), are key attributes for reputation management. Thus, a focus on improved internal communications may help to shift the narratives that influence the professional identity of the teaching profession. This increased impact on narrative and reputation management is also central to the issue of recruitment. Strong professional identity (and not for dirty work), community support, and the chance to advocate for larger change make the reputation of the entire field more positive, and thus more enticing, to those looking to enter the workforce or make a career change.

Community-level factors and action

At the community level, teachers who feel rooted in their local community are more likely to stay and be happier in their profession. This sense of community may come from returning to their childhood home to teach or feeling a sense of belonging in the community of residence. Further, communicating school, classroom, and teacher successes into the community reduces stigma and offers educators a renewed sense of dignity and pride in the communities where they reside. For example, local media coverage highlighting positive educator successes and support from local businesses would celebrate the teaching profession and help provide further narrative fidelity (Fisher, 1987) to teachers' lived experiences. For example, local and regional replication of the Teach Like Me program may empower educators to share their own stories via social media.

Conclusion

This study takes a qualitative approach to understanding the connections among narrative, professional identity, and reputation management in the field of public education. Central to the findings are the factors that have led to a reputation crisis for the profession of teaching and thus contributed to the national teacher shortage. Although much research in public education focuses on program, policy, or national level change, this report instead focuses on the role of communication in addressing the teacher shortage. Key findings indicate that public education would benefit from societal, organizational, and community-level communication interventions.

Although the Ad Council and TEACH campaign was a start, the inspiring narratives of teachers changing students' lives in these PSAs is often at odds with teachers' everyday lived experiences in the classroom. Offering success stories and positive images of classroom teachers may help to recruit new teachers, but to retain teachers the internal organizational narratives and external societal narratives surrounding the teaching profession also must begin to shift.

All of the teachers who participated in this study referenced their desire to be heard, respected, appreciated, and consulted in the decision-making process. At the school level, creating a culture of open communication, collaborative opportunities, and shared vision will invest educators in both the profession and the outcomes. Assuring this inclusive culture may help to restore some of the former dignity to the profession and create a community of colleagues who lifts one another up in pursuit of shared aims. Although it is understood that a communication approach will not end the teacher shortage, it is believed to be the foundation for a shift in the perception of the value of teaching and teachers. Ultimately, this study points to the notion that increasing retention and recruitment can be affected when narratives are understood and the principles of reputation management are applied.

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The Framing of Adoption: A Content Analysis of Print News Coverage 2014-2016

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Article Information	Abstract
	A qualitative content analysis method was applied to explore the frames associated with child adoption news coverage over a three-year period. The research questions examined the frame themes represented in print news stories about adoption and their prominence. An analysis of national print news publications found that child adoption coverage leaned toward regulatory and policy frames and frames about the child welfare industry. Absent from print news frames were themes that focused on the humanity of adoption, whether from the perspective of individuals and couples considering adoption or of children either waiting to be adopted or who were adopted successfully. The skew toward a small subset of themes on such a complex issue has implications for adopters and adoptees and the stigmas perpetuated across society.

Introduction

The practice of child adoption in the United States can be traced back to 1851 when Massachusetts became the first state to pass a law that recognized adoption "as a social and legal operation based on the interests of child welfare rather than adult interests" (Herman, 2012a, para. 1). Prior to that, children were considered the property of their parents to be used as adult guardians when deemed appropriate, which often meant working as farm labor, being hired out as labor to private citizens or factories for family income, or being orphaned and left on their own to make a way of life. The concept "placing out" (Herman, 2012b, para. 2) began in 1868

and promoted the idea that home life was superior to the ideal standard for children's well-being relative to institutionalized living. Placing out eventually evolved into what we recognize today as the foster care system.

Agendas that characterized adoption policy in the earliest years focused on child-caring institutions (e.g., orphanages and infant asylums), the processes applied to vet caretakers and the suitability of their homes for child placement, and the regulations associated with the transference of children from biological parents to either foster or adoptive parents. Within this context, adoption frames were dedicated to child welfare reform and family values as defined based on early periods of religious reform (Hart, 2012). Over time, the topic of child adoption became more defined according to the range of social, legal, and policy issues debated to protect the interests of children, as well as on refinement efforts to oversee adoption practices. Among the most prominent efforts to safeguard parties engaged in international child adoption are captured in guidelines specified in the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption[1] (Hague Conference on Private International Law [HCCH], 1993) and in the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000 (IAA), which provided for the implementation of the Hague Conference guidelines by the United States (Mabry-King, 2016; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2000). Otherwise, domestic adoption laws in the United States vary by state although there are general commonalities on processes for vesting of parental rights with the adoptive parents, the requirements for consent, the standards for assessing the best interests of the child, the confidential nature of adoption proceedings, and the permanent nature of adoption (Acosta, 2013).

U.S. adoption records before 1975 are imprecise since it was not until 2000 that the U.S. Census included "adopted son/daughter" as part of its report categories (Herman, 2012). U.S. Census records from 2010 report that just over two million U.S. citizens are adopted, and up to four percent of families have adopted; in addition, less than three percent of all children under 18 are adopted (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014). The Pew Research Center reports a 77% decline in the number of children adopted from non-U.S. countries compared to 2004, the peak year for international adoptions (Budiman & Lopez, 2017). Despite the downward trend, the United States makes up 46% of international adoptions among adoptee receiving countries worldwide and is also a growing source for international outgoing adoptions (Budiman & Lopez, 2017), a practice where U.S.- born children are adopted to individuals from another country (Marbry-King, 2016). Domestic trends also show that adoption rates have declined since 2007 due to a significant drop in kinship or related adoptions. A total of 110,373 adoptions were reported in 2014 (Jones & Placek, 2017).

Faulkner (2010) noted "a great deal of cultural energy has been invested in the ideal of childhood innocence, to the extent that innocence is frequently cited as society's most valuable

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[1] The Hague Convention represents an agreement among 83 countries that agree to three key objectives, namely, 1) to establish safeguards for intercountry adoptions in the interest of the child and with respect for his/her rights; 2) to establish a system of cooperation between contracting states in such a way the reduces the incidence of child trafficking, sale, or abduction, and 3) to secure the recognition of contracting states of adoptions made in accordance with the convention (HCCH, 1993).

asset" (p. 106). Entertainment media's portrayals of adoption reinforces the constructs of childhood and family, with heartwarming portrayals of families and individuals after adoption, as with the CBS network's annual holiday special, *A Home for the Holidays*, and through the use of storylines that either humorize or dramatize the challenges to adopted children and their families, as with the ABC network's *Modern Family* and FreeForum's *The Fosters.* Feel-good presentations of adoption represent a negotiated agreement among program producers, broadcast sponsors, and viewers to limit adoption topics to manageable bites that can be resolved in less than one hour. By default, more challenging topics associated with child adoption become the purview of news media.

This study investigates the framing of adoption in national print newspapers between 2014 and 2016.Within the adoption literature, there are very few studies focused on analyzing newspaper media, and even fewer focused on U.S. domestic adoptions. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to understand the framing of adoption in print news media. Specifically, how is child adoption depicted in print news and how is the public's interest on the topic shaped by the coverage? Findings from agenda-setting research suggest that media presentations of an issue cannot only shape the public's attitudes about its attributes, but also impose priorities on the issue that may not reflect reality (McCombs, 1977). Scrutiny of the presence (or absence) of media frames assigned to child adoption, as well as the balance in their representation over time, is an essential step to identifying those issues that contribute to public perceptions and broad social policy. This is significant because the media's effect on the public's salience for the issue, as well as the characterizations attributed to it, can have real implications on the lives of the more than 400,000 children in the U.S. foster care system awaiting permanent adoption (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 2017) and for adults who view adoption as a path to family.

Literature review

Child adoption portrayals in media research

Researchers have studied the dramatization of child adoption in broadcast media and concluded that depictions of child adoption in media reinforce negative perceptions about the practice and the people associated with it. While some studies have focused on the depictions of the health or unhealthiness of family units including adopted children in broadcast news coverage (Kline, Chatterjee, & Karel, 2009), others shed light on the judgments of viewers or readers, rather than those producing the media, in demonizing adoptees in broadcast and print media (Creedy, 2002). Kline et al. (2009) looked at television news coverage of adoption between 2001 and 2005 and suggested that "when adoption activities become newsworthy, frequently the story that is broadcast is potentially stigmatizing" (p. 67). Reese (1998) focused on the portrayals of adoption over time, analyzing the stigmas associated with adoption particularly regarding the cost of

adoption as well as interracial adoptions. Most notable in the representation of research analyzing adoption portrayals and framing in the media are three main topics: 1) how adoption is portrayed in broadcast news, 2) emergent frames in international adoption, and 3) the negative stories or negative frames surrounding adoption in news media.

The stigmatization of the adoptive parents is also an area that has received some attention in academic research. Miall's (1987) study found evidence that the general public believed that adoptive couples were unproductive if they were unable to reproduce naturally. Moreover, the idea that a complete parenting experience is justified by blood ties further challenged the traditional understanding of family.

Social constructions of a typical birth or adoptive parent are said to be created in the media and ultimately affect the biases existing toward adoption and the negative ways in which adoption is portrayed (Maxwell & Cook, 2014; Wegar, 2000). This bias is reinforced by the normalization of narrow social constructions associated with family shaped by dominant ideology, in addition to ideas about race, biological normativity, and the ideals of nationalism (Suter, Reyes, & Ballard, 2011). Wegar (2000) concluded that the negative and biased images of adoption and adoptees that pervade mass media today are likely to continue to permeate mass media if these images continue to capture the attention of, and elicit emotion from, consumers.

Rushton's (2004) review of scholarship on the adoption of children placed from public care found that the bulk of child adoption research has focused on "adoptive parents' views and their accounts of their children's development" (p. 101). He notes topics for investigation have skewed toward the problems associated with child placement, the challenges to new parents, interventions with difficult adoptions, and the process for matching and preparation. Less attention has been invested in the experience of child adoptees, birth parent experiences pre- and post-adoption, the effectiveness in placement types, and the effectiveness of policies and services that facilitate adoption processes. He concludes that research could do more to improve the public's depth of understanding about child adoption. In doing so, the improved public interest may lend more oversight to the issues that challenge the obstacles to the ideals of childhood and family.

Framing theory applied to child adoption news coverage

Scholarship suggests that the effect of the news media's attention to adoption, child adoptees, adoptive families, adoption agencies, and adoption policy shapes public attitudes in directions that could become difficult to reverse. The news media's surveillance and reporting might not only cast a negative shadow on the public's perceptions about adoption but could also marginalize adoptees and adoptive families through characterizations that add fuel to its social stigmas. Although stigmas may be changed through social action and societal change (Goffman, 1963), the media could also provide a platform upon which the negative portrayals or stigmatizations of adoption may be changed for the better.

The concept of framing involves "[selecting] some aspects of a perceived reality and [making] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman 1993, p. 52). A contextual frame provides a schema both for presenting and for comprehending an issue (Scheufele, 1999). The way an issue is framed in media based on tone (positively or negatively), voice (us or them), or lens (individual, community, or societal) can change individuals' opinions about the importance of that issue and the prioritization of merits associated with it (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani 1989; Kinder 1983). The visibility given to an issue in media, the time and space dedicated to promoting it, as well as the number and prominence of references that give voice to the issue are cues external to the message itself that add to the salience of issue frames.

In the context of any issue-based communication campaign, there is an ongoing negotiation that ensues between the frame applied to the message and how the individual makes sense of the information in context with the existing schema on the topic (McLeod, Kosicki, Pan, & Allen, 1987; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Individual frames as defined by Entman (1993) are "mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals' processing of information" (p. 53) that activate when an audience attempts to make sense of a message proposition. The interaction between the message frame and pre-existing attributions not only influence how individuals process a message but also has an enduring influence on galvanizing their perception of that issue.

Kline, Karel, and Chatterjee (2006) studied the framing of adoption in broadcast media by analyzing these representations through Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma. Goffman's theory is based on the idea that stigma is an outcome of tension between "virtual social identity and actual social identity" (p. 2). In the context of news coverage, Kline et al. (2006) note that the stigmatization of a group occurs when that group is linked with negative attributes in news stories. The media, particularly broadcast news media, often construct news stories surrounding adoption using human interest, economic, and morality frames that ultimately stigmatize adoption in the eyes of readers, promoting individual rather than societal responsibility or blame for social problems (Kline et al., 2006). News media additionally are often accused of, and found to, misrepresent adoption in insensitive ways including discussing adoption through insulting remarks or commenting on adoption with general ignorance regarding the topic (Waggenspack, 1998).

Kline et al. (2009) also studied the portrayals of adoption in broadcast news by exploring the media frames surrounding the depiction of adoption. The researchers attempted to discover whether televised news depicted adoptee families in unhealthy ways and if journalists played any role in counterbalancing these depictions through adoption participant perspectives or positive depictions of adoptees. They found that many stories depicted adoptees as unhealthy (e.g., starved, abused, troubled) or as having deficiencies (physical or psychological). Their study also highlighted the absence of positive news coverage that included birth parents or of negative news stories that incorporated the perspectives of adoption participants (e.g., adoptees, birth parent, or adoptive parent) as a news source (p. 67). Since "the public uses the media to learn about

adoption as a family form" (Kline et al., 2009, p. 56), the study's implications on issues related to adoption are substantial and suggest a need for greater scrutiny among professionals and civic journalists who report the news.

Research has also given attention to the sociological perspective of international adoption and its implications for families. Tyebjee (2003) focused on advancing proposals for how adoption could be compellingly framed to affect attitudes and interest in child adoption and foster care among immigrant populations. Because the United States has the largest number of international adoptions (Engel, Phillips & Dellacava, 2007), a good portion of the literature on adoption framing in the media focuses on the international aspect of adoption, or U.S. citizens' adoption of children abroad. Engel et al.'s (2007) research concluded that media were particularly effective in influencing national policies, citing a media exposé about black market Romanian orphanages that resulted in a decrease in adoptions from Romania. Jacobson (2014) focused on international adoption activity in two of the most popular countries for adoption, Russia and China, as well as the media frame storylines that characterized adoption coverage from country to country. Jacobson's research also shed light on the disparity in social frames between each country's media. In an analysis of 21 years of U.S. newspaper coverage, Jacobson found that Russia adoption coverage frames were "notoriously problem focused" (p. 672) relative to China adoption coverage, which was overwhelmingly positive. The findings had implications on prospective U.S. adoptive parents' decisions about routes to family and the risks attributed to child adoptees based on country of origin.

Hellerstedt et al. (2008) examined media framing and adoption decision making in print reporting through the lens of international adoptions by analyzing the positive or negative framing associated with international adoptions from various countries. Their investigation attributed the focus on international adoptions to concern for children adopted into societies much different than their own, where racial and ethnic discrimination persists, and children are often made to feel like outsiders or are portrayed as outsiders, even sometimes within their respective adoptive homes.

Research questions

Within the adoption literature, there were very few studies focused on analyzing newspaper media, and even fewer focused on U.S. domestic adoptions. This suggests that a more holistic view of issues pertaining to strictly domestic adoptions is both needed, and appropriate, in efforts to track the news media's ongoing portrayal of an issue with the range of implications on the cultural, social, and regulatory landscape of adoption. Since the media agenda is believed to set the public agenda (Guo, 2012), it is feasible to believe that the way in which domestic adoptions are bundled in combination with various social issues in print news media could stigmatize adoption through association, making these bundled issues appear interconnected in the minds of consumers (Vu, Guo, & McCombs, 2014).

This study extends prior media research on adoption by exploring the topic through the lens of print news framing. Because an object's framing in the media can have measurable behavioral consequences (McCombs & Shaw, 1993), the contribution of this research is to lend further evidence to the categories and themes apparent in media's portrayal of adoption. This research analyzes a subset of national print news media for evidence of what adoption frames exist and with what consistency. In doing so, the research attempts to identify trends that allow for observations about the state of child adoption coverage in news media over the most recent three years from the study's launch. Three research questions are explored:

RQ1: What general frames are represented in print news stories (headlines and leads) about adoption?

RQ2: What frames, if any, are most prevalent in their representation?

RQ3: What implications can be made about the effect of the combination of the news frames and their frequency on the public's interest in child adoption?

Method

A qualitative content analysis method was applied to explore the research questions. Qualitative content analysis is appropriate for "subjective interpretation of the content of text data though the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hseih & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Qualitative content analysis seeks to identify trends and patterns in the themes that emerge over the period analyzed, while also predicting the expectancy of broad organizing categories (Krippendorff, 2013). This method improves the opportunity for researchers to make a more judicious appraisal of the observations and trends observed in research, as well as allows for expanded discussion of the intricate characteristics observable in the units of analysis that comprise the sample pool (Kracauer, 1952). Relative to quantitative content analysis, qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to describe the elements of the content observed, while also acknowledging propositions that could explain linkages between the content and audience outcomes (Neuendorf, 2002).

The representation and framing of adoption and activities surrounding adoption were examined in print news media. Although newspaper readership has experienced a decline in the last decade, its selection for research is justified because daily newspaper circulation is still 31 million for print and digital editions combined (Pew Research, 2018). Studies sponsored by the Pew Research Center reported that about half of newspaper readers read only the print edition (Barthel, 2016), and news organization digital platforms were the most common pathway to online news (Mitchell, Gottfried, Shearer, & Lu, 2017). Mitchell et al. (2017) also identified news topics related to community, politics, crime, and health as most likely to prompt readers to

talk to others about the news, search for more information, or post on social media. These data are particularly relevant to adoption news, which could feasibly fall into any one or more categories of news. All newspapers in this study were circulated both in print and online, with the latter replicating the stories reported in the print version.

Unit of analysis and sample pool

The newspapers selected for analysis came from five major metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) which were identified as high-index adoption states. This included articles from the top two news publications in the respective states including: California, New York, Texas, Pennsylvania, and Illinois (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). The unit of analysis applied to the exploration was a single print news story from the leading two major metropolitan newspapers in high-index adoption markets with a daily print circulation of 100,000 or more. The researchers expected that because these areas were larger, contained more diverse populations, and had higher rates of adoptions, news stories from these markets would be more varied and balanced in the coverage of adoption-related news. The targeted news markets above-average adoption index is also suggested to indicate heightened levels of awareness and involvement around adoption news events. The major metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) selected for analysis were in the states of California, New York, Texas, Pennsylvania, and Illinois (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). The final list of newspapers selected within the designated MSAs was identified using Cision's Top Newspapers in 2016 (Cision, 2016). The list of publications included in the study by circulation is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Major metropolitan statistical area newspapers, circulation, and metropolitan statistical populations (Cision, 2016)

Newspaper	Circulation
California	
Los Angeles Times	467,309
San Francisco Chronicle	223,549
New York	
The New York Times	2,101,611
Daily News	299,538
Texas	
The Dallas Morning News	271,900
Houston Chronicle	360,251

Pennsylvania	
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette	173,160
The Philadelphia Inquirer	158,546
Illinois	
Chicago Tribune	384,962
Chicago Sun-Times	470,548

Adoption-related news stories that ran between the years 2014 to 2016 were retrieved from the online databases ProQuest and NewsBank. The research timeframe represented the most recent three years from the study's launch. Only news stories considered hard news were included in the research sample. Hard news, defined in this study as up-to-date and factual reporting of national newsworthy events, encompassed stories of adoption of a political, economic, crime, or policy nature ("Hard News," 2016). Therefore, any localized or international news, soft news, defined as feature stories that are not factually reported or newsworthy ("Soft News," 2016), op-ed articles, announcements for localized or nationalized events, and any duplication articles were omitted from analysis. Featured pictures framed with a caption or freestanding visuals that accompanied the news story also were eliminated from coding because the databases tended to cut visual supplements from the digital content feed. Based on the criteria in the platforms provided above, a final sample of 10 articles remained and was used in the final analysis.

Coding categories

An initial codebook was developed using adoption-related topics gleaned from The Adoption History Project's website (http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adoption/) and from keywords that emerged from the library database search. On analysis of the returns in the databases, as well as the grouping of topics from the Adoption History Project, the researchers found four overarching themes that characterized discussions of adoptions, including social frames, regulation and policy frames, economic frames, and technological frames relating to developments in birthing or surrogate alternatives. The researchers reviewed several articles from the sample with the coders to clarify the code definitions as well as to negotiate the recognition of the codebook categories before coder training.

The criteria applied to code were operationalized according to the presentation and combination of news story headline and the lead (qualified as the first three paragraphs of the news story) for adoption-focused news stories. This decision is justified, in part, by the traditional structure for journalistic writing structure that adheres to an inverted pyramid style of news presentations in which the most newsworthy information and most relevant details are presented in the first section of the article (Rabe, 2008). Additionally, since the goal of the research was to hone in on what topics and story angle the journalist or editor chose to make

most important, supplemental topics presented later in the article that could distract from efforts to draw conclusions were not included in this analysis.

The final codebook addressed 1) descriptive characteristics about the news source; 2) descriptive characteristics about the story headline and lead, respectively; and 3) lead content characterized according to its social, regulatory/policy, economic, or technological emphasis. News stories were coded on more than one criterion only if multiple criteria applied; coders were instructed to code for as many criteria as apparent in the lead paragraphs. The final codebook contained 37 coding categories. Table 2 summarizes the categories and their definitions.

Table 2. Coding frames and definitions by category

Code	Code defined
Social category (12)	
African-American Adoptions	African-American adoptions, African-American children in need of adoption, African-American parents adopting.
Child Welfare	Stories about child emotional and behavioral well-being. Includes topics such as abuse, neglect, poverty, domestic violence, and parental substance abuse (Burns et al., 2004).
International Adoptions	Stories about issues associated with international and cross-racial/cross-ethnic transfer of child guardianship or topics related to family building or adaption due to cultural/national differences. (Askeland, 2006).
Celebrity Adoption	Stories about celebrity trends to adopt, celebrities or celebrity couples adopting children.
Child Welfare Work	Stories about individuals and parties associated with the adoption industry, (i.e., social workers, child welfare agents or targets).
Search & Reunion	Stories about individual efforts to locate birth- or adoptive-relatives.
Single Parent	Stories involving discussions of single-parent adopters or child adoptees of single parents.

Same-Sex Couple Adoption	Stories about the social implications (values, attitudes, lifestyle trends) of same-sex couple adoption.
Special Needs	Stories about the adoption of children with special needs or disabilities.
Religion	Stories about the intersection between religious beliefs/doctrine and adoption.
Open Adoption	Stories about birth-parent(s) access to adopted children.
Closed Adoption	Stories about issues related to records confidentiality of birth-parent or adopted child.
Regulation & Policy Category (4)	
Legislation/Legalities	Stories about the legality of same-sex adoption, single-parent adoption, or kinship (interfamily) adoptions; also includes legal actions taken by governmental bodies, organizations, schools.
Court System	Story gives attention to court's interpretation about actions or individuals featured.
Fostering	Stories involving discussions of foster care, foster parents, the foster care system, requirements to foster.
Same-Sex Adoption	Stories dedicated to the legal, political, legislative/policy issues surrounding the debate on same-sex adoption.
Economic Category (2)	
Cost to Adopt	Stories about the cost to adopt or costs associated with adoption.

Adoption Statistics	Stories about the statistics—number of adoptions in country, state, gay adoptions, transracial adoptions, international adoptions, or any general statistics regarding adoption
Technological Category (4)	
Eugenics	Stories about the improvement of the population through eugenics or improving individual genetic quality.
Matching	Stories about parent-matching technology or technology's use in connecting adoptive parents with an adoptable child.
Infertility	Stories about women's infertility and adoption as an alternative to family planning.
IVF/Invitro/Surrogacy	Stories about surrogates or surrogacy, invitro fertilization, artificial insemination, IVF treatments to aid in conception.

Coder training

Two independent coders received three hours of training from the research team on a subsample of news stories in the sample pool. Then, they each coded the total sample of news stories. The purpose of the training was to 1) "provide basic validation of the coding scheme" (Neundorf, 2002, p. 2), 2) increase the opportunity for proper application of the coding categories, and 3) to improve the inter-coder reliability quotient, "a necessary criterion for valid and useful research" (Nuendorf, 2002, p. 2). The training also allowed the researchers an opportunity to clarify the code definitions as well as to negotiate the recognition of the codebook categories between individual coders.

Results

In this section, the frames found in the analysis of the data are reported. The section begins with a description of the sample characteristics and intercoder reliability. The findings are discussed in the context of the research questions that guided the investigation.

Sample characteristics and intercoder reliability

A total of 10 articles made up the content analysis sample. Four articles were published in 2014; three articles were published in 2015 and 2016, respectively. In terms of newspaper outlets, five articles in the sample were sourced from the *Los Angeles Times*, three came from the *New York Times*, and two appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*. Although the sample size was smaller than the researchers anticipated, the quantity did not distract from the goals of research. An overall Krippendorf's alpha statistic for inter-coder reliability was acceptable (k-alpha = .76) with 92% pairwise agreement between the coders, which met the baseline of .68 or higher for an acceptable level of agreement (Neundorf, 2002).

Table 3. Inter-coder reliability

Coding Category	Krippendorf's Alpha Reliability	Percent Pairwise Agreement
Overall agreement	.76	92%
Headline Tone	.86	90%
Social Themes	.76	93%
Legislation & Policy Themes	.75	88%
Economic Themes	.83	95%
Technological Themes	.48	95%

Table 4. Frequency of frames and topics discussed within frames

Frame identified	Topics identified within frame	Frequency of topic in sample
REGULATION & POLICY		
	Legislation	7
	The court system	7
	Fostering	7
	Same-sex couple adoption	4

Total frame identification in sample		25
SOCIAL		
	Child welfare/child welfare work	10
	Same-sex couple adoption	4
	International adoptions	3
	African-American adoptions	2
	Search & reunion	1
	Single parent adoption	0
	Celebrity adoptions	0
	Special needs	0
	Religion	0
	Open adoption	0
	Closed adoption	0
Total frame identification in sample		**20**
TECHNOLOGICAL		
	IVF/Invitro/Surrogacy	2
	Infertility	1
	Matching	0
	Eugenics	0
Total frame identification in sample		**3**
ECONOMIC		
	Cost to adopt	1
	Adoption statistics	1
Total frame identification in sample		**2**

Legislation and judicial themes led among coding categories

RQ1 asked, what general frames are represented in print news stories (i.e., headlines and leads) about adoption? To explore this question the variety of categories present in news stories was

analyzed in addition to the tone attributed to the headline and copy. Within the regulation and policy category, news stories with frames related to legislation, the court system, and fostering were equally prevalent to one another ($n = 7$), followed by the frame of same-sex couple adoption ($n = 4$). The frames found in this category also had a tendency to be intertwined in a single news story with frames from other categories, as was evident in the news stories such as "The Child Welfare System; Broken Bond; Court Delays and Keeping Children in Foster Care Longer Set the Stage for Deeper Heartbreak and Wrenching Removals" (Therolf, 2016) and "Adoptee Advocates Decry 'Re-homing'" (LeVine, 2014), each of which included three frames from the regulation/policy category in addition to themes from the social category (i.e., child welfare/work) as part of the headline and lead. "Adoptee Advocates Decry 'Re-homing'" specifically focused attention on a domestic practice whereby adoptive parents of foreign-born children solicit people illegally over the Internet to take the child, thereby putting an adopted child's welfare at risk.

Same-sex couple adoption rights category dominated coverage about adoption actors

Within the period analyzed, same-sex couple adoption rights and adoption cases occurred across four of the 10 articles analyzed. This frame was coded in both the social and regulatory/policy categories. News stories capturing this theme almost unanimously paired with issues regarding court reviews of adoption rights or state legal privileges denied to same-sex couples seeking to adopt. However, one news story in the sample was unique in its emphasis on international/cross-racial/cross-ethnic adoption. An article entitled, "Schechter Couple Adopts Ethiopian Brothers" (Shields, 2015) was the single article in the sample that provided a human-interest perspective on the adoptive parents' journey in assimilating their adopted children into the U.S.

Characterizations assigned to news leads steered away from negative frames

The coder descriptive words used most frequently to characterize the tone of news leads included informative, happy/hopeful, informative, and in one instance, sad. Informative characterizations tended to educate and inform readers about processes and systems, to report data and numbers, or to share information about organizations, laws, or judgments. The articles titled, "National Briefing: Nationwide; More children in foster care" (Associated Press, 2015), which reported statistical data on foster care trends in a decade, or "Abbott gets high ranking for adoption benefits" (Elejalde-Ruiz, 2016), which featured the adoption benefits provided by a Chicago-based healthcare company, are examples of this category. Happy/hopeful/inspiring frames were tied to stories about celebrations (i.e., "A Family-Friendly Court; On Adoption Day, Judge Hands Down the News Adults and 200 Kids Have Awaited," Streeter, 2014) or realizing some victory over adversity as in the article, "The Nation; A New Victory for Gay Rights; High Court Upholds Adoptions by Same-Sex Parents, Reversing an Alabama Ruling" (Savage, 2016).

Regulation and policy frames were most prevalent in representation

RQ2 asked, what frames, if any, are most prevalent in their representation? The research found that news story frames existed across every major coding category (e.g., social, regulation & policy, economic, and technological). Despite the number of frames listed in the social category ($n = 12$ coding frames), it ranked second to regulation & policy in the number of frames coded in total for each subcategory. Frames coded as regulation and policy occurred 25 times, followed by the social category frames ($n = 20$), then technological ($n = 3$), and economic ($n = 2$) frames, respectively. Specifically, the most coded frame occurred in the social category under the combined frames of child welfare/child welfare work ($n = 10$). In the regulation and policy category, a three-way tie among the legislation/legalities frame ($n = 7$), court system ($n = 7$) frame, and fostering ($n = 7$) frame occurred.

Dominance and frequency of frames have implications on potential child adoption actors

RQ3 asked what implications can be made about the effect of the combination of the news frames and their frequency on audience perceptions? The findings lend evidence to the social frames that dominated the landscape on child adoption from 2014 through 2016. Same-sex couple's right to adopt and court review of legal appeals surrounding this issue were a dominant component of adoption frames in the public sphere. However, child welfare frames written from the perspective of the child adoptee or the birth parents were underrepresented, as was coverage on pro-adoption advocacy groups that could represent the interests of children still hoping to be adopted. Frames that captured the economic or technological issues surrounding adoption were entirely absent. The dominant frames during this period could lead an outside interest to conclude that child adoption is a same-sex couple issue. For single adults and couples who do not fall into this demographic, the news coverage could effectively marginalize opportunities to view adoption as an acceptable alternative for family planning.

Research summary
In summary, the key findings that emerged from the investigation are as follows:
1. Frames about legislation, the court system, and problems associated with the foster care system (i.e., child welfare) were coded most frequently.
2. Frames about adoption actors (e.g., children waiting to be or placed with adoption, birth parents, or adoptive parents) occurred less frequently unless tied to news stories that reported on law, policy, or the court's review of the prospective adopter's rights.
3. The adoption rights of same-sex couples and the legal review of court cases were dominant frames across the three-year period reviewed.

Discussion

This study investigated the framing of adoption in national print newspapers between 2014 and 2016. Newspapers in five metropolitan statistical areas were selected for mining adoption news coverage over the specified period. The findings revealed that print news' coverage of the child adoption issue leaned heavily toward legal/legality frames that give attention to the legal actions taken by organizations and interested parties in court review for the privilege to be (or remain) adoptive parents. The next most prevalent frames were found in the social category, with negative frames applied to child welfare and the work of child welfare agents. Ironically, human-interest frames that focused on the humanity of adoption appeared with the least frequency among the news content sampled. One news story sampled focused on an adoptive family through frames that highlighted international and cross-racial adoption. News frames dedicated to personalizing the birth parents who transfer parental rights to others or the children waiting to be adopted were absent from the sample pool.

Similar to previous studies on media coverage of child adoption, print news storylines were concentrated on elements that lent an impression of child adoption and its actors as litigious and difficult. Systemic difficulties caused by court delays and the child welfare system's policies, as well as news stories about same-sex couples' legal suits to become adoptive parents were written from a third-person perspective so that the reader could absorb the facts of the story without expending emotional empathy toward the individuals affected. News headlines were a cue to reinforce adoption stigmas through the choice of words used to capture readers' attention. Descriptive terms such as "broken," "wrenching," and "deeper heartbreak" provided prominent cues for the problematic circumstances surrounding child adoption.

The surveillance and reporting functions of media (McQuail, 2005) intend to ensure that news stories will be framed in terms that make complex events become more accessible to media audiences. The presence of frames that skew toward a small subset of such a complex issue suggests a need for greater vigilance in oversight among news media gatekeepers and greater control in media representation among adoption advocates to harness the ongoing interest of the public. For better or worse, the reporting of adoption stories and the representations of those involved may heighten, if not skew, the public's interest in the people and processes that characterize child adoption. The stories presented in print news have the potential to leave an impression as permanent as those presented to an audience in broadcast news or entertainment media through the use of journalistic storytelling, verbal imagery, and word choice. Yet story lines related to the challenges of new parents, matching and preparations, birth family contact arrangements after adoption (Rushton, 2004), or the financial costs of adoption were not part of the print news agenda during the study timeframe.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

The study also identifies limitations and highlights opportunities for future research. A limitation of this investigation is in the small sample size of news articles on child adoption in the United States. Future research should broaden the scope of the newspapers included to determine how this subject is discussed in a larger geographic region and context. Future research that expands the number of newspapers included in the sample, or that broadens the stipulations placed on the sampling frame could be applied to increase the sample pool. In this research, coders analyzed the first three paragraphs of the article. While this is typically where the most pertinent information in the article is provided, future research should seek to analyze the entirety of the text to develop a more holistic view of the coverage. Future studies also are suggested to explain how coverage of adoption has changed or changes over time going forward and how this compares with previous periods in time.

The current study analyzed print articles out of context of the vehicle in which the article ran or photojournalism images that may have accompanied the article. Even the column width space or placement of the news story can cue the reader to its prominence in the media content. Future research could also explore coder frames in the context of print-plus-visual supplement contexts to see if the outcomes are different. Last, with the exclusion of soft news coverage, those news outlets and stories seeking to humanize the issue of child adoption may have been overlooked. The hard news section of a print article tends to give focus to issues such as crime, litigation, or abuse of the establishment. Other sections of the newspaper—lifestyle, community, health, or business, for example—could result in adoption frames that were not found in hard news headlines and lead paragraphs. Soft news coverage is recommended in future research to obtain a more holistic view of news representations of the issue. Last, references to news sources quoted in a story are recommended as a coding criterion to provide context to the relationships between news frames and source agents.

Conclusion

The current research outcome challenges media gatekeepers and audiences alike to consider the importance of news framing in the public's understanding about the issue of child adoption. For some, aspirations for a family are only attainable through adoption. However, the void in the media's coverage of individual viewpoints, combined with the stigmas attributed to adoptees and adoptive families, could effectively dissuade prospective parents from pursuing child adoption. This research supports the idea that adoption's coverage in the major print news vehicles perpetuates the perception that child adoption is an atypical path to family sustained by marginalized actors. This characterization effectively counteracts efforts to build understanding of issues that influence the practice of adoption and degrades the list of reasons to pursue child adoption.

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Twitter and the Struggle to Transform the Object: A Study of Clean Coal in the 2017 Australian Energy Policy Public Debate

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Article Information	Abstract
	This paper investigates unusually high spikes in Twitter engagement in Australia in February 2017 invoking the 2014 Peabody Energy global public relations campaign Advanced Energy for Life (AEFL) trope clean coal. Focusing on peak Twitter events, it asks: What caused the spike, what was amplified and signified by the dominant tweeters, and what was the content and tenor of discussion generated? Applying discourse analysis to an archive of Australian-based Twitter activity, the research argues that despite widespread ridicule of clean coal as oxymoronic by contemporary publics, the increased engagement provided unintended impetus for the PR campaign objectives. The research contributes to greater understanding of the reach, influence, and limitations of Twitter-based public debate.

Introduction

On November 10, 2016, Climate Reality, a Washington, D.C.-based activist group, tweeted: "Australia has joined the Paris Agreement! The world is still taking climate action bit.ly/2eYcMLO #ClimateHope #TheRoadForward."

The Bitly link to *The Guardian* URL stated that Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull "confirmed Australia had ratified the Paris agreement despite domestic opposition from the One Nation party, a critical Senate bloc for the government, and persistent climate change skepticism roiling within Coalition ranks" (Murphy, 2016).

Since the 1960s, public debate about resource and energy policy in Australia has broadly swung between political support for either nationalism, which aims for industrialization and self-sufficiency, or liberalism, which "embod(ies) the idea of free trade, comparative advantage and security through interdependence" (Hay, 2009, p. 142). In tandem with the latter, debate on global energy policy has also been characterized by a focus on the "maintenance of particular beliefs" as well as high-stakes corporate strategies at play to dominate meaning-making to "delegitimize and silence alternatives" (Mercer, De Rijke, & Dressler, 2014, p. 279). Launched on February 26, 2014, Peabody Energy's Advanced Energy for Life (AEFL) global public relations campaign is a prime example of the corporate apparatus used to influence and mold public opinion. Supporting the ideological idea of clean coal in the fight against energy poverty, the campaign was aimed at "world leaders, multi-national organizations, a wide range of institutions and stakeholders, and the general public" in the United States, China, and Australia. Its three objectives were to 1) show how coal could alleviate "the crisis of global energy poverty," 2) sway government policy to support "advanced coal technologies," and 3) promote technologies to further reduce "power plant emissions" (Peabody Energy Corporation, 2014, para. 2). By 2016, in the United States, there was clear evidence of high-level pro-coal political support. Comments made by the then Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump during a debate on energy policy signposted: "We need much more than wind and solar. . . There is a thing called clean coal. Coal will last for a thousand years in this country" (Fehrenbacher, 2016, para. 5).

This paper builds on previous research that explored the AEFL campaign reception in a 21st century Australian context, with particular reference to Twitter provocations from January 1, 2014, to January 1, 2016 (Demetrious, 2017). The research showed how the campaign's attempt to revive the clean coal trope by extending its context to end energy poverty mostly floundered in the Australian Twittersphere and was dismissed as a continuation of PR industry spin. Despite this dismissal, there was an anomalous spike in mentions of clean coal in early 2017 (Figure 1). Peak events that triggered the 2017 Twitter spike can be traced to July of the previous year when conservative coal industry supporter and federal Member of Parliament Josh Frydenberg became environment and energy minister in a new portfolio combining climate and energy. The tricky portfolio merger caused a level of agitation in public debate with concerns about the federal government's integrity in response to climate issues. Further embedding public debate about the energy policy, on September 28, 2016, the federal government vigorously maintained that abandoning base load power such as coal was foolish when in renewable dependent South Australia wild storms caused a blackout leaving 1.7 million residents without power. In another move that triggered debate, on February 3, 2017, it was reported that the federal government wanted an expansion of the so called green bank or Clean Energy Finance Corporation to subsidize, incubating a generation of more environmentally responsible coal-fired power stations. According to Ludlow and Potter (2017), "As the energy sector continued to pour cold water on the idea of any new coal-fired power stations being built in Australia, Resources Minister and Queensland-based MP Matt Canavan said he would consider using the $5 billion

Northern Australia Infrastructure Fund to help build new base-load power in North Queensland" (para. 2).

Colorful media theatrics to promote both sides of the clean coal divide were deployed capturing media attention. For example, federal treasurer Scott Morrison MP brought a lump of coal to parliament as a prop to make a political point about the working-class employment losses that renewables would engender. Pointing at the trade union backed opposition benches, Morrison said: "It's coal, it was dug up by men and women who work and live in the electorates of those who sit opposite" (Butler, 2017, para. 4). As a rebuttal, political performance collective ClimActs constructed the Clean Coal Fairy to parody the fanciful logic of clean coal:

> To unequivocally allay the doubts of any deniers out there, the Clean Coal Fairy™ has landed! As the latest in Australia's arsenal of clean coal commercialising technologies, the Clean Coal Fairy™ will solve global warming (real or imagined), save civilisation, as well as the profits of our beleaguered fossil fuel industry, and make Straya proud! (ClimActs, 2017, para. 2)

Again, on February 20, 2017, possible changes to green bank were mooted, reinforcing earlier concerns that the fund was being compromised:

> Coal-fired power stations could be eligible for funding from Australia's $10 billion green bank under changes being considered by the Turnbull government. . . in what would represent a significant weakening of the country's environmental financing rules, Energy Minister Josh Frydenberg confirmed the government is considering issuing a new ministerial directive to the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to put investment in so-called 'clean coal' on the table. (Gartrell, 2017, paras. 1-2)

Over February 2017, several newspaper articles and TV current affairs programs focused on clean coal and energy policy (Long, 2017; McHugh, 2017). At the same time, clean coal lobby groups were reported to be trying to "convince the Government to offer it subsidies, or as the industry prefers to call it, 'policy support'" (Iggulden, 2017, para. 12). Dynamically intersecting with this elevated media attention on energy policy over the period under review, another blackout in renewable-dependent South Australia occurred on February 8 when "on a day of extreme temperatures . . . power demand outstripped power supply" and according to an Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) official report, controversially affected 90,000 customers when excessive and unnecessary electricity load shedding occurred to manage the situation (Harmsen, 2017).

This study of the February 2017 Twitter spike invoking the AEFL campaign trope clean coal will be informed by an investigation of tweets and key hashtags that propelled the debate and an analysis of themes and ideas that were signified by the hashtags around the issue of clean coal, as well as speaking positions, under the period in review. There is limited research into how global public relations campaigns discursively interact with new communication tools such as Twitter and more educated, cynical, and contemporary publics. As such, the research provides a revised understanding of the effects of this complex and influential social medium and its possible impacts on public debate.

PR, publics, and neoliberalism

Global public relations campaigns such as Peabody's AEFL are designed to reach specific targeted publics to achieve campaign objectives. Tabling the adjunct idea of contemporary publics, Marshall (2016) discusses the changed digital conditions of the 21st century when direct public participation in media processes is distinct to other eras. Marshall says today's publics are "complex, immaterial entities that can attach and detach from territories, technologies, spaces and practices" (2016, p.10). This shift—from a group targeted for control, to a group that can exert control—together with new social practices linked to digital technologies, is significant for the changing tenor and locale of public opinion and its relationship to news on platforms such as social media.

The United States public relations and contemporary fossil fuel promotional campaigns such as Peabody's AEFL, can be ideologically situated within theories of neoliberalism (Peeples, Bsumek, Schwarze, & Schneider 2014; Schneider, Schwarze, Bsumek, & Peeples, 2016). According to Mirowski (2009), the neoliberal thought collective is characterized by a belief in the freedom to pursue a global agenda for capital expansion, a willingness for interventionism to facilitate this agenda, and an essentialist view of the market system as natural regulator of social order (pp. 29-31). In explaining how the neoliberal agenda has progressed in recent decades, Mirowski, Walker & Abboud (2013) point out:

> One reason neoliberals have triumphed over their ideological rivals is because they have ventured beyond a single "fix" for any given problem, instead deploying a broad spectrum of policies from the most expendable short-term expedients, to medium-term politics, to long-horizon utopian projects. While these may appear as distinct and contradictory policies, they are in fact integrated in such a way as to produce eventual capitulation to the free market. (p. 81)

Arguably, public relations performs an important discursive role in this multi-pronged approach by articulating to the wider neoliberal repertoire at play. Peeples et al. (2014) argue that in the United States, the coal industry rhetoric is not only designed to hegemonically further neoliberal ideals, such as wide-ranging free market ideology, but is "anti-environmental" (p. 9). Nonetheless, the AEFL campaign presents as ethical and in the public interest because the notion of clean coal is associated with a quest to alleviate global energy poverty. However, the idea of public interest communications is both a problematic and contested concept through which it "must be recognized that contemporary society is constructed from conflicting values and divergent interests, and therefore the public interest is always contingent in the sense that no one definition of the public interest can ever be viewed as final" (Ihlen et al., 2018, p.110). Drawing on these threads, the AEFL campaign can be conceptualized as a complex discursive site where capital, political intent, influence, and ideology intersect in a multi-layered communicative strategy working across international boundaries within new digital conditions that affect the dispositions of contemporary publics. As such, it is a volatile site of political meaning-making

and hegemonic struggle, active in shaping public opinion with the view to determining future energy policy in unusual and under-researched ways.

Coherence, performativity, and power: Twitter and making news

Central to this investigation of the clean coal trope in the 2017 Australian Twittersphere is its relevance and the significance of the medium to public debate and opinion formation. Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, and Welpe (2010) explored the extent to which Twitter was used as a source of political deliberation and opinion leadership in the German election in 2009 and found that "Twitter can be can be seen as a valid real-time indicator of political sentiment" (Tumasjan et al., 2010, p. 184). They note that their study was based on users who had similar demographics. "However, the fact that these well-educated users 'influence important actors within mainstream media who in turn frame issues for a wider public' (Farrell & Drezner, 2007, p. 29) warrants special attention to Twitter as a source of opinion leadership" (Tumasjan et al., 2010, p. 184).

Further to this situation, the demographic profile of Australian Twitter users is more significant than the uptake and usage metrics suggest. Although overall Twitter remains less popular than other social networking sites such as Facebook, Sensis data for 2016 shows that it is the favorite social media site for media content including news at 33%, compared to Facebook at 6%. Twitter is also considered the favorite platform for global reach at 14% compared to Facebook's 6%. Similarly, it ranks higher as a favorite than Facebook for forum/issue discussion at 8% compared to 4% (Sensis, 2016, p. 25). These data support the views of Revers (2014) who argues that "journalists are drawn to the drama of instantaneity that unfolds on Twitter" (p. 5). Therefore, although Twitter cannot claim to have access to the largest slice of the social media browsing constituency, it can claim to be the site that members of that constituency go to for news-values related activity, including discussion.

Given Twitter's journalistic affordances and access to social media users wishing to engage with news-related content and activity, it is relevant to shed light on the social identity and relative power of Twitter users. According to Roy Morgan Research, Australian Twitter usage "is demographically skewed to the younger, urban, early adopting, well-educated and, slightly, to men,"[1] which broadly correlate to "its global audience" (Morgan, 2016, para. 3). Based on the 2016 census data, this Twitter user profile can be compared to the average Australian profile as

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[1] Usage declines with age. Australian 14-24-year-olds are twice as likely to use Twitter in an average month (38%) as those 50+ (19%). Thirty percent of men use Twitter, which is slightly more than 26% of women. Although 30% of capital city residents use Twitter, just 23% of people in rural areas do. Greens voters (half of whom are capital city residents under 50) are, therefore, the most likely voters to use Twitter (35%), ahead of 29% of Australian Labor Party (ALP) voters, 23% of Liberal voters, and just 16% of National voters. Those with a higher education are more likely to use Twitter: 39% of Australians with a postgraduate degree, compared with 34% of those with an undergraduate degree, 27% of high school graduates, and 20% of people with less than a high school degree. Geographically, Twitter usage is highest in Melbourne (32%), ahead of Sydney (30%) and Perth (30%).

female, in a registered marriage with two children, living in a three-bedroom house that has a mortgage, and high school educated. This discrepancy suggests that the average Australian Twitter user is demographically distinct from the average Australian, by virtue of his or her younger age, urban location, and stronger green political views (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017). The significance of this difference is compounded by the microblogging site as the preferred social media platform to engage with news and news-related discussion for journalists and opinion leadership (Revers, 2014) and suggests that the Twitter using demographic has a disproportionate influence on the construction and framing of news (Tumasjan et al., 2010).

Transformation and adaptation: PR tropes and Twitter

This study of the AEFL campaign and its reception on Twitter over the period of February 15— 25, 2017, will apply a discourse analysis of statements related to clean coal on Twitter to develop an understanding of how influential the tweets were or how the campaign may be linked to relations of power, corporate persuasion, and public opinion. While discourse analysis is a vast area of scholarship with competing traditions, Fairclough's (1992) critical discourse analysis sheds light on the concept of intertextuality and how it hybridizes and transforms textual meanings. He defines intertextuality as "the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 84). He argues that this concept is useful in understanding how texts move along or transform from one site to another, such as when a political speech is distributed into media such as television and then into homes through the six o'clock news and then into discussion around the dinner table (Fairclough, 1992). Although predating Web 2.0 developments in 2004, Fairclough's notions of intertextuality are conceptually relevant in analyzing how statements interact with the microblogging site Twitter in an era of digitization when the "despatialization of production practices" may affect "interpersonal relationships and their replacement by technologically mediated relations" (Revers, 2014, p. 3). For Fairclough (1992), intertextuality is a subtle effect where various discourses are often absorbed unconsciously by the reader. He argues that it comes in two forms: manifest intertextuality—where specific texts occur in a text such as a quote and interdiscursivity—where orders of discourse are drawn on to constitute the text from discourse and text types or conventions such as genres, discourses, and narratives. Bringing these ideas into the social media era, Davis (2013) argues: "Twitter's unique intertextuality contains the potential for spurring widespread political activism by encouraging voices from all echelons of society to be heard" (pp. 16-17). However, as noted, other studies have found that small groups of users with similar demographics on Twitter can exercise disproportionate influence because it is a preferred source for journalists (Revers 2014; Tumasjan et al., 2010). Therefore, discourse mapping, drawing on the concept of intertextuality and examining its capacity to open or close

public debate, will be used to understand the normative relationship of contemporary publics to the AEFL campaign in the context of the Australian energy public debate.

This paper focuses on an intense node of communicative activity in the February 2017 Australian Twittersphere. During this time, there was a spike in volume and the patterns of tweeting, drawing on data, using clean coal as a key search term. A period of volatile engagement was intensively profiled from February 15-25. The data were profiled using the software program Tableau and select periods of time were targeted either due to high levels of engagement or key events in the course of the campaign. The Tableau data provided evidence of prominent hashtags that were reviewed to inform an understanding of the greater themes signified around the issue of coal. In addition, a data set of tweets and retweets that contained examples of manifest intertextuality (e.g., presented in quotation marks, as hashtags, or as web hyperlinks such as Bitly) was analyzed.

The data were analyzed in relation to these questions: a) What peak events triggered the 2017 spike in engagement around the AEFL trope clean coal in the Australian Twittersphere?; b) What tweets engaging with the AEFL trope clean coal were retweeted and why?; and c) What meanings and social themes emerged that shaped the overall tenor and influence of the public debate?

Twitter data for this research were accessed through Tracking Infrastructure for Social Media Analysis (TrISMA). TrISMA is a cross-institutional project funded through an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage, Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities (LEIF) grant that "establishes a powerful new framework for tracking, storing, and processing the public social media communication activities of Australian users at very large scale and in close to real time" (Bruns et al., 2016, para. 2). These data were curated to incorporate all Australian-based Twitter accounts active in 2016, retrieving archival activity from 2008 to present activity in 2017.

Although all information used for this study is in the public domain, as part of my ethical approach to digital data collection, I chose not to identify some account holders. Therefore, generally, I de-identified Twitter account screen names or handles and replaced some words within the tweets to impede searchability. The exception to this was high-profile individuals experienced in public debates, such as news commentators, politicians, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

New clean* coal in Australia—Who do you believe?

In reporting on the use and impact of the AEFL campaign trope from the February 15-25, 2017, Twitter spike, the research found that clean coal was used intertextually 7,635 times. The study found that a majority of tweets referring to clean coal were retweets or reshares rather than original-generated content. The most frequently mentioned accounts with the most retweeting and reposting within the discussion were progressive, left, or left leaning political accounts: @MarkDiStef (Buzzfeed), @JayWeatherill (Australian Labor Party), @samregester (GetUp, an

Australian left-wing political lobby group), @JohnWren1950[2] (ALP leaning) and @markdreyfusQCMP (ALP). These accounts were scrutinized for their potential to generate content in defining the debate, and it was found that although they were credible and influential, they were not consistently amplified over the period of analysis, but rather retweeted at specific times (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. Top 5 most retweeted accounts during the February 15-25, 2017 timeframe.
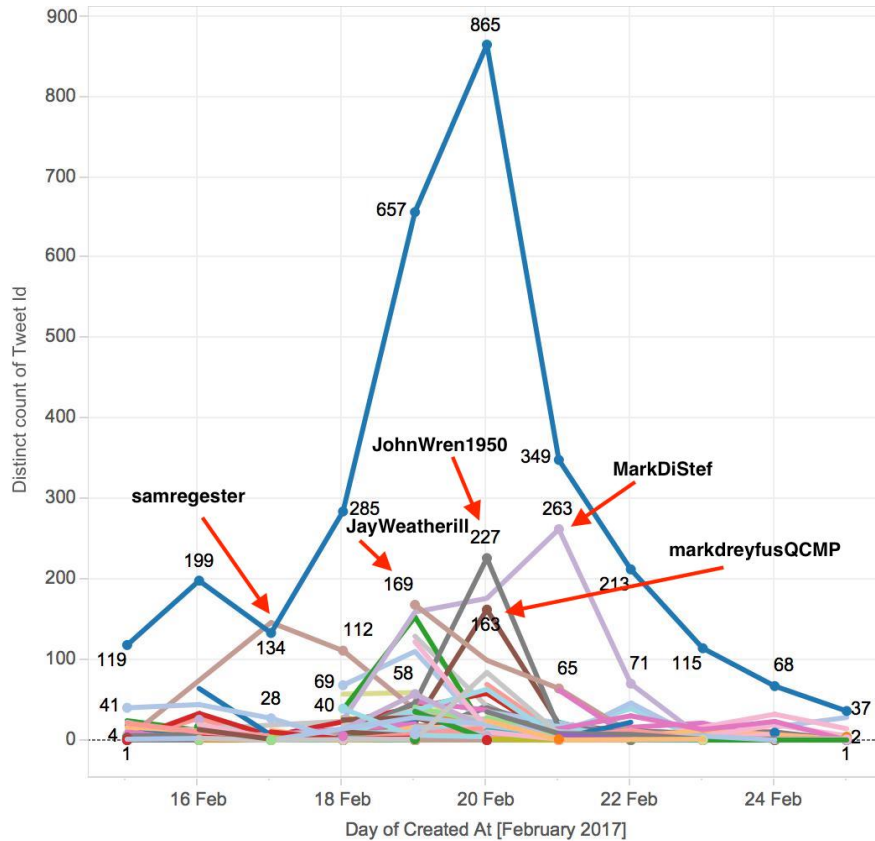
The trend of distinct count of Tweet Id for Created At Day. Color shows details about retweetee. The marks are labeled by distinct count of Tweet Id. The data is filtered on clean coal, Created At Month and Created At Day. The clean coal filter keeps True. The Created At Month filter keeps January 2017, February 2017 and March 2017. The Created At Day filter keeps 11 members.

Most of the top tweets had a satirical flavor or were ironic in attempting to reveal the contradictions of clean coal. This satire or irony was achieved by taking the flawed logic a step further and, for example, comparing it with the oxymoronic notion of clean cigarettes or green coal. Others were more outright disparaging in tone. Hyper or Bitly links to other institutional sites included: left-wing think tank The Australia Institute's satirical graphic titled 'New clean*

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[22] @JohnWren1950 is a fictional account based on a historical inner-Melbourne underworld and business identity who died in 1953.

coal in Australia—Who do you believe?'; the *Sydney Morning Herald*; a hashtag to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) political analysis show *Insiders*; and a video clip discussing clean coal from the 2008 ABC political satire focusing on PR and spin, *The Hollowmen*. The words Clean Coal Fairy associated with the ClimActs publicity stunt were identified in 61 tweets.

Peak events for engagement were February 16, 18-19, and 20-21. These days coincided with the release of a report by the Australian Energy Market Operator on February 15, discussing the blackout in South Australia on February 8 and the problems with intermittent renewal supply.

Figure 2. The most amplified accounts within the clean coal discussion during the Februrary 15-25, 2017 timeframe.
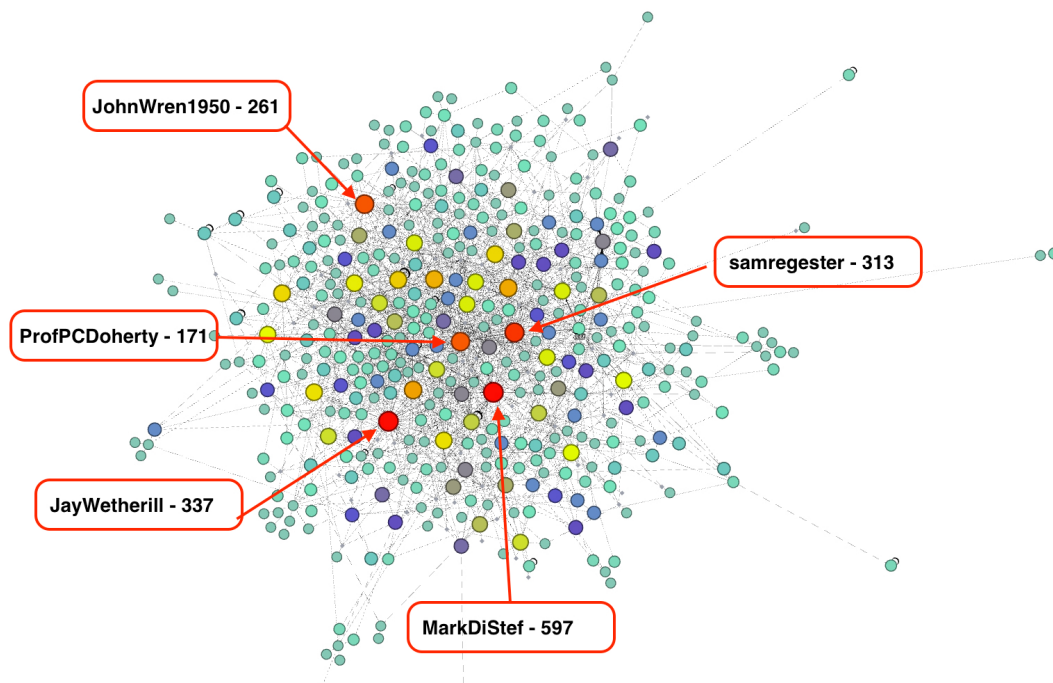
Proposed changes to the so called green bank, or the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, to include subsidies for coal were the dominant driver for other clean-coal-related discussion. Cross-checking of the transcript showed that the February 16 spike was largely due to media reports and much of this activity was associated backlash to the Turnbull government and Josh Frydenberg's mooted changes to subsidize coal as clean energy. In addition, there was a general debunking of the clean coal idea featured on ABC's *Insiders* program on February 19. Over February 18-19, further momentum built propelled by ABC's weekday current affairs program *7.30*, which reported on energy policy and the idea of clean coal. Seventy-nine tweets with the hashtag #abc730 were identified. For example:

> RT @Twitter user 1: LOL. That #abc730 piece on clean coal just made a complete
> mockery of Turnbull's clean coal crock. Well done all involved.

Similarly, on February 19, the program *Insiders* was referenced by hashtag 398 times, in particular when host Barrie Cassidy interviewed Josh Frydenberg, the environment and energy minister. Less contemporaneous material also was evident. On February 20 @MarkDiStef posted a tweet which gained traction that referred to a Minerals Council of Australia television commercial, published several years earlier YouTube:

> @MarkDiStef Incredible. Coal industry spent money for 'clean coal' research on ad
> campaign called 'COAL IS AN AMAZING THING' t.co/RZLAUZLoUW

In total, there were 99 tweets satirically denouncing "COAL IS AN AMAZING THING," a number demonstrating the contemporary public's predilection for drawing out the irony of PR tropes such as clean coal. Over the period in review, 2,140 tweets hashtagged #auspol, the Australian political discussion site (Bruns, 2017, p. 3). Although pejorative references to corporate spin and the rise of right-wing politics were readily evident, an occasional attempt to break down the polarization and reference to a wider group of institutional sites also was apparent. For example: @Twitter user 2@account Great stuff Jenny. A just transition for coal ind[3] workers must also be part of plan. #CleantechFuture #auspol. However, in total, the word worker was used only nine times over the period under review.

In summary, the research of Twitter activity showed an abundance of left leaning conversations about energy policy and the need for further investment in renewables as well as the need to abandon coal as an energy source, and within this discourse there was ample talk of shutting down coal mines. Tweets often were propelled by links to a handful of key accounts, self-reinforcing hashtags and Bitly links to key media sources and left leaning policy institutions. The data suggested a preoccupation by contemporary publics to expose and satirically deconstruct the discursive hegemonic properties of clean coal as a PR trope, but although thematically relevant, there was little reflection about what may happen to the people who work there or the regions that depend on the economic stimulus of mining.

Twitter, PR, and the impact of aggregated discontent

The Twitter explosion during the February period was sparked by a confluence of events, including the capacity of the national electricity grid in light of the second round of blackouts in South Australia, the AEMO report into the cause of the blackout, media stunts such as the lump of coal, and the federal government's mooted change to the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to include a subsidy for coal, as well as intense media coverage of political discussion invoking either the idea of or the trope clean coal. This research shows that the Twitter debate around clean coal was dominated by a handful of key accounts facilitated through retweeting and

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[3] ind refers to industry.

sharing. The tenor of the debate was mocking and satirical and focused narrowly on a limited repertoire of discursive sites and strategies.

Since 2014, the AEFL campaign has worked to elevate the key campaign tropes of clean coal to end energy poverty in public discourse (Peabody Energy Corporation, 2014, para. 1). Although criticized as oxymoronic, the public relations trope has nonetheless successfully worked its way into Australian public debate on energy policy, intensifying over the 2017 period. This peak in Twitter discussions about clean coal suggests a win for the AEFL campaign, but an examination of the tweeting behavior and content shows that the majority of the tweeters focused on the negative aspects of coal. Despite this negativity, the increase in clean-coal-related discussion entrenches the idea and can counterproductively create a level of legitimacy for the public relations trope and its associated ideals. This situation was created by Twitter-using progressives who were focused on a counterhegemonic exposé of clean coal. By applying their rhetorical powers to clever ridicule, they ignored other real-world issues that affect the communities most impacted by mining closures and contributed to the ideological divide. Although not ideal, this situation could be interpreted as an adequate outcome for the AEFL campaign objectives.

The speaking positions Twitter privileges are urban-dwelling, younger, politically left or green, mostly male, and well-educated, so this group is unlikely to be affected by the economic restructuring of the coal industry (Morgan, 2016). This distortion toward a particular sector in public debate has particular significance and is also evident in the findings of Tumasjan et al. (2010) who argued that although Twitter was an important site of opinion leadership and indicator of political sentiment, the discussion was limited by, and at the same time skewed by, the similar demographics of its users. The data in this study support this argument, showing that the key accounts retweeted all had left or progressive agendas, which had the effect of fortifying the exclusivity of the Twitter discussion. Indeed, the most retweeted account was (@MarkDiStef) of independent online news organization BuzzFeed which is geared towards millennial preferences by "leveraging data and innovation to reach hundreds of millions of people globally … for a more authentic audience engagement" (BuzzFeed, 2019, para. 1). The hashtag #auspol was used extensively in the discussion but its prevalence also reinforces the exclusivity of Twitter. According to Bruns (2017), and in relation to #auspol: "There are a handful of very active users, which I would number 200 to 300 or so, who are using the hashtag to engage with each other. . . debating with each other, talking to each other about Australian politics" (Ariel, 2016, para. 15). This pattern suggests contemporary publics using Twitter share exclusive demographics that influence the trajectory of left or green debates through a disproportionate ability to frame and set news agendas.

Bearing in mind the ideas of Mirowski et al. (2013, p. 81) concerning the likelihood of a multi-pronged neoliberal strategic approach to triumph over ideological rivals, it would appear that although the high-stakes Peabody Energy AEFL corporate public relations campaign trope clean coal may have been delegitimized to some extent by the Twitter discussion, on the other hand, it has been successful in silencing alternatives. By doing so, and on balance, it has

advanced the neoliberal agenda (Mercer et al., 2014). In this debate, despatialized contemporary publics formed online affirmations with a few key accounts (Marshall, 2016), producing little original content and mostly resharing and retweeting. These technologically mediated relations deployed a range of intertextual features such as quotes and hyper and Bitly-style links as well as hashtags, which mapped out the boundaries of the discussion within a limited range of choices and propelled these tweets to form the spike (Fairclough, 1992; Revers, 2014). Much of the content on Twitter displayed a preference to select satire and mockery as a dominant discursive mode to engage with political debate. In this mode, the Twitter discussion fixated on being clever, exposing the oxymoronic elements of clean coal and promoting or running down institutional sites, but absent was a focus on the new realities for the workers and regional communities impacted by economic restructuring. This example also showed Twitter's limitations in expanding the discursive boundaries of public debate about energy policy. This finding is at odds with Davis (2013) who argued that Twitter's potential for intertextuality opens up debate more broadly in society. In this case, the opposite was true. The trope clean coal was incendiary throughout the Twitter discussion under review. An effect was that the trope drew the oxygen out of the debate and allowed two distinct groups to emerge based on class and demographic divides with greater potential for political exploitation. While unintended, this situation had the effect of constricting the scope of the public discussions and advantaging the AEFL campaign. Arguably, the neoliberal AEFL campaign is ideological and therefore it is possible for it to work by muting alternative discussion, even when the campaign is ostensibly not working (Mirowski et al., 2013). Although unintended, the repeated performative mocking and satirical statements of the Twitter debate created dispositions focused on a limited repertoire of ideas and avoided issues affecting the everyday lives of those involved more directly.

The satiric tenor of the Twitter discussion around clean coal can be explained in part by Raisborough and Adams (2008, p. 2) who argue that cultural hegemony works through mockery and "it befits an audience more consciously liberal, tolerant, and ironic, and perhaps polite" (2008, p. 6). This argument is validated by the demographic trends for Twitter users that have been discussed so far. This lack of attention to real-world impacts from middle classes for affected working communities was evident in a study by Pini, Mayes, and McDonald (2010). They investigated media reporting of the Western Australia Ravensthorpe nickel mine closure and found:

> The moral and emotional imperatives of class are clearly conveyed in the media treatment of 'miner.' While unemployed without notice, these people are not worthy or deserving of positive emotional responses such as sympathy or understanding for they are deemed avaricious and vulgar. (Pini et al., 2010, p. 563)

Similarly, in a study of middle-class attitudes toward the changing fortunes of miners at the demise of the resource boom in Australia, Pini, McDonald, and Mayes (2012) discussed how "mockery distances elites from the working class via an expression of disgust" (p. 46)

An underlying class divide in the public debate about clean coal was evident in the federal treasurer's Scott Morrison's remark in parliament accompanying his lump of coal stunt when he

said, "It's coal, it was dug up by men and women who work and live in the electorates of those who sit opposite" (Butler, 2017, para. 4), and the rebuttal by ClimActs clean coal fairy "to make Straya proud!"[4] According to Vincent (2015, para. 13), the word "Straya" "plays directly to the Aussie Aussie Aussie, Oi Oi Oi bogan brigade, who will no doubt drape themselves in the flag again on January 26." Arguably, the idea of bogans connotes anti-environmental, xenophobic working-class nationalists (Demetrious, 2016). Use of the term bogans suggests that the progressive contemporary publics participating in the Twitter debate around clean coal are intertextually invoking a pejorative term used to identify a social grouping of low status Australians. Inflected with disgust, the deployment of this term shows the Twitter users posting about clean coal are emotionally distant from working class issues, despite identifying with a left leaning, progressive political orientation. Therefore, in their aggregated form, the tweeting patterns discussed so far show how several elements, including the shifting cultural dispositions of Twitter users and technological affordances such as retweets, shares, and Bitly links, work to unconsciously propel the AELF public relations trope clean coal into contemporary public debate, keeping it alive.

In general, the Twitter discussion that surrounded clean coal was produced by demographically left leaning or green users who showed little inclination to canvas long-term issues of adversity should coal mining cease and instead was highly reactive to current events. This emphasis has the potential to skew the overall public debate and overlook hardship issues for miners, families, and communities affected should mining cease. This situation also could have the effect of polarizing the ongoing debate more broadly in ways that create social division and inertia, if, as discussed by Hopke (2015), "Twitter serves to bolster in-group affirmation" (p. 11). This in-group affirmation together with the emotional and partisan tenor of the debate had a narrowing effect, which could have long-term social consequences for the resolution of complex public debates such as the future of the coal industry and energy policy. As such, Twitter may be counter-productive to left and green causes and actually advantage corporate campaigns such as the AEFL. Therefore, any analysis should not ignore what Hopke (2015) describes as Twitter's "function as a performative, identity-building space, more than as a means to reach external audiences" (p. 2). Given this reality, future investigations into the role and relationship of Twitter users and public debate could consider uncritical "interpretive assumptions" in the data (Bruns, 2017, p. 2). This consideration could lead to an understanding of the less visible discursive political potential working through Twitter activity and greater recognition of how corporate discourses may be colonizing the idea of public interest communications (Ihlen et al., 2018).

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[4] The word Straya is an abbreviation for Australia.

Conclusion

This paper is a critical study of the AEFL global PR campaign at work in the Twittersphere in Australia and its reception by contemporary publics. It examines the transmogrification of the clean coal trope within these conditions and the impacts of tweets linked to a compelling political debate. A study of the social and cultural limitations of Twitter has revealed how it may in turn generate relationships among contemporary publics that unintentionally reinforce fixed binary identities and political meanings. Future research paying attention to neoliberalist public relations activities working in their contemporary settings such as Twitter and their unintended consequences could work to provide greater clarity in understanding the impasses, divisions, and confusion that sometimes characterize critical public debates.

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Electronic Cigarette Companies' Twitter Messages: Public Interest (Mis)communication

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Article Information	Abstract
	Despite increased controversies over the health effects of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes), little is known about how the public interest issue has been discussed by e-cigarette companies on social media. Using arguments from the theory of planned behavior as a guide, this study examines how e-cigarette companies engage with potential customers on Twitter. Using quantitative content analysis, this study examined 525 tweets from the top five e-cigarette companies that occurred between July 9, 2016, and September 9, 2016, one month before and after the U.S Food and Drug Administration implemented a new regulation limiting sales and distribution of tobacco products to minors. Results indicate that the deeming did not affect e-cigarette companies' message strategies on Twitter. Theoretical and practical applications for public interest communications are discussed.

Introduction

A growing scholarly interest in strategic communications and social causes has resulted in the emerging field of public interest communications, which seeks to increase positive behavioral changes in public interest issues (Fessmann, 2017). Health communications is a particularly important area of public interest communications (Demetrious, 2017; Downes, 2017). As such, researchers have examined some companies' efforts to change consumers' attitudes toward products that impact their heath (Dixon, Scully, Wakefield, White, & Crawford, 2007). Results,

however, have not always had the desired behavioral outcome. For example, Wagner and Sundar (2008) found that anti-drug campaigns designed to reduce teenagers' illicit drug use instead increased participants' curiosity about drug use.

For decades, research has shown that exposure to cigarette advertisements can lead to misperceptions about the danger of smoking cigarettes (Dube, Arrazola, Lee, Engstrom, & Malarcher, 2013). For example, the creation of "low tar" cigarettes was touted by the American Cancer Society in the 1970s as a healthier cigarette (Rodu, 2016). Electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) companies have followed suit by promoting their products as a healthier choice than regular cigarettes and as a socially acceptable product (Grana & Ling, 2014). Nevertheless, despite the companies' best efforts, e-cigarettes remain controversial. Is "vaping" another recreational endeavor for tobacco smokers? Or is it a cessation device that can help smokers make a permanent behavioral change and quit smoking?

These contrary communication messages have been overt on Twitter. While companies like Outbrain and Taboola have revolutionized paid content on traditional news sites through native advertising initiatives, e-cigarette companies have taken it upon themselves to promote their products directly to consumers via original and retweeted tweets—even while the FDA considers whether e-cigarettes are a public health threat and need extra regulation, particularly in their public communication strategies.

E-cigarette companies have employed sophisticated messages that are ambiguous and often conflicting (Cole-Lewis et al., 2015). Initially regulated only loosely, the e-cigarette industry has recently experienced increased restrictions. A major change occurred on August 8, 2016, when new regulations were set in motion to regulate how e-cigarette companies could communicate to potential consumers. It is not clear how marketers have viewed and understood these restrictions within the social media space. However, a growing number of researchers have begun to argue that e-cigarette marketing on social media has not been closely monitored or regulated (Phua, Jin & Hahm, 2017).

Despite increasing regulatory efforts to prevent e-cigarette companies from promoting their products, social media could be a place to get around such policies, and thus harm public health (Vance, Howe, & Dellavalle, 2009). Therefore, this study seeks to better understand this conundrum. Given the proliferation of social media content created by e-cigarette companies, this study focuses on how the top five e-cigarette companies have used Twitter as strategic communication. Using quantitative content analysis, this study examined 525 tweets that occurred between July 9, 2016, and September 9, 2016.

Literature review

E-cigarettes are battery-powered devices that contain varying amounts of nicotine, propylene glycol, and flavorings (Grana, Benowitz, & Glantz, 2014). Awareness and use of e-cigarettes in the United States have skyrocketed in the past few years (Huang, Kornfield, Szczypka, & Emery,

2014; Lazard, Saffer, Wilcox, Chung, Mackert, & Bernhardt, 2016). In particular, Mantey Cooper, Clendennen, Pasch, & Perry, 2016) noted e-cigarettes are now the most popular tobacco products for American young adults. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of adolescents who used e-cigarettes exceeded those who smoked tobacco cigarettes in 2014 (Rifkin, 2015). Despite the widespread use of e-cigarettes, the potential health effects (healthy or harmful) remain contested. For example, D'Ruiz, Graff, and Robinson (2016) found that smokers who completely or partially replaced smoking with vaping e-cigarettes over five days were less likely to expose themselves to harmful smoke toxicants. However, other studies demonstrated that there was no clear relationship between the use of e-cigarettes and smoking cessation (Grana, Popova, & Ling, 2014).

Researchers have found that e-cigarettes contain toxicants, such as acetone, isoprene, and nicotine (Schripp, Markewitz, Uhde, & Salthammer, 2013). Although some e-cigarette products do not contain nicotine, Krishnan-Sarin, Morean, Camenga, Cavallo, and Kong's (2014) study found the use of such products significantly increased users' exposure to propylene glycol and glycerol. Despite the general view that these substances are safe, the researchers pointed out that these products should be closely assessed to inform regulations because there is insufficient evidence supporting these substances as safe when inhaled through e-cigarette vapor rather than ingested, such as in food.

Researchers have found no clear relationship between the use of e-cigarettes and smoking cessation (Grana, Popova, & Ling, 2014). Rather, studies have shown that e-cigarettes have the potential to increase tobacco cigarette use by renormalizing smoking by completely reducing individuals' motivation to quit smoking (Hajek, Etter, Benowitz, Eissenberg, & McRobbie, 2014). Furthermore, researchers and health advocates have shown concerns about youth and young adults' use of e-cigarettes by pointing out that using e-cigarettes could lead them to experiment with other tobacco products (Bahl, Lin, Xu, Davis, Wang, & Talbot, 2012).

Theory of planned behavior

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) expands on Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) theory of reasoned action by aiming to "predict and explain behaviors that are not under the volitional control of the actor" (Hale, Householder, & Greene, 2002, p. 277). Ajzen (2005) asserts that the theory of planned behavior is based on intentions. That is, "a person's intention to perform (or not to perform) a behavior is the most important immediate determinant of that action" (p. 118). The theory of planned behavior adds a new element by considering perceived behavioral control as a factor that predicts behaviors. This concept originates from Bandura's (1978) social learning theory (SLT), which argues that subjects can learn about something simply by observing the phenomena.

TPB has been tested with the various context of individuals' health behavior such as e-cigarette use (Cooper, Case, Loukas, Creamer, & Perry, 2016), smoking (Harakeh, Scholte, Vermulst, de Vries, & Engels, 2004), and smoking cessation (Moan & Rise, 2006). Cooper et al.

(2016) found that individuals are more likely to use e-cigarettes when they perceive lower levels of harm from e-cigarettes and higher levels of peer use of e-cigarettes. SCT posits that individuals' outcome expectations from a particular behavior are continually influenced by their own experience and observation of the consequence of others' behaviors (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). In particular, scholars have investigated how the media affect individuals' health behaviors by stimulating social and cultural changes regarding certain health behavior (Yanovitzky & Stryker, 2001). Numerous studies have shown that individuals' exposure to cigarette advertisements attenuates their perceived harm of tobacco product use (Emery et al., 2005). In particular, researchers have argued that promoting e-cigarettes as a safer alternative to combustible cigarettes increase young adults' e-cigarette use (Pokhrel, Fagan, Kehl, & Herzog, 2015).

While often applied to the content of television shows (Paredes, Cantu, & Graf, 2013; Starr & Ferguson, 2012), SLT also helps explain the content of social media including Twitter messaging. For example, Moreno and Whitehill (2014) argued that adolescents were influenced by the content they observed about alcohol on Twitter and Facebook. The researchers argued that social media provides a potentially more influential experience than traditional media because the audience can easily choose particular content that most interests them. Likes, retweets, and quoted retweets are all ways that Twitter content producers can encourage their potential customers to not only learn about their products, but engage with the messages, and ultimately, think more favorably toward the particular product and brand. When combined with the Theory of Planned Behavior, it is possible to understand companies' messages on Twitter as a first step toward moving a behavioral outcome. Being exposed to content that encourages a type of outcomes behavior (product trial, for example) has important ramifications for the success (or lack thereof) of a public strategic information campaign.

Over the years, research has consistently shown that positive messages about cigarettes, such as smoking in movies, increases adolescent smoking initiation (Choi, Ahluwalia, Harris, & Okuyemi, 2002; Dalton et al., 2003). Villanti, Boulay, and Juon (2011) found that adolescents' exposure to tobacco advertising was positively associated with former and current smoking behaviors. Researchers have also linked exposure to tobacco advertising with adolescents' smoking initiation (e.g., Akers & Lee, 1996; Villanti et al., 2011).

While previous studies have investigated how tobacco products have been presented in the media and the potential impact of exposure to such media content on adolescents, little is known about how e-cigarettes, specifically, are presented via social media as strategic communication. Strategic communication refers to an organization's purposeful use of communication to advance its mission including different communication management, such as marketing communication and public relations (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, Van Ruler, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2007). More specifically, strategic communication aims to maximize the desired effects by delivering deliberate messages through the most effective media channels to target publics (Plowman & Wilson, 2018). Researchers have found that organizations incorporate social media into their communication strategies to increase the public's engagement (Linke & Zerfass, 2012). For

instance, researchers have examined the impact of social media message interactivity on consumers' purchase intention (Ott, Vafeiadis, Kumble, & Waddell, 2016) and the relationship between non-profit organizations' social media use and their stakeholders' intention to support the organization via volunteering and donation (Pressgrove & Pardun, 2016). Regarding e-cigarette companies' strategic communication via social media, researchers have found that e-cigarette companies use social media to fulfill various objectives, such as advertising their products (Vandewater et al., 2018) and advocating e-cigarette use (Harris, Moreland-Russell, Choucair, Mansour, Staub, & Simmons, 2014). Therefore, there is a need for more scholarly investigations in this area of research. Given Twitter's capacities to disseminate messages to a large number of audiences, e-cigarette companies and Twitter users who advocate e-cigarette use have actively engaged in Twitter conversations (Chu et al., 2015).

Electronic cigarettes and social media marketing

Researchers have found that social media has become a popular platform to find information about e-cigarettes in recent years (Clark et al., 2015; Lazard et al., 2016; Salloum, Osman, Maziak, & Thrasher, 2015). Studies have revealed that social media users are vulnerable to e-cigarette content (Link, Cawkwell, Shelley, & Sherman, 2015; Mackey, Miner, & Cuomo, 2015). Others have explored various aspects of e-cigarette advertisements: the number of product brands; presence of flavors, levels of nicotine in the products and other ingredients; product claims; description of health-related benefits; volume and topic areas/themes of online marketing; assessing characteristics of online banner/video advertisement; and examining the relationships between affiliate networks and Internet vendors (Cobb, Byron, Abrams, & Shields, 2010; Grana & Ling, 2014; Richardson, Ganz, & Vallone, 2014).

In addition, research has indicated that this increased attention is raising concerns about the potential dangers of e-cigarettes such as finding that exposure to online e-cigarette messages is associated with individuals' intention to try e-cigarettes (e.g., Krishnan-Sarin et al., 2014). Trtchounian and Talbot (2011) argued that e-cigarette online promotion has contained unsubstantiated health claims and erroneous nicotine content labeling. Despite the increasing concerns about e-cigarette social media content, however, little is known about how e-cigarette companies actually use social media to engage with their potential customers.

Due to the increased concern about e-cigarette companies' marketing strategies targeting tobacco cigarette users and nonsmokers, the FDA implemented a comprehensive regulation on e-cigarette companies' marketing in 2016. In the midst of the controversy surrounding the potential health risks of e-cigarette use, calls for increased regulation of this little-understood product led to the FDA's "deeming rule" of August 8, 2016, which allowed the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (2016) to prohibit e-cigarette manufacturers and retailers from selling e-cigarette products to minors. As a result, electronic nicotine delivery systems, such as e-cigarettes, vaporizers, and hookah pens, became regulated by the FDA as combustible tobacco products. In particular, since August 8, 2016, e-cigarette companies have been prohibited from promoting

their products as not harmful or as less harmful than tobacco cigarette products unless they have acquired scientific evidence that demonstrates such effects, approved by the FDA. In addition, e-cigarette companies are prohibited from distributing free samples (U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2016), as tobacco cigarette companies are. Also, as of August 8, 2018, e-cigarette companies are now required to have nicotine addictiveness warning statements on their products or in advertisements.

Despite the implementation of the deeming rule of 2016, social media marketing has not been closely monitored and regulated by the government (Freeman, 2012; Vance, Howe, & Dellavalle, 2009). Researchers have found that adolescents' exposure to tobacco-related social media content is positively associated with their susceptibility to e-cigarette and combustible tobacco product use (Hébert, Case, Kelder, Delk, Perry, & Harrell, 2017). Given the lack of systematic research about e-cigarette companies' social media use as strategic communication, this exploratory research focuses on the following research question:

RQ1: How do e-cigarette companies present e-cigarettes on Twitter?

Critics of e-cigarettes are quick to associate them with tobacco products and, as such, assume the products are unhealthy and that they require regulations to limit both product sales and the advertising that encourages sales. While the regulation of tobacco cigarette advertising remains somewhat controversial, the majority of studies have argued that the advertising of tobacco cigarettes significantly increases the initiation of smoking (Biener & Siegel, 2000). Even so, tobacco companies have continually argued for the right to promote their products. For example, Hoefges (2013) showed that tobacco companies challenged regulations on tobacco advertising such as the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Act.

The Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) of November 1998 prohibited tobacco companies from targeting youths in marketing (Hamilton, Turner-Bowker, Celebucki, & Connolly, 2002). This historic ruling yielded some important research studies that examined its effect on subsequent tobacco use as well as the change in messaging before and after the agreement. Hamilton et al. (2002) investigated the impact of the MSA on tobacco companies' targeting youths in marketing. The researchers found that the expenditures on cigarette advertisements in national magazines with substantial youth readership increased after the MSA was implemented, whereas the expenditures decreased after the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids heavily publicized that cigarette advertising in publications with high youth readership had significantly increased after the implementation of the MSA.

Baek and Mayer (2010) content-analyzed 657 cigarette advertisements from 1994 to 2003 to examine the impact of the MSA on the sexual imagery in cigarette magazine advertisements. The results of Baek and Mayer's (2010) study indicated that the cigarette advertisements containing visual sexual imagery more frequently appeared in the post-MSA period compared to the pre-MSA period. Chung, Garfield, Rathouz, Lauderdale, Best, and Lantos (2002) examined how the MSA influenced youth targeting in magazine cigarette advertisements. The results of the study

revealed that the three major manufacturers did not comply with the banning of youth-targeting advertising implemented by the MSA.

Due to the prevalence of pro-smoking messages in the media and the potential influence on publics, substantial scholarly attention has been paid to cigarette-related product advertising (King & Siegel, 2001). The potential for similar messaging for e-cigarettes may also yield future research and thus connect the impact of both the MSA as well as the recent deeming. Social media enables e-cigarette companies to promote their products and interact with potential customers beyond advertising (Vandewater et al., 2018). Given the lack of systematic research about e-cigarette companies' message strategies on social media, this exploratory study focuses on two additional research questions:

RQ2: How has the FDA deeming rule of August 8, 2016, impacted e-cigarette companies' messages on Twitter?

RQ3: How have e-cigarette companies employed strategic communication strategies that are prohibited for tobacco product advertisements?

Method

Research design

To investigate e-cigarette companies' communication strategies on Twitter, this study examined 525 tweets that appeared on five e-cigarette companies' Twitter accounts between July 9, 2016, and September 9, 2016. To obtain representative samples of e-cigarette companies in the United States, the researchers investigated the lists of popular e-cigarette companies from e-cigarette review websites (e.g., vapingdaily.com and ecigarettereviewed.com) and then cross-checked whether the companies that appeared on the lists were popular among e-cigarette users. The initial search included 10 companies, which have a variety in terms of brands, such as United States-based companies (e.g., Volcano) and brands owned by large tobacco companies (e.g., Blu, which is owned by Imperial Brands). Most companies that appeared in such websites had been examined in previous studies (e.g., Huang et al., 2016; Luo, Zheng, Zeng, & Leischow, 2014) due to their active use of social media. However, of the 10 companies that were identified from the initial search, five companies did not operate an official Twitter account (e.g., Juul) or posted no further tweets after August 8 (e.g., Njoy), which resulted in eliminating five companies. With the remaining five companies, the researchers conducted a content analysis to analyze both textual and visual components of the companies' tweets, specifically with regard to how e-cigarette companies presented their products and the issue of e-cigarette use on Twitter. E-cigarette companies' tweets that used reply functions were not included in this study's sample because pretest results indicated that such tweets were generally e-cigarette companies' responses to their consumers' questions or complaints and were not in the context of strategic

communication. Table 1 provides the volume of tweets posted by five e-cigarette companies before and after August 8.

Table 1. Volume of tweets posted by e-cigarette companies

Company	Tweets before 8/8	Tweets after 8/8	Total
Blu	54 (62.1%)	33 (37.9%)	87
Vaporfi	32 (42.1%)	44 (57.9%)	76
Volcano	48 (38.4%)	77 (61.6%)	125
Vapor4life	42 (47.7%)	46 (52.3%)	88
Whitecloud	71 (47.7%)	78 (52.3%)	149
Total	247 (47.0%)	278 (53.0%)	525 (100%)

Coding scheme

Basic information was analyzed about each tweet such as the date of the tweet, how many retweets and likes each tweet had, and whether the tweet was commercially focused or advocacy focused. In addition, coders recorded whether the tweet was posted before or after August 8, 2016, when the new regulations were put in place.

The FDA's deeming and potential regulatory items

The analysis about current and potential regulatory items were split into two major categories: the FDA's deeming items and potential regulatory items. Coders determined whether tweets complied with the deeming. Coders then decided whether the tweets used persuasive communication techniques that are prohibited for tobacco products. Regarding the deeming, coders examined whether the content indicated distribution of sample items, whether e-cigarettes were presented as a safe alternative to tobacco cigarettes, and whether there was any information about banning sales to minors (1 = Yes; 2 = No). To examine potential regulatory items, celebrity endorsement, the use of cartoon characters, sponsoring music concerts and sport events, and flavoring were analyzed (1 = Yes; 2 = No). The code book was refined and revised through several rounds of discussions and testing using a small portion of the sample.

User engagement

To access Twitter users' engagement with e-cigarette companies' tweets, the number of likes and retweets were measured. Although number of likes and retweets may be somewhat different from individuals' self-reported attitude toward social media content, the two variables have been widely used as a proxy of social media users' levels of engagement in studies that examined Tweets (e.g., Chung & Yoon, 2013; Marozzo & Bessi, 2018). Researchers have pointed out that Twitter users are more likely to retweet others' tweets when they find the tweets interesting (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013).

Inter-coder reliability test and coding

Three graduate student coders were trained through coding practices and discussion after the codebook was refined. A mutual understanding of the codebook was achieved before the inter-coder reliability test. To test inter-coder reliability, the three coders independently coded 10 percent of the tweets that were randomly chosen from the sample. Therefore, a total of 56 tweets were selected using a random sampling method to test inter-coder reliability. Coder reliability was calculated using Krippendorff's alpha (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). Krippendorff's α for all coding categories ranged from .76 to 0.93 (see Table 2). Thus, the overall reliability was satisfactory. The level of reliability for each coding category reached above the acceptable threshold, .70, as suggested by Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken (2002). After obtaining acceptable inter-coder reliability, the coders coded the remaining tweets.

It should be noted that inter-coder reliability could not be calculated for three variables (displaying information about the sales of e-cigarettes to minors, the presence of cartoon characters and displaying coupons) because their frequencies were too small to calculate reliability. However, the coding is included because of the particular relevance to the current and potential FDA regulations.

Table 2. Coding variables and inter-coder reliability

Coding variables	*Krippendorff's* alpha
General Tweet information	
Date (before or after the FDA deeming)	0.84
Nature of tweet	0.87
Number of retweets	0.93
Number of likes	0.92
Advertising techniques	
Embedding retail websites in tweets	0.88
Contest participation	0.86
FDA deeming variables	

Sample distribution message	0.81
Reduced harm claim	0.78
Minor sale information	Undefined*
Potential regulatory variables	
Celebrity endorsement	0.79
Cartoon characters	Undefined*
Flavoring	0.77
Sponsoring concert/sports events	0.81
Discount coupons	Undefined*
Scenario	0.76

* Frequency is too small to determine inter-coder reliability.

Data analysis overview

Pearson's chi-square tests were used to examine e-cigarette companies' message strategies on Twitter. The researchers compared the volume of tweets posted before and after August 8. Tweets' attributes including marketing strategies (e.g., coupons) were also examined across companies. E-cigarette companies' messages that were prohibited by the deeming or were not allowed for combustible tobacco companies were investigated across companies before and after August 8.

As addressed earlier, the number of likes and retweets were used as an indicator of user engagement. Due to the non-normal distribution of number of likes and retweets in the sample data, percentile bootstrapping approach was employed. Bootstrapping procedures provide a less biased point estimate when the data do not show normal distribution (Kelley, 2005). Bootstrapping t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests enable researchers to test group differences when their data violate assumptions for the tests, such as normal distribution of data and equal variances across groups. In particular, when a group's sample size is drastically different from the other group(s), bootstrap sampling provides an estimate for the mean and standard deviation by randomly selecting cases from the sampled data. When percentile-corrected bootstrap confidence interval does not contain zero, mean differences between groups are considered significant. Independent sample t-tests and one-way ANOVA tests with 5,000 bootstrap samples were performed.

Results

Communication strategies on Twitter

Results indicate that e-cigarette companies employed various traditional advertising techniques, such as embedding their retail websites in tweets ($n = 30$, 5.7%), distributing coupons ($n = 28$,

5.3%), or offering sample products (n = 13, 2.5%). Moreover, e-cigarette companies used promotions, such as asking for participation in contests (n = 18, 3.4%), or sponsoring music concerts or sports events (n = 4, 0.8%). Independent sample t-tests were performed to examine the relationship between the marketing strategies and Twitter users' engagement. The tweets displaying a retail website (n = 30, M = 2.03, SD = 2.57) were less likely to receive likes from Twitter users when compared to the tweets that did not depict a retail website, n = 495, M = 7.53, SD = 19.99, t (523) = -5.50, p < .001, 95% CI = (-7.55, -3.66). The relationship between displaying retail websites was not associated with the number of retweets, t (523) = -5.42, p = .10, 95% CI = (-11.28, 1.73). Twitter users were less likely to share tweets that distributed a coupon (n = 28, M = 2.86, SD = 12.22) than tweets without a coupon, n = 497, M = 13.20, SD = 24.33, t (523) = -4.05, p < .01, 95% CI = (-14.36, -4.55). Twitter users were less likely to click likes on tweets distributing a coupon (tweets embedding coupons: M = 2.43, SD = 4.38, tweets without coupons: M = 7.48, SD = 19.95, t (523) = -5.06, p < .01, 95% CI = [-7.48, -2.63).

Presentation of e-cigarette use

Regarding the scenario of tweets, approximately two-thirds of the tweets were identified as occurring in a "social/every day" context (n = 338, 64.4%) followed by educational (n = 135, 25.7%), comedic (n = 37, 7.0%), action/athletic theme (n = 14, 2.7%), and other (n = 1, 0.2%). Chi-square analysis showed that this pattern was not random (χ^2 = 751.52, df = 4, p < .001). The results indicated that e-cigarette companies often described e-cigarettes and/or vaping during normal, everyday scenes. A one-way ANOVA test indicated that there was no significant difference for the number of retweets, $F(3, 520)$ = .96, p = .41, and likes, $F(3, 520)$ = 1.87, p = 13, between the four scenarios ("other" was excluded from the calculation).

Characteristics of tweets between companies

In addition, the researchers examined how Twitter messaging varied across e-cigarette companies. Blu, Vaporfi, and Volcano posted a greater number of commercially focused tweets than tweets that were advocacy focused, whereas Vapor4life and Whitecloud's tweets that advocated vaping in general outnumbered commercially focused tweets. Table 3 provides further information about how Twitter messaging varied across e-cigarette companies.

Table 3. Characteristics of tweets by commercial use and vaping advocacy companies

	Commercial use companies			
	Blu (*n* = 87)	Vaporfi (*n* =76)	Volcano (*n* = 125)	Total (*n* = 288)
Commercial	84 (96.6%)	73 (96.1%)	124 (99.2%)	281 (97.6%)
Vaping advocacy	3 (3.4%)	3 (3.9%)	1 (0.8%)	7 (2.4%)
Free samples	1 (1.1%)	11 (14.5%)	0	12 (4.2%)
Coupons	1 (1.1%)	15 (19.7%)	10 (8.0%)	26 (9.0%)
Retail websites	5 (5.7%)	3 (3.9%)	18 (14.4%)	26 (9.0%)
Contests and events	82 (94.3%)	6 (7.9%)	1 (0.8%)	10 (3.5%)
Vaping scene	7 (8.0%)	0	2 (1.6%)	9 (3.1%)

	Vaping advocacy company		
	Vapor4life (*n* = 88)	Whitecloud (*n* = 149)	Total (*n* =237)
Commercial	33(37.5%)	16 (10.7%)	49 (20.7%)
Vaping advocacy	55 (62.5%)	133 (89.3%)	188 (79.3%)
Free samples	1 (1.1%)	0	1 (0.4%)
Coupons	1 (1.1%)	1 (0.7%)	2 (0.8%)
Retail websites	1 (1.1%)	3 (2.0%)	4 (1.7%)
Contests and events	0	8 (5.4%)	8 (3.4%)
Vaping scene	11 (12.5%)	20 (13.4%)	31 (13.1%)

*Note: Pearson's Chi-square tests between commercial use and vaping advocacy companies * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.*

Independent sample *t*-tests indicated that commercially focused companies' tweets (*n* = 288, *M* = 15.70, *SD* = 24.97) were more likely to be shared with Twitter users compared to the tweets posted by vaping advocacy companies, *n* = 237, *M* = 8.93, *SD* = 22.13, *t* (520) = 6.78, *p* < .01, 95% CI = (2.58, 10.76); however, vaping advocacy companies' tweets (*n* = 237, *M* = 10.23, *SD* = 27.27) received a greater number of likes than commercial-use companies' tweets, *n* = 288, *M* = 4.74, *SD* = 8.15, *t* (520) = -5.49, *p* < .05, 95% CI = (-9.49, -2.23).

Commercial-use companies were more likely to embed their retail websites into tweets ($n = $ 26) than vaping advocacy companies ($n = 4$, $\chi^2 = 13.00$, $p < .001$). Commercial-use companies more frequently disseminated information about how to get a free sample ($n = 12$) or a coupon ($n = 26$) on Twitter than vaping advocacy companies (free sample: $n = 2$, $\chi^2 = 7.55$, $p < .01$; coupon: $n = 2$, $\chi^2 = 17.25$, $p < .001$). Commercial-use companies did not differ from vaping advocacy companies for asking participation in contests. Vaping advocacy companies were more likely to display tweets that claim e-cigarette use reduces health risk, ($n = 60$, 25.3%) as compared to commercial-use companies ($n = 2$, 0.7%, $\chi^2 = 75.68$, $p < .001$).

Compliance with the FDA's deeming

RQ2 examined how the FDA's deeming imposed on August 8, 2016 influenced the ways in which e-cigarette companies promote their products on Twitter. The e-cigarette companies in this study posted 247 tweets (47% of the sample) before August 8, 2016, and 278 tweets (53% of the sample) after the deeming rule took effect; the increase was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1.83$, $df = 1$, $p = .18$).

Additionally, there were no differences between distributing free samples before August 8 ($n = 9$) and after August 8 ($n = 3$, $\chi^2 = 2.63$, $df = 1$, $p = .11$). There were also no differences in the level of coupon distribution before August 8 ($n = 11$) and after ($n = 11$, $\chi^2 = 0.72$, $df = 1$, $p = .40$), indicating that the deeming did not affect such marketing strategies.

Finally, results indicated that there were no significant differences in e-cigarette companies' tweets about reduced health risks from using e-cigarettes rather than tobacco products before and after the deeming rule (before August 8; $n = 35$, after August 8; $n = 27$, $\chi^2 = 0.35$, $df = 1$, $p = .56$). As to disclosing banning sales to minors, the occurrence was too infrequent (one tweet before and one after the deeming rule) to analyze statistically (see Table 4).

Table 4. The FDA's deeming and potential regulation items

Coding Variables	Before August 8 ($n = 278$, 53%)	After August 8 ($n = 247$, 47%)	Total ($N = 525$)
The FDA's deeming			
Free sample distribution	9	4	13 (2.5%)
Reduced harm claim	27	35	62 (11.8%)
Disclosure of minor sale information	1	1	2 (0.4%)
Potential regulatory items			
Celebrity endorsement[**]	17	7	24 (4.6%)
Cartoon Characters[*]	4	13	17 (3.2%)

Flavoring (any flavor)	68	57	125 (23.8%)
Sponsoring concerts/sports games	4	1	5(1.0%)
Discount coupons	11	17	28 (5.3%)

Note: Pearson's χ^2 tests between before and after August 8 [**] $p < .01$, [*] $p < .05$

Potential regulatory message strategies

RQ3 questioned how e-cigarette companies employed strategic communication techniques that are prohibited for tobacco products. While sponsoring sporting events is a common outlet for advertisers, when it comes to Twitter and e-cigarette companies, this is a rarity. Of the 525 tweets, only five tweets (four before August 8 and one after August 8) contained a message sponsoring sporting games or music concerts. Additionally, while there was not a preponderance of celebrity portrayals, the date of the deeming rule, apparently, did matter. E-cigarette companies were less likely to depict an image of celebrities after August 8 ($n = 7$, 2.5% of all tweets posted before August 8) than before August 8 ($n = 17$, 6.9% of all tweets posted after August 8, $\chi^2 = 5.71$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). The presence of celebrities, however, was not significantly associated with the number of retweets, $t(523) = 6.93$, $p = .46$, 95% CI $= (-7.93, 26.61)$, or the number of likes, $t(523) = 15.50$, $p = .39$, 95% CI $= (-3.78, 48.40)$.

While only a small number of tweets depicted cartoon characters such as Pokémon and the Simpsons, e-cigarette companies were more likely to depict cartoon characters after August 8 ($n = 13$) than before August 8 ($n = 4$, $\chi^2 = 3.90$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Even so, tweets depicting cartoon characters were less likely to be retweeted by social media users (tweets with a cartoon character: $n = 17$, $M = 1.59$, $SD = 2.42$, tweets without a cartoon character: $n = 508$, $M = 13.02$, $SD = 24.26$, $t(523) = -11.43$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $= [-13.82, -9.04]$). Tweets displaying a cartoon character ($n = 17$, $M = 1.59$, $SD = 2.42$) tended to receive fewer number of likes, when compared to tweets without a cartoon character ($n = 508$, $M = 13.02$, $SD = 24.26$, $t(523) = -4.60$, $p < .05$, 95% CI $= [-6.93, -2.13]$).

About one-fourth of the tweets ($n = 145$, 27.6%) depicted an e-cigarette flavor through either text or visuals. E-cigarette companies frequently depicted fruit flavors such as strawberry ($n = 36$), sweet flavors such as custard ($n = 30$) and other flavors ($n = 79$). One-way ANOVA test showed that there is significant deference in number of retweets between depicted flavors, $F(3, 521) = 6.87$, $p < .001$). Tukey's post-hoc analysis indicated that Twitter users were more likely to share the tweets displaying a fruit-flavored e-cigarette ($M = 23.64$, $SD = 28.19$) compared to sweet flavors ($M = 6.39$, $SD = 15.80$, $p < .01$, 95% CI $= [4.28, 34.30]$), other flavors ($M = 9.30$, $SD = 19.06$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $= [8.70, 33.12]$), and unflavored e-cigarettes ($M = 12.49$, $SD = 24.31$, $p < .01$, 95% CI $= [4.14, 23.32]$), indicating that the presence of a fruit-flavored e-cigarette significantly increases social media users' engagement with e-cigarette content. Depicting flavors was not associated with the number of likes, $F(3, 521) = 1.19$, $p = .31$.

Discussion

Even though this study is exploratory in nature, it provides some interesting results that warrant further research. First, consistent with previous studies that found that e-cigarette companies make efforts to normalize nicotine consumption (Hajek et al., 2014; Vandewater et al., 2018), the results of this study indicate that e-cigarette companies are more likely to present e-cigarette use as normal and socially acceptable behavior. E-cigarette companies' attempts to renormalize tobacco product use could hamper public interest communication regarding this lesser known health product and, in turn, threaten public health.

This study attempted to investigate how e-cigarette companies differ in their communication strategies. Previous research has tended to treat the e-cigarette industry monolithically, but this study provides evidence that, perhaps, that approach is short sighted. The main difference in strategies tended to be whether the company used Twitter in an advocacy role or as purely commercially driven. This is particularly interesting in the context of public interest communication. Perhaps e-cigarette companies are working to get consumers to try their products now, but also to influence behavioral change long term by presenting e-cigarette use as a lifestyle. Some messages encouraged e-cigarette potential customers to use e-cigarettes as a mechanism to stop smoking while others urged customers to fight regulations. Other companies, however, used Twitter in a more traditional promotional way, encouraging the use of e-cigarettes as additional opportunities for smoking (albeit tobacco-less) or to experiment with the world and flavors of e-cigarettes. This apparent dichotomy continues to compel the medical community, public interest communicators, and tobacco companies to debate whether e-cigarettes are a healthier alternative to traditional tobacco cigarettes. While public interest communication would align more comfortably with advocacy messages than commercially focused messages, this study raises some alarms as to the kind of advocacy in which these companies are engaging. Reducing health risk is certainly in the public interest, but without strong evidence that e-cigarettes do, indeed, create more healthy opportunities (such as helping people to stop smoking), one should question e-cigarette companies' actual interest in public health.

The results of this study show that the current FDA deeming has not influenced e-cigarette companies' various strategic communication, such as advertising products and advocating e-cigarette use. More specifically, the current FDA deeming prohibits e-cigarette companies from promoting their products as being relatively less harmful than tobacco products. E-cigarette companies also are not allowed to present any health-related benefits unless the benefits are confirmed by the FDA. However, the findings of this study indicate that the FDA's deeming did not significantly influence how e-cigarette companies advertise their products on Twitter. Consistent with previous findings that e-cigarette advertising is unregulated (Duke et al., 2014), this study found that e-cigarette companies continue to display strategic communication strategies that are prohibited by the FDA's deeming even after the regulation took effect. In other words, the companies in this exploratory study continued to send the message that e-cigarettes are a better health alternative to tobacco use. The insignificant effect of the FDA's deeming on e-

cigarette companies' Twitter use may result from the fact that there is no federal law regulating e-cigarette companies' marketing on social media (Hébert et al., 2017). However, consistent with researchers' call for implementing regulations on tobacco companies' social media content (Dai, Deem, & Hao, 2017), the results of this study show that e-cigarette companies continue to use message tactics that are prohibited for other media channels.

In addition, while the use of celebrity endorsements decreased after the deeming rule went into effect, the use of cartoon characters in tweets increased significantly (although the overall number remained small). Given that only two messages out of 525 included the message that e-cigarettes cannot be sold to minors, it is surprising, if not alarming, that cartoon characters are used at all in tweets from e-cigarette companies. The use of cartoon characters in tobacco product advertising is restricted by the MSA, such as displaying cartoon characters with comically distorted features or human characteristics (Pierce & Gilpin, 2004). Displaying cartoon characters in the same ways in e-cigarette advertisements could attenuate viewers' perception of the harm of e-cigarettes and increase their likelihood to experiment with e-cigarettes. Given the preponderance of emphasis on flavors that can appeal to children, the notion that e-cigarette companies are only interested in promoting e-cigarettes as better than traditional smoking seems hollow.

In addition, e-cigarette companies employed various advertising techniques that are prohibited for tobacco products. E-cigarette companies continued to display celebrities and cartoon characters after August 8, although Twitter users did not favorably react to such tweets. It is possible that the presence of celebrities or cartoon characters in tweets increases users' curiosity about and favorable attitude toward e-cigarettes; however, they may not view e-cigarette content as socially acceptable or share such content with others on social media. Perhaps users visited e-cigarette companies' Twitter accounts or websites rather than directly responding to the companies' tweets. More studies are needed to better understand what specific behavioral outcomes could occur from exposure to e-cigarette-related social media content.

When it comes to flavoring, Twitter users were more likely to disseminate tweets depicting fruit flavors than tweets displaying other flavors or tweets with the absence of a flavor. Consistent with the previous studies' findings (Vandewater et al., 2018), this result indicates that social media users could be substantially exposed to flavored e-cigarettes from not only e-cigarette companies' social media content but also individual users' content. While e-cigarette users and dual users advocate e-cigarette use as an aid to smoking cessation, the popularity of fruit flavors in this study indicates that nonsmokers or non-e-cigarette users could be attracted by e-cigarette advertisements with flavoring options. More recently, several large cities, such as Chicago and New York, implemented regulations on the sale of flavored e-cigarette products (Kowitt, Goldstein, Schmidt, Hall, & Brewer, 2017). The results of this study demonstrate that flavored e-cigarettes are more likely to increase social media users' engagement, which potentially attenuates social media users' perceived harm of e-cigarettes and in turn increases their susceptibility to e-cigarette use. However, the FDA and federal government have not implemented a regulation to prohibit e-cigarette companies from advertising flavored e-cigarette

products. Consistent with the growing number of states banning the sale of flavored e-cigarettes, the findings of this study could be used to promote regulations on advertising of flavored e-cigarettes. Given the increased number of cities that have prohibited use of flavors for e-cigarette products, the FDA and other regulatory authorities should consider banning flavoring advertisements and the sale of flavored e-cigarette products into consideration.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, this study adds breadth to the body of literature that has examined and applied arguments from Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) TPB within a strategic communications approach. While the nature of a content analysis cannot determine the actual effects of media content on subsequent behavior, findings from the present study provide insight into the messages that are being distributed in viral settings. That is, results from this study highlight Moreno and Whitehill's (2014) arguments about the potentially effective influence of content on social media platforms. Presenting e-cigarette use as a lifestyle on social media can lead viewers to develop positive social norms about e-cigarette use, thereby increasing their susceptibility to e-cigarette use. In particular, social media users may come to view e-cigarette use as a socially acceptable behavior after observing e-cigarette companies' discourse on social media, as social learning theory posits. Individuals may become open to e-cigarette use when e-cigarette companies' social media posts are shared by their in-group members, such as friends or acquaintances on social media. As a growing number of researchers have investigated the influence of social media on social norms (Neiger et al., 2012), the findings of this study provide insight into the potential effects that e-cigarette companies' social media content have on individuals' opinions for e-cigarette use as a socially acceptable behavior. The results of this study show that e-cigarette companies attempt to maximize the use of Twitter not only by promoting their products via traditional advertising techniques, but also by depicting e-cigarette use as an everyday life activity.

Practical implications

Though previous studies have found positive associations between individuals' exposure to e-cigarette content and their susceptibility to e-cigarette use (e.g., Pokhrel et al., 2018), little is known about e-cigarette companies' specific messages that may violate current and potential regulations on e-cigarette marketing. This study provides insight into the strategic communication used by e-cigarette companies to decrease the public's interest in discussing the potential risks of e-cigarette use. In particular, e-cigarette companies' efforts to present e-cigarettes on social media as less harmful and more socially acceptable products may discourage the public from discussing the potential health risks in using e-cigarettes. Social media users' increased engagement with such content via retweeting and clicking likes results in e-cigarette

companies' designated messages becoming more salient on social media, thereby increasing individuals' exposure to social media content that is more supportive of e-cigarette use.

By examining content on Twitter, this study offers a starting point for additional investigations seeking to further understand e-cigarette companies' strategic communication in the social media space, especially with consideration to newly implemented and upcoming regulations that may potentially impact the way in which e-cigarette companies present their products on social media. The results of this study show that e-cigarette companies continue to use some marketing strategies prohibited for tobacco or e-cigarette products (e.g., free sample distribution and reduced health risk claims), which is an important potential extension of understanding public interest communications. Findings from the study provide useful information about a complex consumer product and the relevant health risks, and the social implications that have not been widely examined thoroughly in scholarship.

Limitations

As with any exploratory study, this study has limitations. Given the preponderance of tweets that are produced daily, examining only 525 tweets requires caution. Also, attributes of the companies in the sample were not considered. Some characteristics, such as the locations of companies and the amount of business, may have influenced the way in which the companies used social media to promote their products. For example, Whitecloud, which has a limited number of retail stores that are only on the East Coast of the United States, is more likely to advocate e-cigarette use rather than promote their products on Twitter. In contrast, Blu, which belongs to a large tobacco company, is more likely to use Twitter to increase consumer awareness of the brand. Thus, more studies are needed to examine the relationship between e-cigarette companies' characteristics, such as ownership and the types of sales (offline focused or online focused), and their use of social media to attract potential consumers.

Understanding the regulatory environment of e-cigarettes needs more investigation. Despite a growing number of studies that found a positive association between exposure to e-cigarette messages on social media and users' susceptibility to e-cigarette use, e-cigarette companies' social media content has not been viewed and regulated as clearly as with other communication strategies such as advertising. However, when it comes to social media content, this study found that e-cigarette companies have used similar strategies to advertising, which are prohibited for e-cigarette advertisements and marketing by the FDA. As public interest communicators increase their understanding of the potential health risks of e-cigarettes, it will be even more important to investigate how this impacts e-cigarette messaging.

Directions for future research

The current study was exploratory in nature, and as such, is an early attempt to better understand how e-cigarette companies are promoting their products via Twitter. It would be interesting to

expand this approach and look at other social media platforms to better understand similarities and differences. For example, there are a number of Instagram postings of consumers vaping in different scenarios. But how these postings relate to e-cigarette companies' use of social media advertising has yet to be explored. Also, e-cigarette companies have a large arsenal of advertising strategies they can use to increase their usage—both on social media platforms as well as in legacy media. Investigating these strategies particularly within the dichotomy of messages (is the product a healthy alternative to tobacco cigarettes for example) is going to be even more important for public interest communicators as the debate of regulation will most certainly continue. Finally, from a theoretical standpoint, actually measuring behavioral intentions with regard to this health topic would further advance public interest communications literature that examines how e-cigarette advertising impacts society.

Conclusion

This study provides a novel examination of e-cigarette companies' messaging strategies on social media. While the messages of e-cigarette advertising remain fairly ambiguous, this study provides direction for understanding e-cigarette companies' strategic approaches and advertising strategies in this realm and the social implications that accompany them. Results indicate that social media enable e-cigarette companies to further develop their advertising strategies such as advocating e-cigarette use. Rather than only embedding such messages in product advertising, e-cigarette companies also explicitly convey anti-regulation messages on social media. Clearly, more research about advertising and e-cigarettes, particularly within a social media environment, needs to be conducted. This study is an early attempt to expand the understanding of how health products companies' messages on social media potentially impact public health as a public interest issue.

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Raining on SeaWorld's Parade: PETA's Direct Action and Public Interest Communications

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Article Information	Abstract
	PETA is well known for creative animal rights activism, with studies exploring how its text-based advocacy creates change regarding societal treatment of animals. What is less explored is how PETA uses on the ground direct action strategies as public interest communications (PIC). For PIC scholars, these strategies are relevant, as direct action provides communicators with experiential ways to persuade stakeholders of new perspectives to push for social change. Building on previous studies in public relations activism and PIC, this essay argues that PETA's direct-action strategies complement its text-based advocacy by shaping stakeholder perception through encounters with material realities, specifically by using embodied forms of persuasion. Answering how public interest communicators create effective persuasive messages on the ground is crucial in understanding contemporary social change.

Introduction

Prior to the 2013 Rose Bowl Parade, animal rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) asked parade directors to redesign a proposed SeaWorld float. Instead of whales frolicking in the waves, PETA suggested depicting a single orca trapped in a small fishbowl surrounded by locks and chains, complete with a banner that read "SeaWorld of Hurt, Where Happiness Tanks." The redesign was unsurprisingly declined. PETA also tried to convince the parade organizer, the Tournament of Roses, to drop the company's float with no success.

On parade day, 12-year-old Rose McCoy, along with 14 other PETA protestors, was arrested for attempting to stop the SeaWorld float from going down the route. Later in the year, Macy's received 80,000 angry emails from animal lovers before its Thanksgiving Day Parade demanding that it drop SeaWorld's float, with celebrity Alec Baldwin arguing that SeaWorld "should not be celebrated with a giant Shamu float parading down 34th street" (as cited in Li, 2013, para. 4). Finding their email campaign unsuccessful, PETA protestors and the same little girl jumped parade barricades and were dragged away by police. Coming on the heels of the July 2013 release of the CNN Films documentary *Blackfish*, which drew intense media attention for its allegations that SeaWorld treats its orcas poorly, PETA's direct-action strategies, which favor demonstrations, protests, and the like to achieve goals (Sangiovanni & Bondaroff, 2014; Lacewing, 2008), helped bring even more attention to the plight of the orcas. Fast forward to 2018, and PETA's ongoing use of these strategies to complement its more text-based advocacy pressured SeaWorld to change policies such as phasing out orca shows, ending breeding practices, and instituting improved animal welfare practices (Bomey, 2018). Over time, PETA's use of direct-action strategies helped shift public interest regarding animal welfare using animals for entertainment in ways the company could not ignore.

PETA is well known for its creative animal rights activism, with studies exploring how its text-based advocacy (turning SeaWorld into an *abusement* park, for example) has been able to help create change regarding the treatment of animals (Duhon, Ellison, & Ragas, 2016; Stokes & Atkins-Sayre, 2018). What is less explored is how PETA and others use on the ground direct action strategies as types of public interest communications (PIC). For PIC scholars, these strategies are relevant, as direct action provides communicators with experiential ways to persuade stakeholders of new perspectives to push for social change. Building on previous studies in public relations activism and PIC, this essay argues that PETA's direct-action strategies complement its text-based advocacy by shaping stakeholder perception through encounters with material realities, specifically by using embodied forms of persuasion. Although some public relations research explores the discursive (i.e., written or spoken text) construction of shared meaning, where organizations compete for the power to shape meaning through public communication (e.g., Stokes, 2013; Weaver, 2010), the role of more non-discursive (visual or physically based communication), direct action strategies in meaning creation has received little attention in public relations and PIC. Answering how public interest communicators create effective persuasive messages on the ground is crucial in understanding contemporary social change.

Although much has been written about the role of *Blackfish* in helping PETA create "a profound crisis for SeaWorld, which had built its brand on the back of killer whales" (Wallace, 2016, para. 4), the variety of ways PETA organized around the film has not been explored fully. PETA had long campaigned against SeaWorld, with its messages largely reaching committed animal welfare activists, but the film served as a "gift" for the organization, helping it reach new supporters (McEwan, 2014, para. 2). After the film's release, PETA's Twitter account set a new

record for retweets, thousands more people visited its campaign website, SeaWorldOfHurt.com, and its media outreach intensified (McEwan, 2014). In the documentary itself, footage telling the story of SeaWorld's trainer-killing orca, Tilikum, is used along with damaging testimony from former SeaWorld employees and other insider information to help indict the company. PETA used *Blackfish* to intensify its own attack on SeaWorld, with observers noting that the "*Blackfish* broadcasts on CNN injected new life into the SeaWorld campaign" (McEwan, 2014, para. 2). Although PETA is known for its mix of "strategic opportunism and digital technologies" in support of its causes, and some have assessed its use of new media in its fight for orcas (Stokes & Atkins-Sayre, 2018), the role of its direct-action strategies in helping cultivate negative public sentiment has been overlooked.

This research first sketches PETA's cause-related activism and campaign against SeaWorld, connecting its strategies to scholarship about PIC, public relations activism, and rhetorically based social movements. It then describes materialist rhetorical criticism as a method best able to capture this type of advocacy. After analyzing three uses of PETA's direct-action strategies regarding orcas since the release of *Blackfish*, implications for crafting persuasive PIC campaigns are provided as well as suggestions for moving scholarship forward.

PETA's activism, PIC, and rhetorical social change strategies

Although the animal rights movement has grown rapidly since the 1980s, with thousands of active participants and "millions of sympathizers" (Jasper & Poulsen, 1995, p. 493), PETA is recognized as the international leader, crafting public controversy since 1980 to draw attention to animal rights arguments regarding what it considers to be animal cruelty, including wearing fur, testing on animals for drug manufacture, and making animals perform for entertainment (Stokes & Atkins-Sayre, 2018). Founded in the United States, it campaigns against organizations worldwide, influencing a variety of animal rights conversations including reform in horse racing, lab animal treatment standards, and closing circuses and zoos (Atkins-Sayre, 2010). Since 1998, the organization has targeted SeaWorld, established in 1964 in San Diego, CA, by Milton Shedd and colleagues. The park has two other locations, with additional versions across the United States and around the world, all marketing animals as entertainment (Friedersdorf, 2014). Shedd, an ocean conservationist, claimed that business success depended on the ability to "exploit and stoke humans' natural interest in the ocean" (Friedersdorf, 2014, para. 28). SeaWorld reiterates that message today, arguing that its parks "inspire millions to celebrate, connect with and care for the natural world we share through the power of entertainment" (SeaWorld, "What we do," para. 1).

For PETA, SeaWorld represents the antithesis of its philosophy about animal rights and ethics. In its commitment to protecting animals, the organization accepts that it is sometimes viewed as extremist, even relishing this perception. It argues, for example, that if people are against slavery, it does not matter who is being enslaved, including animals (Cadwalladr, 2013).

PETA's goal is not to build consensus about animal rights but to provoke thought, as founder I. Newkirk explains: "People have been taught to disregard what happens to pigs or chickens, to not think about the suffering they go through. Our job is to make them think. We're not out to be popular" (as cited in Cadwalladr, 2013). The way the organization fosters thought tends to draw on shocking and emotional rhetorical, or persuasive, strategies. PETA has developed a parody of a popular Nintendo game called Cooking Mama, for instance, where players see a mother beheading animals for dinner (Cadwalladr, 2013). PETA also famously targets fur-wearing celebrities by throwing red paint (to symbolize blood) at them, features naked celebrities holding signs that read, "I'd rather go naked than wear fur," and holds die-ins, with protestors appearing dead, bloodied with spears in their backs, to protest bullfighting.

Although SeaWorld is *one* of its corporate targets, PETA's ongoing advocacy for animal rights makes it a public interest communicator. Indeed, because Fessmann (2017) defined PIC as developing and implementing "planned strategic communication campaigns with the main goal of achieving significant and sustained positive behavioral change on a public interest issue that transcends the particular interests of any single organization," PETA's work is a textbook example (p. 16). Its actions to support animal welfare worldwide connect it to other public interest communicators who draw on public relations techniques to help achieve social change regarding this issue (Fessmann, 2017). For PETA, animal welfare is an issue in the public interest because a central goal for its campaigns is to improve animals' lives with the help of human interference (Fessmann, 2017). Its efforts to conquer what it sees as some of the world's "demons and inequities," regarding animals provides an example of the type of PIC campaign that tries to mobilize the public in the service of policy change[1] (Christiano, 2017, p. 6). Thus, although PETA's campaigns surrounding orca treatment may help strengthen PETA's legitimacy and reputation as an organization, its activities are in the service of animals, and people's relationships to them, rather than on behalf of the organization itself. Like other public interest communicators, PETA seeks to change organizational structures by helping different voices be heard in particular communities, here, regarding the role of animals in society (Brunner, 2017; Fessman, 2017).

Within public relations scholarship that has deep connections to PIC, PETA is studied as an activist organization (Stokes & Atkins-Sayre, 2018) where activism is frequently defined as "a process by which groups of people exert pressure on organizations or other institutions to change policies, practices, or conditions that the activists find problematic" (Smith, 2005, p. 5). Briefly reviewing how activism is typically studied in public relations emphasizes the value of adding the PIC lens. Due to the continuing reliance on excellence theory and other functionalist approaches (Grunig & Grunig, 1992), some public relations scholarship still views activists as antagonistic groups corporations need to manage through public relations techniques (Benecke & Oksiutycz, 2015; Smith & Ferguson, 2010; Stokes & Rubin, 2010). Traditional activism

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[1] PETA achieves positive behavioral change, which Fessmann (2017) calls "the only valid measurement of the success of a public interest campaign" (pp. 21-22). Positive change can be viewed differently; but most might agree that reducing animal suffering is a good goal (Downes, 2017).

scholarship argues that opposing parties in a conflict begin by trying to find common ground; but, once one party does not reciprocate, media advocacy may begin, providing the pivot to PIC (Fessmann, 2017; Hon, 2017). As Stokes and Rubin (2010) point out, this pivot away from accommodation becomes necessary because corporations and public interest communicators often have conflicting goals, meaning that "the compromise metaphor implicit in the two-way symmetrical model is not always accurate in describing the relationships between corporations and activists" (p. 42). To better account for such intractable scenarios, sometimes activism is studied from issues management perspectives that seek to understand how organizations and activists alike nurture their positions on issues, or contested matters, through the issue-management lifecycle to a favorable outcome (Heath & Waymer, 2009; Smith & Ferguson, 2010). Depending on whether they are attempting to establish the issue and attract supporters and media coverage or push for action, parties will adopt different rhetorical strategies (Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Smith and Ferguson, 2001). Like other organizations managing issues (Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Heath & Waymer, 2009; Smith & Ferguson, 2010), PETA has to establish the legitimacy for its perspective regarding the orca issue, but also it has the PIC goals of changing the status quo and encouraging behavior change. The PIC feature of a triggering event (Fessman, 2017) is also at work in the PETA case, with the *Blackfish* release kicking off its intensified campaign. Finally, PIC campaigns face fierce opposition, and PETA's undoubtedly faces stiff challenges from SeaWorld. The value of bringing the PIC perspective into public relations activism scholarship is that it helps us better understand cases where two sides are deeply entrenched and social change hangs in the balance, while a PIC focus on PETA activism helps "train and empower a new generation of social change activists" (Fessmann, 2017, p. 27).

Indeed, analyzing how PETA tries to create social change regarding animal treatment helps scholars better appreciate the changing nature of contemporary activism. Public relations has work to do if it is to meet this challenge, especially in terms of moving away from strategy as discursively conceived to understanding the range of persuasive methods activists now employ. To date, only Henderson (2005), Ihlen (2004), and Weaver (2010, 2013) specifically explored one form of direct action, protest, as a form of public relations, examining how this strategy attracts media coverage, conveys discontent, and applies political pressure. As Ihlen (2004) argues, protests send particular messages to negotiate new meanings, with visual methods particularly important in halting the building of a power plant in Norway. Henderson (2005) and Weaver (2010; 2013), too, examined the role of protest in combating genetic engineering and industrialized food, with Weaver arguing that the celebratory carnivalesque style of protest should even comprise a particular genre of activist public relations. Finally, Boyd and VanSlette (2009)'s outlaw discourse, though not specifically protest, also begins to suggest how non-conventional, disruptive forms of public relations activism eschew making direct counterarguments to implementing the types of attention-getting appeals we see in PETA's animal rights activism to "question the methods and assumptions of the dominant system" (p. 333). Although the idea of not seeking compromise through these types of strategies is considered to be somewhat radical in traditional public relations scholarship, within rhetorical

scholars' work that connects to PIC's concern with social change, it is foundational.

In fact, in its more shocking protest measures, PETA joins other contemporary social movement organizations that rely on radical rhetorical methods to provoke thought as a persuasive strategy. PETA's efforts in combating its opponents align it with rhetorical scholars who study new social movements (NSMs), where organizations are "oriented toward changing identity, social norms, or challenging the logic governing social systems" (Foust, Pason, & Rogness, 2017, p. 3). Thus, although the need to understand how social movements create outcomes such as policy changes or legal precedents continues, scholars studying NSMs are concerned with how meaning changes over time, as in PETA's attempts to shift meaning regarding animals. Similarly, recent campaigns to legalize same-sex marriage demonstrate how "overturning bans state by state ('material' change) is woven tightly with symbolic efforts to 'normalize' marriage outside of heterosexual partnerships" (Foust, Pason, & Rogness, 2017, p. 5). PETA's efforts to change SeaWorld's policies regarding orcas is thus complemented by its longstanding work to revise perceptions about the acceptability of using animals for entertainment purposes. The work of rhetorical social change scholars is helpful in appreciating PETA's PIC strategies in this regard.

Rhetorical studies in general have made good progress in moving beyond text-based strategies to more fully considering the role of the nondiscursive in successful activist persuasion. One persuasive avenue that has been explored in detail is how bodies are a resource for argumentation and advocacy in creating social change (DeLuca, 1999b). Activists use their bodies to perform arguments, with scholars pointing out that to better "understand the dynamics of social change. . . critics must analyze bodies as a rich source of argumentative force" (p. 20). Thus, as Flood (2017) points out, for rhetoricians, the body is not just a biological form but a socially constructed entity that "has the potential to disrupt societal norms and the institutions that enforce them" (p. 109). Through this embodied rhetoric, bodies garner attention to issues as well as helping to construct an argument (Flood, 2017). Early on, Olson and Goodnight (1994) examined how anti-fur activists used their bodies to challenge social beliefs, with scholarship developing since the late 1990s to explore how bodies argue without verbal commentary (Condit, 1990).

Today many contend that the non-linguistic body does, in fact, argue. Bodies in the road blocking machinery, bodies at risk protecting trees, or SeaWorld protestors' bodies painted as orcas certainly convey meaning without words. Bodies may serve as proof for an argument, provide reasoning, or *as* an argument that helps create dialogue and change (Flood, 2017). Over time, scholarship concentrated on the body not as *part* of protestors' arguments but *as* the argument itself. DeLuca (1999a) points out that the use of the body in EarthFirst's protest image events may garner mass media attention through spectacle but serves *as* the argument for this environmental rights group. It is important to note, however, that bodily presence is not always enough to create change in the public interest because bodies must not only prompt dialogue but also continue discussion "until change and/or progress is made" (Butterworth, 2008; Flood, 2017, p. 112). PETA's combination of language and performance requires bystanders "to look,

to gaze, to read, and respond" in ways that meet this standard (Foust, Pason, & Rogness, 2017, p. 166). Indeed, by 2018, PETA's advocacy helped pressure SeaWorld to end orca breeding, stop its theatrical shows, and create educational exhibits (Bomey, 2018). Thus, like other social movement organizations, PETA may have electoral, legislative, legal, and material goals, but it uses bodies as arguments to contest social norms and suggest news ways of thinking and behaving. Specifically, PETA uses bodies to upend the perception of the "Cartesian subject apart from the natural world," trying to get people to see nature, and animals in particular, as *like* us rather than different (DeLuca, 1999b, p 15). Since Fenske (2016) contends that there is more to understand about how bodies argue, with body rhetoric's "corporeal and physically experiential," qualities intersecting with words, images, and actions, attention to PETA's orca campaigns provides this opportunity (p. 99). It should be clear that attending to the role of the body, in concert with traditional text-based strategies, helps to understand how organizations act rhetorically to achieve PIC goals. One type of rhetorical criticism is particularly useful in exploring this process.

Rhetorical criticism and PETA's embodied rhetoric

To capture this movement away from focusing on text-based advocacy, this study applies materialist rhetorical criticism to analyze PETA's use of embodied rhetoric in its direct-action strategies. Rhetorical criticism analyzes written symbols in order to understand their persuasive potential, systemically looking to explain the symbolic, meaning making process. It often follows four steps: descriptive analysis, or examining texts for persuasive patterns; accounting for how texts address or respond to a particular history and context; drawing from different theoretical approaches to best illuminate a text; and, finally making an argument based on the previous steps (Campbell & Burkholder, 1997; Foss, 1996). Materialist criticism draws on the traditional rhetorical criticism process to analyze the persuasive potential of places, bodies, performance, protest, and the like, seeking to read these alternative texts to better understand meaning creation. Materialist criticism thus moves away from the symbolic, persuasive meaning of words to viewing rhetoric "as some sort of concrete 'matter'" (Landau, 2014, p. 593), with bodies acting as a material dimension of rhetoric (Selzer & Crowley, 1999), and critics asking "not just what a text means but, more generally, what it does'' (Blair, 1999, p. 23). Materialist criticism draws from a variety of theoretical influences (Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze) and texts (printed documents, historical monuments, mass mediated images, videos) to see the persuasive/rhetorical potential of physical material objects (e.g., bodies, buildings, cars, geographical space) (Landau, 2014, p. 593).[2] Indeed, although some PIC rhetoric is overt, with organizations making written/spoken statements and inviting others to join them, some of it is implicit, as in PETA's silent protests or costumed performances. The written

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[2] See also Biesecker & Lucaites, 2009.

texts surrounding PETA's animal rights activism are clearly important parts of its persuasive messages, but so much of its argument is experienced by its viewers/participants, where text becomes "something living, breathing, and operating within unique spaces and received by particular audiences" (Hess, 2011). In general, then, focusing on the unruly bodies of PETA activists helps us understand the affective, emotional, biological, and psychological qualities of material rhetoric (DeLuca, 1999b, Landau, 2014, p. 603; Rice, 2008). It also appreciates how PETA relies on bodies to create arguments that are then taken up by media and used to persuade more audiences.

As a result, this longitudinal study tries to open up the definition of rhetorical texts as much as possible. Following the release of *Blackfish* until the present, I use material criticism to examine three primary examples of PETA's nondiscursive, body-centric direct-action strategies: moral shock, pranking, and rhetorical form, assessing how they try to shape knowledge and opinions and motivate action about animal rights (Stokes, 2013). I explore these strategies in examples of PETA's media-generating image events: The Rose Bowl Parade, two Macy's Thanksgiving parades, and a variety of embodied protests at or near the SeaWorld parks themselves. Similar to other materialist critics, I explore PETA's videos, images, and its mediated accounts of these events (in news releases and on its website), as well as news coverage and SeaWorld's responses to these strategies, looking to see how and whether these strategies help persuade audiences and put pressure on the corporation (Cisneros, 2008). In all, I assessed every PETA text available regarding the issue of orca treatment, resulting in approximately 50 texts, including SeaWorld's responses and related news coverage. Accounting for this kind of rhetorical experience allows for an expanded understanding of what is considered persuasive in PIC and is in keeping with its focus on understanding how to best advocate for a cause.

Analysis: Using direct action to build pressure on SeaWorld following *Blackfish*

All three strategies examined illustrate how PETA's experiential involvement of audiences helps create a connection between humans and animals while simultaneously courting media attention, complementing text-based work. PETA uses body rhetoric[3] to contest SeaWorld's treatment of orcas, to encourage viewers to reconsider their views of animals, and/or take action. PETA strategically uses the body to capture attention and cultivate identification with the orcas in ways that are more dramatic, emotional, and empathetic than using text alone.

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[3] All of PETA's texts analyzed are available on its website, peta.org, and are included in references.

Using the body to create moral shock

If PETA seeks to shift audience perception of animal rights in order to realize the PIC goal of creating change in the public interest, drawing on the moral shock strategy, which cultivates a sense of outrage so that people become inclined to act (Jasper & Poulson, 1995), is an effective choice. Moral shocks use highly publicized events to draw people into activism "by building on their existing beliefs" (Jasper & Poulson, 1995, p. 498). Since people have become more likely to view animals as capable of having feelings and thoughts (Jasper & Poulson, 1995), with research demonstrating increasingly that animals suffer psychologically in captivity (Sample, 2008), PETA uses moral shock to interrupt societal justification of keeping animals in these conditions. Frequently moral shocks use visuals to create effective appeals that stop accepted forms of reasoning, with the imagery translating into powerful condensing symbols, as described in the following animal rights scenario:

> The visual images used in animal rights recruitment have a simple but effective structure based on good versus evil. There are pictures of happy animals, sometimes in the wild and sometimes in loving homes, living fulfilled lives. Then there are the "innocent suffering" pictures. These are presented as innocent victims of an evil force. (Jasper & Poulson, 1995, pp. 498, 506)

These visually based moral shock strategies are particularly useful in serving a recruiting function by creating an opening. For example, one protest bystander explained his decision to become a part of an animal rights organization after seeing shocking images: "I had never thought about it much, but I went by a table one day and saw these terrifying pictures. I thought about that on the street, and I brought home all their literature" (as cited in Jasper & Poulson, 1995, p. 506). Thus, through their focus on visual imagery, moral shocks grab attention, create epiphanies, and trigger activism, persuading audiences to view animals, and their role in human entertainment, differently.

Following the release of *Blackfish*, PETA relied on the body to intensify the persuasive power of moral shock, deploying this strategy in two different years in the lead up to the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Analysis of photos, video, and website content illustrates how this strategy relies on the materiality of the body to help cultivate new perspectives in ways that go beyond written appeals. First, in 2013, PETA staged a protest/performance outside the Macy's flagship store in New York City. There, a world-record breaking swimmer, outfitted in a sleek orca-resembling wetsuit, thrashed about in a tiny, water filled, clear tank outside the store (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Bodily amplifying the moral shock strategy at the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade.

The swimmer closely resembles a SeaWorld orca, down to the collapsed dorsal fin associated with orcas held in captivity, his head and toes resting only approximately an inch from either end of the clear tank, his arms resting similarly close to its walls (PETA, 2013). This use of zoomorphism to enact the moral shock strategy, or the "attribution of animal traits to human beings, deities, or inanimate objects," helps connect humans and animals, emphasizing the suffering orcas endure while helping erase the Cartesian distinction between them (American Psychological Association, 2007, p. 1011). Indeed, by embodying the orca's existence in a similarly small enclosure at SeaWorld, the swimmer makes a clear argument about the inappropriate treatment of these whales, imploring busy passersby to imagine experiencing these conditions. Although the sign held by a PETA member standing behind the tank drives home the argument, "Take SeaWorld Orca Abuse out of Macy's Parade," it is the swimmer's performance that is shocking, perhaps able to move audiences from simply reading a leaflet to imagining the plight of the orcas from a new perspective, as seen in one observer's face (See Figure 2). Thus, in keeping with the moral shock strategy, the swimmer's performance in the tank works to

encourage observers to question their relationships to their fellow beasts, asking if it is moral to use animals for entertainment.

Figure 2. Bodily amplifying the moral shock strategy at the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade.

Similarly, in 2014, when two naked PETA orcas, painted black and white, protested in a bathtub outside the Macy's store, passersby are again encouraged to think about the plight of the animals in new ways (PETA, 2014a). With temperatures hovering around freezing, the two women's legs almost overlap each other's in a cramped white bathtub, their identities concealed by the body paint (See Figure 3). Again, although the orcas hold a sign that reads, "Could you live in your bathtub? Boycott SeaWorld!," with two other activists behind them holding a banner that reads, "Take SeaWorld Orca Abuse out of Macy's Parade," it is the appearance of the women in the tub that helps audiences make a connection between the whales' treatment and themselves. As Atkins-Sayre (2010) wrote about PETA's general ability to induce identification, or common ground, with animals to further the group's goals, the bodily enacted moral shock

strategy helps "effectively blur the distinction between human and nonhuman animals, inviting viewers to rethink their own identities and, thus, their beliefs about animal rights" (p. 311). PETA's embodied rhetoric promotes outrage about these practices, its clever immersive recreations of marine environments encouraging witnesses to think differently about SeaWorld.

Figure 3. Protesters enact the moral shock strategy to induce identification with the animals.

In both uses of the moral shock strategy, what is intriguing persuasively is that these instances flip PETA's common practice of using anthropomorphism, or "the attribution of human characteristics to nonhuman entities" to create feelings of connection between humans and animals (American Psychological Association, 2007, p. 59). In PETA campaigns, animals look frightened or seek comfort from one another in the face of human experimentation or exploitation, with anthropomorphism helping "invite people—whether they currently support animal rights or not—to confront their assumptions about human and animal identities" (Atkins-Sayre, 2010, p. 318). Here, PETA uses zoomorphism, instead, to turn humans *into* animals. This strategy creates empathy by vividly seeing a human in animal like conditions, encouraging people to become involved on their behalf. By using the strategy to draw a comparison between human bodies in confined, uncomfortable spaces (the tank, the bathtub) to animal bodies in similarly problematic places (animal enclosures at the parks), the audience may be inclined to support PETA's calls for boycotting SeaWorld or protest the float's inclusion in the Macy's

parades.

Embodied moral shock thus complements PETA's more text-based appeals. In news coverage about the Rose Bowl and Macy's Thanksgiving parades, PETA is quoted about the plight of the orcas' treatment: "No family event should celebrate a corporation that tears orca babies away from their loving mothers and forces them to live in chlorinated tanks that are barely big enough for them to turn around in" (as cited in Romero, 2013, para. 8). Witnessing the cramped, cold actors, however, invites a comparison in a way that is difficult to achieve through words alone. These performances are also more newsworthy than news releases in today's visually-oriented news cycles (Stokes & Atkins-Sayre, 2018). PETA couples moral shock with pranking strategies in ways that also encourage action and capture media attention.

Pranking at the parades and the parks

If PETA's embodied moral shock strategies jolt audiences into envisioning themselves as animals, the group relies on the direct-action pranking strategy in a different way, trying to point out the absurdity of SeaWorld's business model that relies on using animals for entertainment. Pranking seeks to disrupt SeaWorld's commercial cultural practices and persuasive power by deploying "rhetorical jujitsu" and "playfully and provocatively folding existing cultural forms in on themselves" rather than simply negating and opposing SeaWorld's business (Harold, 2004, p. 191). Indeed, although corporate rhetorical strategies tend to be rational, linear, and systematic to move toward the end goal of persuasion, pranking operates more like "viruses in an ecosystem," playfully using disruption to turn corporate messages against themselves (Harold, 2004, pp. 191-192). Through several uses of pranking, PETA capitalizes on this zany, atypical, playful, and hard to predict form of nondiscursive activism to boost the success of its SeaWorld of Hurt campaign.

Unlike the moral shock strategy examples, which rely on creating compassion and disgust, there is typically an element of the ridiculous in PETA's embodied pranking activities. In 2014, to protest a Christmas Celebration event at SeaWorld San Antonio, a group of PETA activists dressed up like Santas to draw a distinction between the joy of the holiday season and the conditions endured by SeaWorld's animals (PETA, 2014d). Similarly, in 2015, a robed and bearded Moses led a protest outside SeaWorld Orlando in advance of Praise Wave, a Christian Music Festival, with protestors riffing off Christian scripture to instruct parkgoers and park officials alike: "SeaWorld: Let God's Orcas Go!" PETA frequently deploys costumes as part of its activism, but in pranking, the costumes are less about moral shock's connecting human and animal as they are about making SeaWorld's practices seem absurd, or at least questionable. As Harold (2004) explains about the uses of the strategy, "Pranksters can be seen as comedians," working to "see what responses they can provoke" (p. 194). Certainly, visiting a park or seeing a news report about these antics encourages different thinking.

Thus, throughout 2016 to the present, PETA complemented its text-based advocacy and traditional protest measures with pranking to shift thinking about SeaWorld's business paradigm. In 2016, for example, prior to Halloween PETA set up an orca cemetery outside SeaWorld

Orlando, with 38 headstones marking each orca that had died at SeaWorld (See Figure 4). The headstones feature the names and ages of the orcas, drawing a connection to the human experience, but with the absurdity of having a graveyard for a marine animal helping to make the group's point in a novel way (PETA, 2016).

Figure 4. Pranking at SeaWorld Orlando

The group is pulling one over on the corporation in the traditional understanding of pranking but relies on another meaning of the word, wrinkling, folding, and reconfiguring the object of the cemetery (Harold, 2004). Thus, when the group deploys the same strategy in other locations in the United States and in the United Kingdom, each time featuring the headstones, memorial flowers, and mourners dressed in black that audiences associate with funerals, these pranks wrinkle or challenge audiences' understanding of the meaning of the parks. Through the funerals and memorials, rather than serving as a place of celebration of animals, SeaWorld becomes viewed as their killer.

By 2017, PETA again found novel ways to prank the corporation. In early May, the group hung 39 inflatable dead orcas from seven overpasses along Los Angeles highway 101 in response to a campaign targeting Los Angeles residents to protest the San Diego park. Coupled with banners reading "SeaWorld's Watch: 39 and Counting" Friday rush hour traffic could not avoid looking at the inflatables hanging from ropes at regular intervals. According to PETA,

"Hundreds of drivers honked, pumped their fists, and gave participants a thumb's up" in support of the message, with the spectacle also inviting local television news coverage on San Diego's CBS and Fox news stations (PETA, 2017a, para. 2). Later that year, protestors staged at exits along Los Angeles area interstate I-5 also held the inflatable dead orcas, creating a miles-long demonstration against the park's campaign to draw in area residents. Similar to its tactic of associating a gravestone with an actual orca that died at the park, each inflatable orca carried a sign reading, "I died at SeaWorld." Later in the year, the group continued its dramatic pranking methods, holding a die-in in front of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art where 39 painted protestors simultaneously pretended to fall dead to again signify the orcas that died at SeaWorld. Similarly, in August, dying orca painted protestors beached themselves in front of SeaWorld Aquatica in Orlando, with a sister protest in San Diego resulting in five arrests there (PETA, 2017b). During the height of tourist season, pranking allowed the activist group to steal the "limelight of the mainstream organizations or leaders they target," interrupting the story it tells about its business and challenging its meaning (Harold, 2004, p. 198). It is important to emphasize, however, that these tactics do not just potentially influence people visiting the parks and witnessing these activities. That is, these pranks all invite media attention, ensuring that the group's message is not limited to those with direct exposure to them. As Harold (2004) explains about the strategy in general, pranking's "comedic posture and creation of spectacular images" helps get the group's message "into newspapers and television broadcasts" (p. 201). Following the installation of the orca cemetery at the San Antonio SeaWorld park, for example, an article from the *Sacramento Current* provided this summary of the prank:

> There's a new orca attraction at SeaWorld today: A cemetery. Animal rights group PETA placed more than twenty gravestones in front of the theme park's main entrance Tuesday afternoon, each one representing an orca that died in captivity at a SeaWorld park. (as cited in Zielinski, 2016, para. 1)

When media discuss these pranks' symbolic meanings, they help challenge SeaWorld's interpretation and positioning of its business. This work is supported by a third strategy.

(Rhetorically) forming new perceptions about animals

Key to understanding PETA's embodied direct-action techniques is the notion of rhetorical form, or types of argument that encourage or discourage audience discussion, deliberation, and specific types of responses (Burke, 1931). Forms create an appetite in the mind of a participant and then subsequently satisfy that need. For example, attorneys are expected to make a case for someone's guilt or innocence in a court case. Similarly, bodice ripper romance novels operate by promising the reader a tale of passionate romance, fulfilling expectations with exotic locales and mysterious characters. Although some rhetorical forms provide specific types of evidence or follow specific steps to fulfill audience expectations, others are more symbolic, with persuaders seeking to draw attention to "how rhetoric appears—its shape, structure, and style—rather than what is said" (Foust, Pason, & Rogness, 2017, p. 11). In this more symbolic use, for example, the refusal of

vegans to wear leather "implicates their political arguments without saying a word" (Foust et al., 2017, p. 12). As a result, repeated forms of PETA's embodied direct action (dressing as orcas, for example) are about rhetorical style, helping people think in new ways by noticing the connection between the symbolic (an activist's orca costume) and the material (the actual size of the orca tank). Each time audiences see PETA activists dressed as orcas or when they watch a PETA protest (outside a park, during a parade), they engage with qualitative progressive rhetorical form. That is, they experience a non-logical, non-linear embodied argument that helps create a mood, turns up the volume on the group's claims, and offers a specific quality (drama, parody, and the like). As Burke (1931) summarizes about successful rhetorical uses of qualitative form, "We are put into a state of mind which another state of mind can appropriately follow" (p. 125). Through PETA's costumes and performances, then, empathy and identification may be nurtured, followed by action.

Indeed, a primary way that PETA deploys the body as a type of rhetorical form is through its direct-action protest strategy. The role of protest has been examined a bit in public relations, but how the body is used as a type of rhetorical form that creates expectations among audiences needs more attention. Take, for example, the body's performance in a video provided by PETA of the 2014 Rose Bowl Parade Protest. As parade viewers take in a colorful float called Sea of Surprises, which features orcas frolicking in an open sea, 100 protestors dressed mostly in black descend upon the parade route, skirting route barricades to sit down peacefully in front of the float (PETA, 2014b). The protestors run in and sit down calmly, even though they are dragged off quickly by law enforcement, others rushing in as more are taken away. The protestors do not speak and remain calm, their grim presence standing out against the bright colors of the float and the happy atmosphere of the crowd. Since the silent protestors are dragged away by loud officers, appearing somewhat menacing in their riot helmets, this use of rhetorical form casts them as martyrs for their cause. The audience then hears a cheer go up from one side of the crowd, though it is difficult to know whether the audience is cheering for the parade, the officers, or the protestors, disrupting the message of SeaWorld's float. As Burke (1931) explains, writers use text forms to keep the reader predicting what will come next, and each time PETA deploys this rhetorical protest form, it keeps bystanders engaged and curious, wanting to see what happens. Although the protest form fulfills viewers' expectations of drama and antagonism, it is enhanced through the protestors' bodies working in tandem with the written messages they brandish. Silently holding black and white Boycott SeaWorld signs and wearing black t-shirts with white lettering, Sea World Hurts Orcas, their bodies help create cognitive dissonance about the company. This process of self-marking the body helps forge a public identity for the movement and shares its position with broader audiences, cultivating awareness that may increase membership (Goodnow, 2006; Penny, 2012).

Analysis of video from the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade later in the year shows how the protest form continues to develop the perception that SeaWorld's handling of its orcas is problematic. There, the protestors follow the same rhetorical form, jumping over parade route barricades, brandishing the same signs, and wearing the same outfits. This time, one protestor is

able to walk along in front of the SeaWorld float for a minute or so, again calmly, silently holding the sign reading SeaWorld Hurts Orcas (PETA, 2014c). Again, between rough handling by the officers and the distinction from the happy, festive environment, the protestors use qualitative form to create expectations that a particular quality will follow each time SeaWorld tries to make claims about its business and the orcas' status within it (Campbell & Burkholder, 1997). It is important to note that the group follows a similar formula each time. Its protestors are always in black attire adorned with white anti-SeaWorld messages, using this form to make an argument about the orca issue, and the written messages contained in the form do not shift either, repeating Boycott SeaWorld and SeaWorld hurts Orcas. PETA follows the form strategy to the letter, the repeated message conflicting with SeaWorld's framing of its activities as conservation or education. PETA counters SeaWorld's positive messages by creating a grim mood, mournful tone, and empathetic quality through the protest form that circulates through media channels. For example, the *New York Times* said in its coverage, "Coming to the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade: the float fracas" (as cited in Newman, 2013, para. 1). *National Geographic* similarly primed readers for deployment of the protest form:

> In today's polarized political era, even a holiday parade meant for kids can become a heated battleground of opposing views. This week, activists from two animal-rights camps objected to Macy's upcoming Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City. (as cited in Howard, 2013, para. 1)

What this coverage does is set up an expectation among viewers and readers that is then satisfied through viewing the protest on social media or in televised broadcasts.

Finally, the notion of *where* PETA deploys this strategy is significant in terms of rhetorical form. It matters rhetorically that PETA forwards frequently its messages in SeaWorld's *own* place(s). From a materialist perspective, place, too, is rhetorical, such that the "very place in which a protest occurs is a rhetorical performance that is part of the message of the movement" (Middleton, Senda Cook, & Endres, 2011, p. 258). That PETA holds protests at the site of the parks or during parades sends a particular rhetorical message, with place, "not just discourse *about* places," functioning rhetorically in three ways: by building on a place's pre-existing meaning (parks as containment, not conservation), by temporarily reconstructing the meaning of particular place to challenge perceptions (park funerals) and by repeating reconstructions over time (parades, protests) (Middleton, Senda Cook, & Endres, 2011, p. 259). If audiences regularly witness protestors disrupting parades or orca shows and see orcas sitting on the baggage claim areas in airports near SeaWorld parks, the meaning of the place of SeaWorld changes through these repeated forms (See Figure 5).

Figure 5. Deploying rhetorical form at the airport.

Implications and conclusion

Although its moral shock, pranking, and rhetorical form strategies are different from its text-based work, PETA's efforts help cultivate negative sentiment and put pressure on SeaWorld and associated companies, providing insight into the broader world of PIC campaigns. Generating outrage through moral shock, highlighting the ridiculous in some of SeaWorld's business practices through pranking, and deploying direct action through the body as a type of rhetorical form helped compel SeaWorld into responding to PETA in ways that are easy for the critic to discern and for future PIC practitioners to adapt. In terms of PETA's observable response to the particular examples of embodied activism discussed in this essay, for instance, SeaWorld's floats were not included in the 2015, 2016, and 2017 Macy's Thanksgiving parades and were omitted in the 2015, 2016, 2107, and 2018 Tournament of Roses parades. The impact of these strategies builds gradually. In 2013, despite initial activism from PETA, Macy's kept the SeaWorld float in, noting in a statement that it did not take part in political debate or social commentary. Later,

however, it quietly removed the float and it has not rejoined the roster. SeaWorld also responds directly to PETA's direct action, typically calling it an extremist organization and emphasizing its version of its ongoing commitment to animals, often arguing, "The real advocates for animals are the trainers, aviculturists, animal-care staff and veterinarians at SeaWorld," attempting to stand by its conservation and education positioning (PETA takes dramatic stand against SeaWorld, 2014, para. 7, 8). This defensive stance is featured in almost every example of available news coverage (e.g., Li, 2013; Romero, 2013; Wallace, 2016).

Although there is evidence of direct outcomes resulting from PETA's embodied strategies, it is more important for PIC scholars/practitioners to view them as more arrows in PETA's quiver. That is, all of PETA's direct-action strategies deployed in the wake of *Blackfish*'s release help capture audience attention and spread the anti-SeaWorld message, making it difficult for the company to use its defensive posture surrounding the orca issue successfully. As one observer put it, "Blackfish provided a huge boost" for the organization but maintained "part of the reason it had such an impact is because PETA knew how to leverage it" (McEwen, 2014, para. 15). The variety of activism PETA deployed surrounding the film, for example, saw the company experiencing a 400% spike in negative social media mentions, a 13% increase in negative commentary, and an 84% collapse in profits (Neate, 2015). By 2015, a *Consumerist* poll ranked SeaWorld as the third most-hated business in America (as cited in Geiling, 2015). By 2016, the company hired a new CEO. By the end of 2017, the company had lost another $200 million, another CEO stepped down, and attendance continued to decline (Smith, 2018). The company also laid off 350 workers in 2017, attempting other cost cutting and revenue generating strategies, including opening an orca-free park in Abu Dhabi (Smith, 2018). In 2018, still another CEO stepped down. These indicators suggest that the public is increasingly dissatisfied with the company and the interpretation of its business, yet SeaWorld recently continued its defensive posture:

> The truth is that our animals, including our orcas, live healthy and thriving lives in our care. SeaWorld is the nation's true animal welfare organization, and the real advocates for animals are our trainers, aviculturists, animal-care staff and veterinarians. We will continue to focus our energy and resources on real issues and helping animals. (PETA protest demands SeaWorld release its orcas, 2018, para. 5)

Despite Sea World's insistence that it is focusing on the real issues, PETA's efforts to rain on SeaWorld's parade can be linked to changes in the company's business model and operation, including removing orca shows and eliminating breeding practices (Smith, 2018). PETA celebrated helping close the Ringling Bros. Circus in 2017. PETA now holds 339 activist shares in SeaWorld, meaning that its ability to influence corporate behavior through its rights as a partial owner is likely. PETA may not be solely responsible for SeaWorld's woes, but it is hard to deny that its activism surrounding *Blackfish* "culminated in dramatic corporate policy change' (Chattoo, 2017, para. 13). PETA's direct action rhetorically supports and enhances its efforts to shift perceptions and corporate policies in hard to ignore experiential ways.

The ongoing attention keeping results of PETA's direct-action strategies thus suggest that

one implication this research offers is that embodied forms of public relations activism allow advocates to locate common elements of humanity to create identification with their message and the whales. Embodied forms of activism help audiences question, more viscerally, animal welfare and treatment. There may be generational, cultural, and even political divides that PETA must consider when advocating on behalf of orcas. Although baby boomers grew up watching "Flipper," millennials grew up watching "Free Willy" where an orca is released from captivity, and PETA is able to locate those elements of SeaWorld that appeal broadly to people's emotions and humanity, especially with audiences that by now are likely to have been exposed to pro-animal rights arguments. Embodied strategies specialize in creating connection, something that developing technology will only enhance. PETA's new virtual reality experience, I, Orca, for instance, which uses "wireless Google virtual reality goggles to immerse participants in a world where they can swim freely in the ocean with an orca family," finds participants swearing off SeaWorld, with some demanding a refund for prior visits (PETA, 2015, para. 1). Like other uses of embodied direct action, the ability to experience life as an orca through virtual reality goggles provides more opportunities to create identification with PETA's message than by words alone. PIC practitioners can incorporate elements of these strategies into their work to similarly bolster identification with particular issues and causes.

The second implication this paper offers is that PIC scholarship should increasingly consider the visual nature of embodied and other strategies, examining them not only for their symbolic power but also for how they complement and spread an advocacy message through new media. Accounting for visual communication is of increasing importance, because "the promotional work of organizations and activists unfolds in a social context where public expectations are high, but attention is scarce and audiences can be fickle" (Edwards, 2018, p. 107). The attention-getting, visually embodied direct-action strategies feed into this environment where "PETA identifies multiple pressure points where it can make its influence felt, then bombards its target audiences from every possible angle" (McEwen, 2014, para. 19). Direct action helps in PETA's efforts to reach "different target audiences through the media each prefers. Some people respond to video, others are energized through live protests, others read their local newspapers" (McEwen, 2014, para. 19). What PETA and others are adept at doing is using one channel to influence interest in another, which has been noted as a key hallmark of contemporary activism (Rovisco & Veneti, 2017). Embodied direct action is a crucial part of driving attention to PETA's other channels and messages. And, as Madden, Janoske, Winkler, and Harpole (2018) pointed out, social media use intersects with these other activist strategies, providing the "opportunity and support for continuing to develop and galvanize that group repeatedly over time" (p. 182). This study thus points to the need to explore the interplay between the visual nature of direct action and its online circulation. Recent scholarship explores how and why some events and images are rendered visible online and gain momentum, while others are not (Rovisco & Veneti, 2017). So, although the symbolic meaning of visually embodied direct action discussed here is important, future research should consider how it is represented and shared in new media (DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012; Milner, 2013; Rovisco & Veneti, 2017).

A third implication this study presents is that we need to draw on a variety of disciplines to better understand social change and activism within PIC to further develop this burgeoning field itself. Johnston (2017) challenges the public relations discipline to more fully engage with the public interest concept, noting that it "has failed to attract the consideration of public relations scholars in the same way it has other disciplines" (p. 5). She argues that public relations' ongoing privileging of empiricism and positivism makes wrestling with the "more complicated, values-based nature" of the public interest a difficult, but important, challenge in helping understanding the functioning of contemporary society. Although Johnston (2017) draws on the disciplines of anthropology, law, and public policy to develop the public interest field, this essay shows how rhetorical studies offer a variety of insights into this values-based nature of social change, particularly with its focus on crucial parts of PIC campaigns: messages, audiences, and persuasion. There are at least six threads to SeaWorld's SeaWorld of Hurt campaign, including website content, litigation, direct action, social media, shareholder activism, and media attention (McEwan, 2014). This essay has explored one of these in detail, direct action, for its ability to complement the other threads and construct a web that has ensnared SeaWorld since 2013. Explaining how PIC campaigns use these strategies in other contexts will develop our understanding of the social change process and how communicators achieve success in today's complex advocacy landscape.

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"We Really Have to Hit Them Where it Hurts": Analyzing Activists' Corporate Campaigns

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Article Information	Abstract
	Despite a surge in activism efforts directed at corporations, extant research largely overlooks how activist organizations craft and implement their campaigns. To address this gap, this article applies issues management to examine the process used by activist organizations to pressure target corporations into altering practices and policies that they perceive to be problematic. Using a qualitative approach, this study draws from interviews with 21 activist practitioners, which are supplemented by organizational documents and news articles. This study introduces the Corporate Pressure Process Model, which depicts and describes the various phases of activists' corporate campaigns, including how these groups determine what threat is most appropriate and select coordinating tactics. Based on the findings, this article also outlines implications for activist organizations and their target corporations.

Introduction

Campaigns targeting corporations are increasingly prevalent as activists seek to hold these entities to higher standards of social performance (Coombs, 1998), leading John and Thomson (2003) to declare that "capitalism and corporations are under more pressure now than at any time since the Great Depression" (p. 1). The challengers have also become more diverse, representing various issues ranging from detrimental environmental practices and genetically modified foods to exploitation of retail employees and gun control. Although the issues vary, activist organizations share a mission to identify a problem, unite to address it, and doggedly pursue it

(Deegan, 2001). Manheim (2001) explained that "every well—conceived corporate campaign will probe for a potential weakness in the target company and then systematically exploit that weakness until the benefit of doing so declines" (p. 85). What is lacking is an examination of how activist organizations identify these weaknesses and then design strategies, allocate resources, and implement tactics to exploit them.

Traditionally, research favored the perspective of legitimized, for-profit corporations, positioning activists "as barriers to overcome or challenges to meet" even though these groups began "developing and utilizing many of the modern tools of public relations" by the 1960s (Coombs & Holladay, 2014, p. 63). Although scholars shifted their attention from focusing solely on the corporate perspective to better understand how activist organizations develop and operate (Smith & Ferguson, 2018), research on these unique organizations, their communication practices, and their activities trails behind practice (Jaques, 2013).

To expand our knowledge about the process of activists' campaigns, this study analyzes data collected through interviews with activist practitioners, along with organizational documents and news articles, to outline how these campaigns progress, and introduces the Corporate Pressure Process Model. Following an overview of relevant literature on activists' corporate campaigns and issues management, the qualitative methods used to investigate this process are described. Analysis then details how activist organizations construct these campaigns, from analyzing their target to selecting specific tactics while considering their strengths and characteristics as an organization, to increase our understanding of how these groups seek to inflict corporate change from the activist perspective.

Literature review

Activist organizations and their campaigns

Activism "arises from moral outrage and leads to attempts to create and exploit power resources to change offending practices and policies" (Heath, 1997, p. 189) as "groups of people exert pressure on organizations or other institutions to change policies, practices, or conditions the activists find problematic" (Smith, 2005, p. 5). To alter these activities, like-minded individuals with "shared ideals, concerns, or grievances" coordinate, mobilizing individuals into an organized effort (den Hond & de Bakker, 2007, p. 903). Also called issue groups, grassroots organizations, or social movement organizations, an activist organization is "a group of two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics through action" (L. A. Grunig, 1992, p. 504). Activist organizations aim to contribute to the greater social good (Smith & Ferguson, 2010) by elevating "a society's value standards" (Smith & Ferguson, 2018, p. 440) while also emphasizing failure to meet these values (Heath & Waymer, 2009). Such efforts entail promoting or resisting change on behalf of a target company or industry, invoking public policy or regulatory changes, or altering social norms (L. A. Grunig, 1992; Karagianni &

Cornelissen, 2006; Smith & Ferguson, 2001). Many groups pursue all three goals (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). While research has explored the strategies and tactics used by activists in pursuit of these objectives (e.g., Jaques, 2013; Sommerfeldt, 2013; Stokes & Atkins-Sayre, 2018; Veil, Reno, Freihaut, & Oldham, 2015; Woods, 2018), this study examines how activist organizations try to produce change at the individual company level.

In recent decades, activist organizations shifted from using "the most established ways" of indirectly challenging corporations through public policy to engaging organizational-level efforts that directly pressure corporations (den Hond & de Bakker, 2007, p. 918; Waldron, Navis, & Fisher, 2013). Recognizing corporations are often susceptible to reputational attacks (Hart & Sharma, 2004), activists adapted approaches pioneered by religious entities and labor groups. Manheim (2001) referred to the targeting of corporations by activist organizations as "corporate campaigns," which he defined as "a coordinated, often long-term, and wide-ranging program of economic, political, legal, and psychological warfare" fought in the media, marketplace, and courts (p. xiii). By applying "systematic and unrelenting pressure," activists endeavor "to cause so much pain and disruption that management is forced to yield to their will" (Manheim, 2001, p. xiiii).

To persuade corporations to alter their activities, activist organizations strive to hurt corporate reputations in addition to disrupting organizational routines (Luders, 2006), damaging pertinent stakeholder relationships (Waldron et al., 2013), and diverting revenue from the targets (Friedman, 1999). To attract managerial attention, activists must effectively promote and advance their issues and rely on issues management.

The role of issues management in activists' campaigns

The identification, promotion, and resolution of issues is central to activism research and practice (Smith & Ferguson, 2018), and issues management is perhaps the most prominent theory applied in this area (e.g., Coombs, 1992, 1998; Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Heath, 1998, 2002; Jaques, 2013; Jones & Chase, 1979; Taylor, Vasquez, & Doorley, 2003; Veil et al., 2015). Issues management is a long-term strategic process that entails monitoring, identifying, and responding to issues, which arise when "one or more human agents attaches significance to a situation or perceived 'problem'" (Crable & Vibbert, 1985, p. 5). Initially intended as a mechanism to help corporations deflect activists while proactively shaping matters of public concern, Jones and Chase's (1979) process model outlined five steps: issue identification, issue analysis, issue change strategy options, issue action programming, and evaluation. First, organizations scan their environments to identify issues of relevant concern. Second, management researches an issue to evaluate its impact. Next, the organization crafts a response strategy to appropriately address the issue. Fourth, management adopts the policy to support the plan and commit to it. Finally, the organization evaluates the results by determining whether the actual outcome matches the intended outcome.

Although issues management was originally intended for corporations, every organization must be proactive in addressing relevant issues and influencing the public agenda (Heath, 2002). As activists unite around perceived problems (J. E. Grunig, 1989), they adopt issues management to establish their roles, legitimacy, and value to society (Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Jaques, 2006). Years ago, Crable and Vibbert (1985) suggested that activist groups were often more adept than their corporate opponents in employing issues management as they seek to define, advance, and resolve issues to their benefit (Jones & Chase, 1979; Smith & Ferguson, 2010).

Activists often are considered secondary stakeholders because they "lack control over firm resources, implying that they are less relevant to firm consideration" (King, 2008, p. 24), and companies do not rely on their support for survival (Clarkson, 1995). Thus, activists and their issues must gain traction and legitimacy to demonstrate that the issue, the organization, and the proposed solution align with societal expectations and have public support (Coombs, 1992). Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997) conjectured that management evaluates a stakeholder group's importance based on its possession of legitimacy, power, and/or urgency. The more attributes held by the group, the greater its saliency and likelihood of claiming the target's attention.

To build legitimacy, activist organizations rely on their own publics. The catalytic model (Crable & Vibbert, 1985) empowered publics as the key component to identifying, defining, and promoting issues and recognized the role of communication in elevating an issue. The model outlined how issues advance throughout five different stages through gaining attention and urgency: potential, imminent, current, critical, and dormant. First, an issue obtains *potential* status when stakeholders begin to pay attention to it and generate support for activists' perception of the problem. Second, the issue progresses to *imminent* status by gaining legitimacy when select stakeholders acknowledge its relevancy and importance, accepting the issue. Third, *current* status "signals the point when a large number of stakeholders know about an issue" (Coombs, 2002, p. 217), often resulting from media or Internet coverage. If the issue gains enough attention and support, it escalates to *critical* status (Crable & Vibbert, 1985). At this phase, the issue may generate a crisis or "a violation of societal norms/expectations" for the target company (Coombs, 2006, p. 249), forcing a response. Finally, an issue goes *dormant* if it is resolved or if interest wanes. An issue can also fall dormant early on if it fails to attract attention or gain legitimacy.

Issues do not always move in a linear direction, leading to a resolution (Jaques, 2009). Rather, they skip steps, never reach a step, or revert to earlier stages. Additionally, activist organizations' campaigns carry on for years or even decades. Smith and Ferguson (2018) posited, "While the avowed aim of many activists is to work themselves out of a job. . . in reality the struggle for social change is a long-term, ongoing process" (p. 444). To increase their chances of gaining management's attention, activist organizations must adapt their tactics to ensure their issues remain at the forefront of public thought.

Case studies outlining how a particular activist organization challenges its opponent(s) abound (e.g., Anderson, 1992; Henderson, 2005; Jaques, 2013; Knight & Greenberg, 2002; Madden, Janoske, Winkler, & Harpole, 2018; Stokes & Atkins-Sayre, 2018; Veil et al., 2015;

Woods, 2018), and offer insight into how a group can effectively employ rhetoric or harness a channel to command a corporation's attention. However, den Hond and de Bakker (2007) claimed "it remains unclear *how* different activist groups try to get their claims attended to" (p. 902), adding that "looking at the development of campaigns over time could provide insight into the different tactics that are applied at different stages of the institutional change process" (p. 919). This study answers this call by describing the various stages of activist organizations' corporate campaigns from the activist perspective. Following an overview of the methods employed, this study introduces the Corporate Pressure Process Model, outlining the progression of these campaigns and describing the various tactics used by activist organizations when challenging corporate behavior. To gain an understanding of how the corporate campaign process works, the following research questions were posed to guide the study:

RQ1a: What characteristics about the target corporation do activist organizations consider when planning a corporate campaign?

RQ1b: How do the target corporation's characteristics shape the corporate campaign plan?

RQ2a: What communication tactics do activist organizations use during corporate campaigns to pressure target corporations and advance their issue(s)?

RQ2b: How do activist organizations select certain communication tactics during corporate campaigns to pressure target corporations and advance their issue(s)?

Methods

Grounded in issues management, this study was part of a larger research project that aimed to understand how activist organizations use communication to incite corporations to change practices and policies. It employed a qualitative approach to understand the process fashioned by activist organizations and described by activist practitioners to construct their corporate campaigns. By providing descriptions and explanations, qualitative research seeks to understand how a process works (Stake, 2010), including discovering and describing communication and interaction patterns (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Data

Twenty-one individuals representing 21 activist organizations participated in the study. Listed in Table 1, these participants represented "issue-specific" groups that are "organized around issues like the environment, human rights, and fair trade" (Karagianni & Cornelissen, 2006, p. 169). Two organizations asked not to be named because of ongoing corporate negotiations.

Organizations were identified in two steps. First, an initial list of activist organizations was acquired using a Google search for the term "activist" along with "campaign," "boycott," "petition," or "protest." Second, additional organizations were identified during interviews by asking respondents if they collaborate with other activist groups. These groups then were invited to participate in the study.

Table 1. List of participating activist organizations and their issues

Activist Organization	Issue(s)	Target Corporations
18 Million Rising	Asian-American and Pacific Islander community issues	The American Girl Doll Company; Facebook; Gap; Marvel Comics; Netflix
2nd Vote	Corporate funding of "liberal advocacy"	Macy's; Target
Action on Smoking and Health	Tobacco-related issues	Philip Morris
Appalachian Voices	Appalachian environmental issues	Duke Energy
As You Sow	Health and environmental issues	McDonalds; Starbucks; Trader Joe's
Campus Pride	LGBTQ issues	Chick-fil-A
Center for Food Safety	Food safety issues	Bayer; In-N-Out Burger; McDonald's; Orville Redenbacher
Collectively Free	Animal and human rights	Chick-fil-A; Hershey's; Nathan's Famous Hot Dogs; Nestle; Starbucks
DeFund DAPL	Bank investment in the Dakota Access Pipeline	Wells Fargo
Environmental Working Group	Health and environmental issues	Johnson & Johnson; L'Oréal
Gays Against Guns	Gun reform	BlackRock; FedEx; Hertz; Wyndham Worldwide
Greenpeace USA	Environmental issues	Kimberly Clark; Procter & Gamble
Life Decisions International	Anti-abortion	Starbucks
Making Change at Walmart	Responsible employer practices	Walmart
Moms Demand Action	Gun reform	Albertsons; Chipotle; Facebook; Fresh Market;

		Kroger; Starbucks; Target; Trader Joe's
Other 98	Issues pertaining to big banks, big oil, and big money in politics	ExxonMobil; Facebook; Mylan; Shell; Wells Fargo
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals	Animal rights	Armani; Ben & Jerry's; Land O'Lakes; Ringling Brothers; SeaWorld
The Sierra Club - Beyond Coal	Environmental issues	Colstrip coal plant; Duke Energy; Puget Sound Energy
US Right to Know	Health issues	Coca-Cola; Disney
Unnamed environmental organization	Human rights and environmental issues	International clothing retailer; multinational food and beverage corporation
Unnamed progressive organization	Economic, health, and environmental issues	Multinational technology company; transnational food and beverage company

Qualitative interviews permit researchers to better understand the world from another's perspective through stories and explanations of respondents' behaviors that help "inform the researcher about key features and processes" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 176). After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, telephone interviews were conducted. These focused interviews employed questions grounded in issues management and corporate campaign literature (How does your organization monitor issues; who are your prime targets; what factors do you take into consideration when confronting your targets; what types of resources do you use to gain support for your issues; what communication strategies have you found to be most successful for challenging your targets' policies or behaviors; how do target organizations respond to your messages; and have you ever engaged with your targets). Interviews were audio recorded with participant permission. Interviews were scheduled to last approximately 60 minutes but ranged in length from 21 minutes to 78 minutes, depending on participant availability. Participants with time constraints agreed to answer follow-up questions via email.

This study reflects analysis of 60 activist campaigns (Table 1). These campaigns were identified in two stages. First, at least one campaign per activist organization was identified as part of the initial Google search. Second, additional campaigns were included after the practitioner discussed them during the interview. All 60 campaigns were exclusive, meaning that although 2nd Vote, Collectively Free, Life Decisions International, and Moms Demand Action pressured Starbucks, these four campaigns were independent of one another. In total, these 60 campaigns targeted 48 corporations. Organizational documents ($n = 473$), including news releases, reports, and blog posts were collected by going to the activist organization's website and searching for the campaigns. News articles ($n = 613$) were gleaned from LexisNexis and Google News using the name of the activist organization (e.g., "DeFund DAPL") and the corporate campaign target (e.g., "Wells Fargo"). These additional sources supplemented the

interviews, and using information from the activist organizations and external sources permitted data triangulation, helping the researcher to "test for consistency" among accounts by comparing internal and external explanations to verify themes (Patton, 2002, p. 248).

Analysis

Inductive textual analysis was used to identify patterns, themes, and categories present in the data through locating and defining key phrases, terms, and practices (Patton, 2002), which were used to construct the model. Analysis occurred across all data (interviews, organizational documents, and news articles) but was organized by campaign. To meld the information gleaned from interviews with that taken from organizational documents and news articles, a document was created for each activist organization. Information within each document was organized according to each campaign. If information did not pertain to a specific campaign but reflected the activist organization's general communication efforts, it was placed under "general campaign information." First, all data were read to gain a general understanding of the contents. Then, the data were re-read and all descriptions of activists' corporate campaigns were highlighted and placed in a separate document. Third, this selected text was read word by word to obtain codes, which are often captured using the exact words from the text. For instance, for RQ1b, which focused on how the target corporations' priorities shape campaigns, codes included "create a PR nightmare," "brand scrutiny," "legal measures," and "some threat to their bottom line."

Next, these codes were sorted into themes based on the relationships between the codes, and a label was crafted for each theme. For example, the codes for RQ1b were organized according to their relationships and formed the themes "reputational threat," "financial threat," and "formal sanctions." Fifth, once the categories were established, the "final, confirmatory" stage of analysis entailed "carefully examining deviant cases or data that don't fit the categories developed" (Patton, 2002, p. 454). Sixth, the final themes were recorded and supported using thick, rich description drawn from the data. Finally, these themes composed the primary model elements described in the following section (corporation priorities, tactics, activist organization characteristics, target response, and engagement) and were organized into the proposed model (Figure 1) based on participant descriptions.

Figure 1. The corporate pressure process model
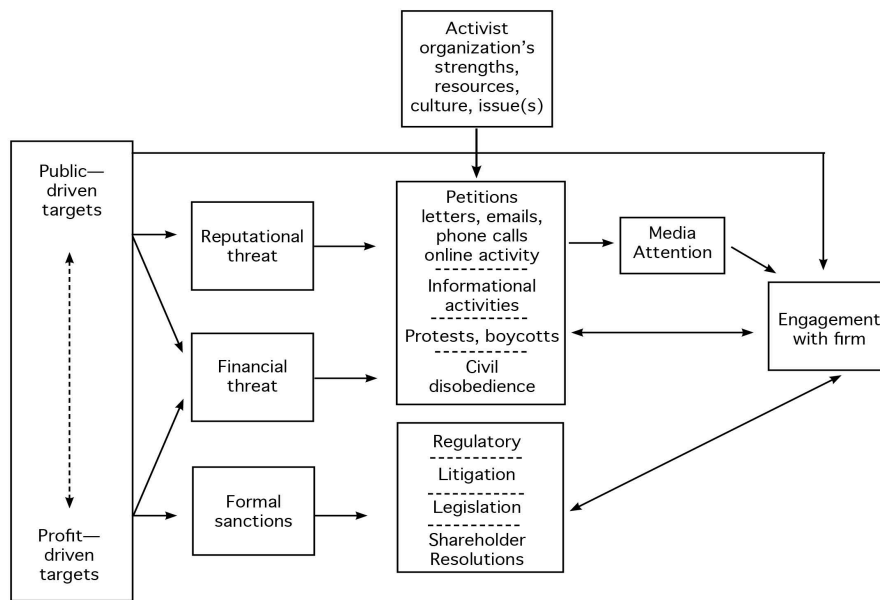
The corporate pressure process model

Anderson (1992) contended that "the trouble with pressure campaigns is that they are irregular" (p. 153). Although the specific tactics used by these groups may vary, this study identified patterns in activist organizations' corporate campaigns. The Corporate Pressure Process Model (Figure 1) presents this progression from the standpoint of these activist organizations, outlining how activist organizations analyze corporate priorities, determine what threat is most likely to provoke a response from the targets, and select supporting tactics while considering their own characteristics and the issues.

Corporation priorities

Participants explained that campaigns differ according to whether the targets appear to value their reputations or bottom lines[1]. According to interviewees, a public-driven corporation is concerned about its reputation and social impact. Examples of public-driven targets identified by participants included Ben & Jerry's, Johnson & Johnson, Procter & Gamble, Target, and Trader Joe's. Given the company's focus on both social responsibility and reputation, participants claimed the corporation is often more likely to engage with the activist organization and even

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[1] These characterizations reflect participants' assessments of target companies.

establish some sort of a relationship. However, such interaction is rarely immediate; rather, the target usually experiences a degree of public pressure before it engages.

On the other end of the spectrum, participants explained that profit-driven targets often engender public hostility. A representative from Greenpeace USA explained a target in this category is often "so powerful it doesn't need to negotiate" because it is "insulated from any kind of market impact that we might have on them. . . They're like a cosmic foe. You're never going to be sitting at the table with them." Examples of profit-driven entities named by participants included companies in the oil and gas (ExxonMobil, Shell), energy (Duke Energy, Puget Sound Energy), pharmaceutical (Mylan), and tobacco industries (Phillip Morris).

Activist organizations analyze the apparent values and culture of the targets as part of the research stage. This investigation includes the activist organization's determining whether the corporation has taken stances on social issues previously, what types of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs the company engages in, and how the corporation previously responded to activists. Because all corporations must be profitable, targets range on a continuum and can be driven by desires to increase profits and build a strong reputation. Therefore, companies fall at various points along the spectrum rather than solely embodying a profit-driven or public-driven mentality.

Identifying an appropriate threat

Based on what it perceives to be the target corporation's apparent values, an activist organization then identifies what threat(s) will be most effective. One participant noted the challenging nature of this task, explaining that "we really have to hit them where it hurts" but "there are very few levers that are available to advocates" (18 Million Rising). After determining whether the target is more profit-driven or public-driven, the activist organization decides whether to focus on challenging the company's reputation, harming its bottom-line, or initiating more formal sanctions, such as government regulation.

While tactics challenging the bottom-line are effective for both types of targets, participants explained that reputational damage is more effective with public-driven companies. When pressuring public-driven corporations, activist groups target the corporations' public relations efforts to "make a PR nightmare" because "it takes up their resources and distracts them" (The Other 98%). Because corporations often respond through CSR initiatives, these programs can easily become new fronts for activist groups to attack, generally because such efforts are symbolic as companies "show you the things they're doing and just hope that's good enough to shut you up" (Appalachian Voices). Groups pressuring profit-driven corporations focus on attacking the bottom line (e.g., boycotts) or engaging in regulatory measures (e.g., legal activities, legislation). A member of The Other 98% argued these targets will remain indifferent "as long as they don't start losing money."

A participant from 18 Million Rising compared a campaign for a more public-driven corporation to a campaign for a more profit-driven company, citing Gap and Walmart as examples. The individual explained that Gap had "sort of built a reputation on being the most

ethical of the fast fashion companies" whereas "a company like Walmart, they really don't care how ethical you think they are. They've realized that's not why people come to them." Although the group sought to "leverage brand damage" in its Gap campaign, the participant expressed that such actions would only be "footholds" in a campaign against a target such as Walmart. Thus, for corporations toward the profit-driven end of the spectrum, activist groups must often engage "other decision makers, like national policy or state policy makers" as "tactics that are effective with [public-driven targets] generally don't have anything to do with them" (Greenpeace USA). Given many companies exist on the continuum between profit-driven and public-driven, activist organizations often must spark a combination of public criticism and financial threats (Appalachian Voices), requiring several tactics.

Tactics

Activist organizations use a variety of tactics (Jackson, 1982). When selecting specific tactics, these groups consider the priorities of the target corporations, characteristics of their own organizations, the specific issue, and the targets' responses. All tactics identified in the data are listed with an example in Table 2[2].

Table 2. Activist tactics applied during corporate campaigns

Tactic	Example
Organizing Activities	
Town Hall/ Public Hearings	Appalachian Voices held public hearings about coal ash pits
Leafleting	CFS distributes literature at events
Informational Activities	
Reports	EWG uses reports to have a "major impact in the media"
Advertising	PETA posts controversial ads
Websites	2nd Vote publishes corporate donations
Social Media	All groups used social media to amplify their messages and establish relationships with supporters
Films	Appalachian Voices showed a series of films on the effects of coal
Symbolic Activities	
Email Campaigns	EWG emails representatives ("When they get emails, a large number of emails about a particular issue, they notice.")

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[2] Typology of activist activities derives from Jackson (1982).

Letter Writing	PETA mailed letters and copies of *Blackfish* to members of Congress
Call-Ins	DeFund DAPL encouraged supporters to call banks financing the Dakota Access Pipeline
Hijacking	PETA hijacked the #AskSeaWorld campaign
Guerilla Activism	An environmental organization placed stickers on a retailer's price tags containing information about the firm's practices
Petition Deliveries	A progressive organization delivered a petition at a firm's headquarters
Protest	Held in a storefront (Collectively Free), at the location of corporate partners (Greenpeace), industry conventions (unnamed environmental organization), or CEO homes (PETA)
Performances	Involves flash mobs (Action on Smoking and Health) or die-ins (Gays Against Guns)
Boycotts	Moms Demand Action initiated a "Skip Starbucks Saturday" boycott
Civil Disobedience	
Blockades	The Other 98 staged a blockade using kayaks to delay an oil rig
Illegal Activities	Greenpeace broke into Procter & Gamble's headquarters to hang banners
Hoaxes	18 Million Rising created a faux website and Twitter account, impersonating Gap
Legalistic Activities	
Petitions	Moms Demand Action posted a petition for Chipotle, which quickly accumulated more than 10,000 signatures, forcing Chipotle to respond within 24 hours
Stakeholder Resolutions	As You Sow proposed at resolution for McDonald's to eliminate Styrofoam packaging
Regulatory Agencies	PETA filed a petition with OSHA to prohibit humans from physically interacting with animals at SeaWorld
Legislation	The Sierra Club pushed a Washington State bill encouraging Puget Sound Energy to phase out Colstrip
Lawsuits	PETA sued SeaWorld, claiming that five wild-caught orcas performing is a violation of the 13th Amendment
Information Requests	U.S. Right to Know files Freedom of Information Act requests

While the specific tactics employed vary by type of activist organization, all groups begin with lower impact informational, formal, and symbolic activities. Informational activities help activist organizations disseminate messages, enabling them to generate awareness about their issues, issue stances, and proposed solutions. Examples in this stage include social media posts,

reports, or websites. Formal activities include petitions and filing information requests. Finally, symbolic activities also seek to advance an issue by enabling an activist organization to demonstrate the magnitude of its conviction "how strongly it feels" (Jackson, 1982) while embarrassing the target. During this stage, symbolic activities include email campaigns, letter writing, or call-ins. If activist groups do not receive the response they desire, they progress to less invasive offline informational activities (e.g., leafleting, press releases, advertising).

The third step is more invasive offline tactics, including protests, petition deliveries, or performances. For some activist organizations (e.g., As You Sow, Campus Pride, Moms Demand Action), these activities are more subdued. For others (e.g., Gays Against Guns, PETA, The Other 98%), these actions are more pronounced, entailing the use of die-ins and flash mobs. Some groups embrace civil disobedience actions, such as blockades, during which individuals are "showing courage, showing bravery, showing the power of creativity and willingness to stand for something" (Greenpeace USA). One participant noted that "things like that are much harder to do, they're harder to get activists to do, and they take more staff to make sure they're done properly, but I think they get more attention" (unnamed progressive organization). During the fifth step, some organizations turn to formal approaches, including legislation, regulatory pressure, or litigation. Maintaining the ability to escalate is necessary because "you don't want to go all out in your first couple of steps. . . We need to plan for room for escalation" because reaching a resolution with the target early in the campaign is unlikely (PETA).

Public-driven targets

As the model depicts, activists are more likely to target public-driven targets with highly-visible tactics (e.g., protests) that foster imagery and symbolism, appealing to the news media. For Greenpeace USA, "the public face of everything that we do is thought out to be appealing to the media." Making Change at Walmart will often "hold a rally or have something happen where media want to cover us as an organization" while an unnamed progressive organization will take popular petitions or protests and "package it up together and tell a story of a national movement" to gain coverage. The goal for many of these tactics is to shame the target companies. Many groups seek to draw attention to irresponsible behavior when they "shame and blame" targets (Gays Against Guns) by using public actions to humiliate the corporations. Some publish lists of companies engaging in improper behavior, such as Life Decisions International's (LDI) "Boycott List" that identifies corporations funding Planned Parenthood. Others use more dramatic approaches. A Greenpeace USA participant noted that it "was a huge embarrassment for Proctor & Gamble to have a banner dropped in their headquarters by people wearing tiger costumes." A second strategy entails "lifting up the work of the forward-thinking" targets (Sierra Club). Greenpeace USA provided a list of responsible tissue producers to "recognize the more progressive members of the industry who are making change" (Brooks, 2009, p. A9). Often, this praise is combined with a reprimand for the target.

Activist organization characteristics and issues

Activist organizations also consider their own characteristics, including perceived strengths, resources, organizational cultures, and their issues when identifying appropriate and feasible tactics. First, some participants noted their organizations perceive certain tactics as their "strengths." A member of Greenpeace USA explained that "We're just really good at actions. That's what we do." These large organizations stage elaborate actions, including blockades or scaling buildings. Second, resource access also influences tactic selection as resource-rich organizations are generally better equipped to occupy oil rigs, enact legislation, and pay for extensive legal services. Greenpeace has deep pockets, raising more than $344 million in donations in 2012 alone (Pilcher & Hunt, 2014). Activist organizations with access to financial pools regularly use advertising. After gaining financial support from Michael Bloomberg's $50 million Everytown movement (O'Connor, 2014), Moms Demand Action launched an advertising campaign against Kroger (Moms Demand Action, 2014). Alternately, smaller groups rely heavily on the internet, news media, email, letter writing, call-in events, and protests. A member of Gays Against Guns mentioned the organization's focus on small costs, such as printing collateral materials because "when you're a grassroots organization, copies are expensive."

Third, tactics also depend on the activist organization's culture. Some organizations engage in controversial behaviors. Several groups included in this study demonstrated willingness to engage in illegal activity and risk arrest. Other actions may be legal but not widely accepted. Collectively Free activists disrupted Easter Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City as part of its anti-chocolate campaign (Chia, 2016), Gays Against Guns prides itself on adopting "visceral" actions that are "in your face" (Neate, 2017, para. 16), and PETA often employs provocative advertising (Quach, 2016).

Finally, tactics also depend on the issue that the activist organization seeks to remedy. Organizations addressing health-related concerns, such as tobacco and cosmetics, employ formal tactics and generate reports rather than using symbolic actions. Environmental groups use formal tactics, hearings, reports, protests, and guerilla activism. Animal rights organizations gravitate toward actions that generate high amounts of visibility and face-to-face contact. Progressive organizations prefer to build a strong social media presence and are more willing to embrace civil disobedience whereas conservative organizations depend on boycotts and informational tactics. Throughout the campaigns' lifespans, groups "switch up the styles of our actions" (Collectively Free). This variety also keeps supporters interested since repeating the same actions would "get kind of boring" (unnamed environmental organization).

Target response

Finally, the corporation's response to the activist organization influences tactics, including whether campaign efforts intensify. An unnamed environmental activist explained they "match the tone," using informational tactics if discussions appear to "be going well" but escalate efforts if the target is "resistant to change." Resistance may manifest in several ways from not responding to meeting invitations (CFS) to meeting with groups where "they're just going to say

what they think you want to hear" (unnamed progressive organization). If activist organizations do move on to more public actions, conversations can continue behind the scenes (Appalachian Voices). One participant explained, "You create a public face, you create a corporate villain, you go at them really hard. But you're sitting at the table with them behind the scenes, working on their corporate policy" (Greenpeace USA).

Creating a media frenzy

Activist organizations regularly involve the media by disseminating information or using dramatic actions to generate publicity, particularly when pressuring public-driven companies, making the media "a really important partner in holding institutions accountable" (U.S. Right to Know). A representative for U.S. Right to Know, who worked in a coalition with Environmental Working Group (EWG) challenging Johnson & Johnson over chemicals in the company's baby products, explained media attention was a catalyst for the campaign. After years of pressure, the company finally responded to the coalition "within one hour" after "they heard from a reporter from the Associated Press about our report." As noted, several participants use what PETA calls "colorful" activities to gain this attention. One individual explained that "creative direct action" is "a way to get eyes on a story." Even if the action "doesn't necessarily effect change in the immediate, if you can get media attention on it, then you raise the profile of the issue and build the groundwork for changing whatever it is that you're trying to change" (The Other 98%).

Engagement

Nineteen of the 21 activist practitioners interviewed for this study claimed their organizations want to parley with the target *before* enacting public campaigns, and that engagement is a central campaign objective because it can engender change. Greenpeace USA sends letters to the organization to request a face-to-face meeting to ensure the conflict is "over questionable policies or actions, not a lack of information" (Linaweaver & Bate, 2009, para. 18). PETA claims it would prefer to solve concerns "before we even print signs" because "Then we can put our funds, our very limited funds, toward more obstinate targets." Moms Demand Action is "happy to talk with them before we go public" and believes reaching out "is a good faith effort." 2nd Vote will ask the target to "clarify your position on this issue" to "be open and fair."

However, participants claimed that "the hardest part is getting them to the bargaining table in the first place. A lot of them will just see an email from us and think 'Maybe if I ignore it, it will go away'" (PETA). Only a handful of participants noted that corporations respond to these requests and meet with the groups. In some cases, the target meets with the group and addresses the concern. In most instances, participants explained that the companies issue what they consider a perfunctory response, making halfhearted promises to change or offering empty talk in response to the activist organizations' concerns. Failure to engage with the activist group in accordance with the group's expectations, or stalled conversations, results in the group reloading its ammunition and reviving the campaign.

According to participants, engagement rarely occurs until after the campaigns go public. Often, "there's an initial period of engagement where we kind of reach out to those companies, we kind of bring them to the table to talk to us, and that can last anywhere from a year to several years" before the two sides are able to engage "in a dialogue" (unnamed environmental organization). Corporations are often publicly challenged before they even agree to meet. Chick-Fil-A reached out to Campus Pride shortly after the group publicly applied pressure while other corporations, including Procter & Gamble and Johnson & Johnson, responded only after demonstrations generated media involvement and inflicted reputational damage.

Discussion

Using data collected through interviews with practitioners from activist organizations, along with organizational documents and news articles, this article contributes to research on activist campaigns by presenting the Corporate Pressure Process Model, which explains how activist organizations design corporate campaigns from the activist perspective. This model extends our knowledge of how activists engage in issues management by offering details on how these groups analyze targets, plan, and implement communication efforts (Jones & Chase, 1979). After providing a summation of the model and its connections to theory and previous research, this section offers implications for target corporations.

The Corporate Pressure Process Model begins by describing the factors that activists consider about their targets. Participants differentiate among targets based on the companies' perceived priorities. Activist groups begin the process by researching and analyzing each target company to determine whether it appears to be more public or profit-driven. Research suggests corporate stances on social issues are often driven by stakeholders (Dodd & Supa, 2015). Waldron et al. (2013) also postulated that stakeholder culture shapes corporate responses to activists and theorized that stakeholder cultures range from moralist to egoist. Moralist cultures reflect public-driven companies as they "view the broader interests of society as their primary obligation" and "emphasize organizational integrity over short-term profit maximization" (p. 403) while egoist cultures "tend to view economically interested external stakeholders as their primary obligation" (p. 402), mirroring profit-driven corporations. Following this step, organizations identify the most likely effective threats, proposing that corporations identified as profit-driven are more likely to respond to formal sanctions or financial threats whereas reputational threats are more effective with public-driven targets. While an activist organization may begin targeting a public-driven firm using a reputational threat, any combination of threats can be used. Some groups even rely on a variety of threats over the course of a campaign to advance their issues to the critical phase (Crable & Vibbert, 1985).

Next, this model described the tactics that activist organizations employ to induce these threats, outlining that they often begin with lower impact, less—invasive, and simpler tactics, leaving room to escalate to more complicated tactics later on, if necessary. An organization's

strengths, resources, culture, and issue also influence tactic selection. The activist organization then employs these tactics to increase media coverage and amplify its messages to promote, build legitimacy for, and elevate the issue to achieve current status by ensuring it touches a large segment of the target's stakeholders (Crable & Vibbert, 1985) and demands management's attention. Finally, this model proposes that for many activist organizations, engagement with the target is a key objective for a campaign so the group can meet and discuss its concerns with corporate management to propose and identify solutions.

In addition to offering an overview of the corporate campaign process from the activist perspective, the findings offer suggestions for targets, particularly regarding the engagement element of the Corporate Pressure Process Model. More recent research positioned issues management as "a strategic planning and response option that organizations can use to create and maintain mutually beneficial relationships" (Heath, 1997, p. 301), offering opportunities for both sides to "reduce friction and increase harmony" (Heath, 2005, p. 460; Taylor et al., 2003). This section provides five implications for target firms: (1) investigate the claim, (2) consider the activist organization, (3) cautiously use CSR as a response mechanism, (4) judiciously engage in corporate activism, and (5) recognize the ongoing nature of activism.

First, management should analyze the accuracy of the activist organization's claim, engaging in issue analysis (Jones & Chase, 1979). In some cases, an activist organization is misinformed and the company must be prepared to offer information and supporting evidence to correct the misperception. At other times, the group is correct, requiring the corporation to analyze the extent of the alleged wrongdoing and adopt a process of adaptation and change. Deegan (2001) declared that many targets avoid engagement. Corporate practitioners may believe acknowledging the activists legitimizes their claims (McDonnell & King, 2013) or perceive the activist organizations pose no threat (L. A. Grunig, 1992). However, study participants maintained ignoring them would do the targets no favors because groups would simply initiate or intensify their public efforts, recommending companies should respond earlier rather than later. Representatives of Kimberly-Clark advised other corporations to not "ignore the fair warning. Take that phone call and just have the conversation" (Gies, 2014, para. 13). Similarly, Heath (1997) suggested that early involvement in issue discussions has a greater impact since these issues have yet to become fixed in publics' minds and generate significant media attention.

Second, the corporation should research the activist organization(s) behind the claims as the profile of the activist group could shape the response. Some participants indicated they had no desire to work with a specific target because their group fundamentally opposed the company's existence rather than a specific policy or practice. A member of The Other 98% claimed that conversations with Exxon would be futile because "Exxon can't do a thing to make us like them. There's not a thing they can do to make anything about their business model acceptable to us."

While some scholars (e.g., Deegan, 2001) suggest corporations must respond to all activist groups, select participants explained they do not expect an invitation and may not accept it if offered. Dialogue can only occur if publics "are willing and able to articulate their demands to

organizations" (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 26). Such relationships also must begin with a desire to interact (Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001). In such cases, the issue stances of activist organizations and their targets are too far apart, providing no ability for these parties to identify areas of shared significance and prohibiting them from building "mutually beneficial relationships" (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2012). Companies cannot respond to every issue or potential issue (Wang, Wezel & Forgues, 2016), forcing management to prioritize issues (Jones & Chase, 1979). In some circumstances, targets are arguably better served to meet with groups that have a genuine interest in posing solutions that generate feasible and sustainable organizational and societal change. Although activists can refuse to compromise on their issues or objectives (Stokes & Rubin, 2010), these groups should be prepared to offer practical solutions to the corporations.

A target also should research the activist organization to learn if it has worked with other corporations in the past and the results of such efforts. Companies can employ vicarious learning (Smith & Elliott, 2007), examining previous cases to identify effective and ineffective responses. Importantly, while prominent and resource-rich activist organizations receive more attention, targets should not dismiss activist groups they perceive to be small (Deegan, 2001) or slacktivists (Veil et al., 2015). Small organizations can effectively challenge corporations. Using tactics such as petitions, boycotts, and social media posts, Moms Demand Action convinced Starbucks to issue a no guns policy at its locations in less than two years after the group's establishment. Similarly, corporations should also not ignore slacktivists. Moms Demand Action later prompted Chipotle to follow Starbucks' lead. Because the group's online petition generated substantial online chatter, the chain responded within 24 hours.

Third, corporations commonly react to activism, or even attempt to prevent activism, by engaging in CSR (King & McDonnell, 2012). However, a company should be careful when employing CSR as a bandage for the activist organization's issue. Study participants quickly disparaged this response as greenwashing (Appalachian Voices). Although CSR initiatives generate financial and reputational perks, such efforts should not be implemented lightly in an attempt to gloss over concerns. Activist organizations monitor CSR activities and will attack programs to expose the hypocritical nature of the corporation that fails to deliver on its rhetoric.

Fourth, corporations increasingly surpass CSR by engaging in corporate activism, which invites risks and rewards. Corporate participation in socio-political issues can be polarizing, isolate stakeholders, and inflict financial damage. Further, taking a stand also can make the company an enticing target to other activists (Dodd & Supa, 2014). Amid the controversy surrounding the North Carolina "Bathroom Bill," Target's decision to publicize its long-standing practice of permitting individuals to use restrooms and fitting rooms that reflect their gender identities "became an expensive and distracting lesson about the perils of combining the web's megaphone with touchy social issues" (Safdar, 2017, para. 2) and attracted groups such as 2nd Vote. However, corporate advocacy also can offer competitive advantages and foster brand loyalty among issue supporters (Dodd & Supa, 2015), particularly for companies that lean toward the public-driven end of the spectrum. As stakeholders appear to trend toward favoring the involvement of business in these issues (Weber Shandwick, 2018), it would behoove a

company to consider its stakeholder culture (Waldron et al., 2013), reflect on its values, and evaluate if it is well-positioned to be a credible leader on the issue.

Finally, corporations must recognize the ongoing nature of activism. If an agreement is met with any activist organization, the company should remain committed to this resolution. Issues "are never solved in the sense of a final answer" (Crable & Vibbert, 1985, p. 5) as an activist organization may revive defunct campaigns (Veil et al., 2015) and will continue to monitor corporate behavior after negotiations end. Should these targets fail to adhere to the agreed-upon terms, a group will not hesitate to reignite public campaign and challenge the corporation based on its original misbehavior and broken promises.

Limitations, future directions, and conclusion

A few limitations should be noted. The data collected for this study favor the activist organization perspective. Future research should incorporate data from the target corporation to provide a more holistic view, including the engagement process. Additionally, analysis reflects on the practices of multiple environmental groups and organizations addressing health and human safety issues while including fewer examples of campaigns focused on animal rights, gun control, employee rights, and LGBTQ rights, even though other organizations were invited to participate. Interviews with activist groups in these areas may offer additional insight into the campaign process. In addition to understanding how these activist organizations use communication to pursue their goals, future studies should continue to explore how corporations differ in their responses to activist organizations (McDonnell & King, 2013). These studies should consider the variables that influence corporate responses (e.g., activist organization size and reputation) along with how targets and non-targets react to activists (Waldron et al., 2013).

This study extended our knowledge of activist organizations' communication practices by introducing the Corporate Pressure Process Model, which outlines how these groups seek to resolve their issues by waging campaigns against corporate targets. Focusing on this process from the activist perspective, this study extends our knowledge of how activist organizations invoke issues management and offers implications for these groups and their targets. As stakeholders continue to elevate their expectations for the corporate sector, managing and responding to these issues present new risks and new opportunities for businesses while also expanding the potential for activist organizations to influence the public agenda and incite change.

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Mediated Vicarious Contact with Transgender People: How Narrative Perspective and Interaction Depiction Influence Intergroup Attitudes, Transportation, and Elevation

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Article Information

Abstract

The emerging intergroup perspective-taking narrative has become a mainstream representational strategy in the rise of transgender media visibility. Taking an experimental design approach, this study investigates how narrative perspective (Ingroup Perspective vs. Outgroup Perspective) interacts with intergroup interaction depiction (Positive vs. Negative) in transgender-related media content to redirect people's attitudes toward transgender people, transportation, and elevation responses. The findings reveal that the outgroup perspective is more likely to elicit 1) positive attitudes toward the featured transgender character and the transgender outgroup; 2) transportation; and 3) meaningful affect, mixed affect, and motivational responses. However, the positive depiction of transgender-cisgender intergroup interaction only prompts positive attitudes toward the transgender character, meaningful affect, and physical responses. Implications of such intergroup communication strategies in public interest communications are discussed.

Introduction

In recent years, transgender media visibility and representation have drastically evolved. The Amazon series *Transparent* won two Golden Globes; Olympic gold medalist Caitlyn Jenner started her reality show, *I am Cait*, garnering 17 million viewers; ABC Family's *Becoming Us* documented a parent's gender transition from the perspective of a teenage son; and *I am Jazz* on TLC explored the journey of a transgender youth (Richards, 2015). These programs show three major shifts in media's representation of marginalized social groups and intergroup relations. First, they redefine and complicate the meaning and relations of ingroup and outgroup in media

representation; different from the ingroup-outgroup relations defined by race, sexuality, nationality, and traditional binary male-female gender categories, transgender social category poses a new ingroup-outgroup relation, cisgender-transgender (cisgender refers to those whose gender identity aligns with their biological sex). Second, these shows emphasize the interaction between transgender characters and their family members as opposed to depicting transgender people as isolated individuals. Instead of focusing on the featured trans characters' perspective, these programs shift the narratives to tell transgender stories from the cisgender family's perspective. As a result, such emerging narrative construction and intergroup relation in media might complicate how audiences process incoming information about the target outgroup members, particularly transgender people. The cisgender family members in these shows might serve as ingroup negotiators to improve intergroup understanding and communication between the general audience and transgender people. While transgender media visibility increased and transformed significantly, the number of transgender people murdered has skyrocketed worldwide (Adams, 2017). This phenomenon calls for better media narrative strategies that are able to not only represent transgender people but also change outgroup members' perceptions of the transgender community at large. Bandura (1994) asserts that vicarious experiences, rather than direct experiences, influence people's conceptions of social reality. Mediated contact theories suggest that contact with outgroup media characters could reduce individuals' prejudices toward the outgroup (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005 Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2006). Therefore, it is theoretically and empirically meaningful to examine the effects of the previously mentioned emerging narrative strategies in the shifting intergroup relations.

The current study integrates mediated vicarious intergroup contact—exposure to the interaction of ingroup and outgroup characters—with social cognitive theory (SCT) to explain the effects of mediated intergroup contact in the context of current transgender media representation. More specifically, this study investigates how narrative perspective (Ingroup/Cisgender Perspective vs. Outgroup/Transgender Perspective) interacts with depictive valence of intergroup interaction (Positive vs. Negative) to influences people's attitudes toward a transgender character and the transgender social group as a whole. Moreover, it examines how narrative perspective and interaction depiction redirect people's transportation and elevation through outgroup-related reality television. This study makes innovative theoretical contributions through 1) investigating the contact effects of narrative perspective and interaction depiction on attitudes, 2) exploring how narrative perspective and interaction depiction influence transportation and elevation, 3) exploring the media effects of the emerging cisgender-transgender intergroup relations and representational strategies, 4) enriching the literature of the emerging field of public interest communications, and 5) exploring the psychologically effective narrative strategies so as to optimize the media's and activists' social change efforts.

Literature review

Public interest communications, intergroup communication, and social change

As a form of strategic communication for social change, public interest communications refers to "the development and implementation of science-based, planned strategic communication campaigns with the goal of achieving significant and sustained positive behavioral change or action on an issue that transcends the particular interests of any single organization" (Fessmann, 2016, p. 16). While intergroup strategic communication is one of the key components that institutes social change (Seyranian, 2013), there is limited systematic knowledge on what social psychological variables can help social groups and community leaders optimize their efforts in social change through constructing intergroup messages and media narratives (Fiol, Harris & House, 1999; Seyranian, 2017). The goals of public interest communications include 1) influencing individuals' attitudes, and 2) enacting positive behavioral change on public interest issues that might "translate into higher levels of overall well-being, thriving, and happiness" (Fessmann, 2016; Seyranian, 2017, p. 59).

This research not only centers around the key component of social change—intergroup relations—but also takes the social scientific approach to explore the optimal social psychological variables and strategies that promote the foregoing two goals of public interest communications. First, drawing from the intergroup contact theories and social cognitive theory, this study addresses the importance of two strategic variables—narrative perspective and interaction depiction—in relationship to intergroup attitudes. Second, through incorporating the theories of transportation and elevation, this research further explores whether narrative depiction and interaction depiction will facilitate creating mediated minority content that not only absorbs/engages the otherwise apathetic majority audience but also prompts broader prosocial tendencies and well-being.

Intergroup contact

The contact hypothesis, also known as Intergroup Contact Theory, asserts that contact with outgroup members functions to facilitate prejudice reduction (Allport, 1954; Schiappa et al., 2005). To optimize such positive outcomes, the contact situation should meet four intergroup conditions—equal status, shared common goals, cooperation, and authoritative support. Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analysis supports these effects and patterns of intergroup contact. However, such direct contact is not always feasible; people tend to choose their social contact based on the similarities in social categories (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, class, religion) (Wojcieszak & Azrout, 2016). In reality, most people do not have direct interpersonal contact with most outgroups that fall outside their identities, especially when it comes to marginalized

social groups such as the transgender community. Therefore, indirect contact plays a crucial role in bridging this gap.

Mediated vicarious contact: Intergroup interaction in the media

Indirect intergroup contact functions in various forms (Harwood, 2010; Harwood, Qadar, & Chen, 2016; Vezzali, Hewstone, Capozza, Giovannini, & Wolfer, 2014). Extended contact addresses situations in which people simply know about an ingroup member's having contact with an outgroup member (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). Imagined contact encourages people to simulate an encounter with an outgroup member mentally (Crisp & Turner, 2009). Parasocial contact pertains to scenarios when an audience encounters individual media characters who are outgroup members (Schiappa et al., 2005). Vicarious contact, on the other hand, emphasizes observing the interaction between an ingroup member and an outgroup member (Joyce & Harwood, 2014). Compared to other forms of contact, mediated vicarious contact is a crucial and accessible means of prejudice reduction, especially when it comes to highly marginalized social groups. First of all, people can easily experience vicarious contact through traditional and digital media with low financial and logistical investments, regardless of their personal social network. Also, individuals in media representation are more interactive than isolated. Moreover, the external mediated outgroup individuals are independent of the audience's subjective imagination. Finally, mediated vicarious contact palliates the anxiety, fear, or perceived threat triggered by direct intergroup contact (Harwood et al., 2016; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011).

This study focuses on mediated vicarious contact because it examines the psychological impacts of exposure to mediated presentation of the interaction between two social groups, the featured transgender character and their cisgender family members. Although underexplored, the existing research on mediated vicarious contact identifies not only the attitude reshaping effects but also the conditions maximizing such effects. According to these studies, how much the audience identifies with the ingroup characters in the observed intergroup interaction (e.g., Joyce & Harwood, 2014), how positively they perceive the contact experience of the ingroup and outgroup characters (e.g., Mazziotta, Mummendey, & Wright, 2011), and the quantity of mediated outgroup contact have positive impact on intergroup attitude outcomes (Wojcieszak & Azrout, 2016). However, this line of research has not examined how narrative strategies such as narrative perspective might impact the cognition of the depiction of intergroup interaction.

Narrative perspective and interaction valence: A social cognitive approach to examine vicarious mediated contact

Narrative perspective

Although rhetorical arguments prompt people to critically and rationally think about media messages (Green & Brock, 2000 Slater, Rouner, & Long, 2006), narratives affect audiences' attitudes by encouraging them to make sense of the story through entertaining and engaging their

attention and emotion (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). The low counterarguing and high engaging properties of narratives are particularly appealing to humans—the cognitive misers—and effective in influencing attitudes related to the topical issues depicted in a story. However, there is little literature on how the previously mentioned perspective-taking narratives—the ingroup or outgroup perspective on which a narrative is based to tell an intergroup story—might influence people's attitudes toward the outgroup.

In the context of the current study and mediated vicarious intergroup contact, narrative perspective refers to the perspective (i.e., ingroup perspective, outgroup perspective) from which the narrative tells a story involving intergroup interaction experience. That is, telling the same story through different characters' perspectives (i.e., ingroup character, outgroup character) might redirect people's cognition of the content differently. Taking the aforesaid transgender reality TV shows, for example, if the same storyline is narrated from the ingroup cisgender family member character's perspective, the audience might have a better understanding of the transgender character because cisgender family member characters ask questions and negotiate with the transgender character from the cisgender audience position. It is possible that the cisgender ingroup family character serves as the negotiator between the transgender character and the general audience to facilitate the intergroup understanding. Thus, it is necessary to examine whether and how narrative perspective influence people's intergroup cognition and outcomes.

Differentiating narrative perspective from identification

Existing research has demonstrated that identification influences people's intergroup attitudes. For example, the impact of negative mediated intergroup contact on people's attitudes toward an outgroup (i.e., immigrants) is enhanced among those who strongly identify with the ingroup character (i.e., a U.S. citizen) (Joyce & Harwood, 2014). Scholars argue that stronger identification amplifies perceived ingroup membership and perceived intergroup difference/conflict and typicality, which might have resulted in relatively negative intergroup attitudes (e.g., Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Stenstrom, Lickel, Denson, & Miller, 2008). However, the effects of ingroup narrative perspective should not be confused with the effects of identification with the ingroup characters. When it comes to emerging intergroup relations such as cisgender-transgender relations, audience members might be reluctant to identify with either the ingroup or outgroup characters. Unlike the established intergroup relationships (e.g., race, sexuality, sex, age), audience members' identification with cisgender characters might not be as automatic, since they might identify themslves with other established social categories of the characters more, such as race, sex, nationality, sexuality, and age. However, the mere ingroup-outgroup division of cisgender-transgender categories might still impact people's intergroup cognition. Narrative perspective should be a standalone factor that influences people's intergroup cognition. To examine the effects of narrative perspective, it is important to control for people's identification with the ingroup character and consider it as a covariate.

Depiction valence of intergroup interaction and its attitudinal outcomes: A social cognitive approach

In reality, mediated vicarious intergroup contact and its attitudinal outcomes might be complicated by not only the narrative perspective but also the depiction of perceiving ingroup character's interaction experience with the outgroup character. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) suggests that individuals observe and learn from other people's actions and the consequent rewards or punishments in dynamic social contexts and interactions (Bandura, 2001). In the context of media exposure, the audience members learn from the experiences of the media characters. In this way, they will acquire new behaviors or attitudes when they retain the relevant information and are motivated and positive in their capability to enact these behaviors. Exposure to a positive intergroup depiction should result in the rewarding and desirable perception of intergroup contact, which eventually leads to the remodeling of the attitudes and behaviors observed in the intergroup narrative (Fujioka,1999, Joyce & Harwood, 2014). Mazziotta et al. (2011) further found that such increased positive intergroup attitudes and desire for future contact are achieved through increasing self-efficacy and decreasing intergroup uncertainty after the positive mediated contact. Thus, when taking into consideration the effects of narrative perspective, positive interaction depiction might interact with ingroup perspective to enhance the positive intergroup attitude outcomes. It is important to explore whether there is an interaction effect between narrative perspective and interaction depiction.

Mediated intergroup contact leads to information processing that helps with judgment, which results in two dimensions of attitudinal outcomes (Bandura, 1986). One dimension is attitudes toward the specific outgroup members with which one has contact. The other is attitudes toward this outgroup as a whole. The notion of abstract symbolic modeling in social cognitive theory states that human beings generalize learning from one context to another (Bandura, 1986). This notion has been tested in intergroup contact; people can generalize their attitudes and perception toward a specific target outgroup member after contact with attitudes toward the whole target outgroup. Herek's (1987) study demonstrated that the generalization also happened for college students who experienced pleasant interactions with a gay person. They tended to generalize the specific contact experience to be the overall impression of gay people as a group. However, little research has examined whether such attitude outcomes and generalization would still exist if we take into consideration the two factors, narrative perspective and valence of interaction depiction. Based on the aforementioned assumptions of the relationships among narrative perspective, interaction depiction, and intergroup attitudes, the researcher poses the following hypotheses:

H1a: People's attitudes toward the featured transgender outgroup character vary as a function of narrative perspective (Ingroup Perspective vs. Outgroup Perspective) and interaction depiction (Negative vs. Positive), such that the storyline with cisgender ingroup perspective and positive interaction depiction are more likely to elicit positive attitudes toward the transgender

outgroup character than the storyline with transgender outgroup perspective and negative interaction depiction.

H1b: People's attitudes toward the transgender outgroup vary as a function of narrative perspective (Ingroup Perspective vs. Outgroup Perspective) and interaction depiction (Negative vs. Positive), such that the storyline with cisgender ingroup perspective and positive interaction depiction is more likely to elicit positive attitudes toward the transgender outgroup than the storyline with transgender outgroup perspective and negative interaction depiction.

Beyond attitudes: Transportation and elevation in mediated intergroup contact

Corresponding to the foregoing two goals of public interest communication, this line of research on the effects of narrative perspective and interaction depiction on intergroup cognition should go beyond emphasizing intergroup attitude outcomes. It should extend into examining the broader transcendent impacts that prompt mental engagement, universal humanistic responses, empathy, well-being, altruism, and justice beyond specific social groups and issues (Seyranian, 2017). Existing research has supported that media narratives can influence people's content engagement such as transportation—how absorbed the audience is (Green & Brock, 2000)—and elevation responses—the meaningful psychological responses audiences feel after observing exceptional conduct (Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012). However, these studies have not explored these narrative effects in the context of mediated vicarious intergroup contact. Thus, transcending the examination of attitudinal outcomes, this study further explores the effects of narrative perspective and interaction depiction on transportation and elevation.

Transportation

Creating minority-related media content that actually engages and absorbs the majority audience has been a challenge for media content creators and strategic communication practitioners who are aiming to create social change and improve intergroup relationships. Psychologically, "people routinely fail to empathize with others, especially members of different social or cultural groups" (Cikara, Bruneau, Van Bavel, & Saxe, 2014, p. 110). It is important to examine whether the emerging perspective-taking strategies (i.e., narrative perspective) have the potential to not only improve intergroup attitudes but also engage audience members in meaningful ways.

Different types of narrative engage and absorb audience members differently, which has rarely been examined in the intergroup context and narrative perspective. Transportation refers to audience members' engagement in the narrative experience in a mental state where their attention is absorbed by the story, such that people feel 1) more emotions about the characters and events and are 2) less aware of their reality and physical surroundings (Green & Brock, 2000). As a result, people are more likely to uncritically accept the message (i.e., belief, attitudes) in the narrative, which subsequently reshapes their attitudes (Green & Brock, 2000; Tal-Or, 2016; Zwarun & Hall, 2012). Although some research (e.g., Slater, Rouner, & Long,

2006) has found the persuasive effects of transportation are lacking, several studies have demonstrated that transportation and narrative engagement are associated with people's endorsement of story-consistent beliefs (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Green & Brock, 2000). However, little research has examined transportation in the context of narrative perspective and interaction depiction in relationship to intergroup communication. In the current study, ingroup narrative perspective might absorb viewers more because they might sympathize or agree with the ingroup character due to shared ingroup experience. Through projecting a rewarding experience, positive interaction depiction has the potential to interact with ingroup narrative perspective to make audience members more cognitively involved (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008) and emotionally invested in considering and adopting the perspective of the characters (Dal Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000). Therefore, the researcher proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: People's transportation varies as a function of narrative perspective (Ingroup Perspective vs. Outgroup Perspective) and interaction depiction (Negative vs. Positive), such that the storyline with cisgender ingroup perspective and positive interaction depiction is more likely to elicit higher levels of transportation than the storyline with transgender outgroup perspective and negative interaction depiction.

Elevation responses

Other than absorbing/engaging audiences and reshaping people's attitudes toward specific outgroups, another broader goal of public interest communications is to generate transcendent impacts (e.g., elicit meaningful empathetic emotions, motivate altruism, prompt prosocial tendencies) that are not necessarily limited to a specific issue or group. Elevation is a possible theoretical consideration that allows us to test whether narrative perspective and interaction depiction can facilitate achieving this goal.

As stated before, people's responses to narrative inevitably involve emotions; narratives about intergroup interaction might elicit more nuanced and meaningful elevation responses differently, depending on the narrative perspective and interaction depiction valence. Research on how affective and conative processes complicate the cognition of media content and its attitudes outcomes can be traced back to the debates between hedonic concerns (e.g., pleasure and enjoyment) and eudaimonic concerns (e.g., truth and meaningfulness) of media consumption. Early on studies on the motivations and outcomes of the consumption of entertainment materials focused on hedonic concerns. Disposition-based theories supported the idea that enjoyment increased as the outcomes depicted for liked characters became more positive in the storyline; level of enjoyment also was increased as disliked characters suffered (Zillmann & Cantor, 1977). Also, Zillmann and Bryant (1985) found in mood-management theory that the potential to optimize positive states and terminate negative states guided viewers' choices of entertainment. For example, this theory indicates that people select their entertainment

content based on whether the content will give them pleasure and enjoyment. However, these frameworks were constructed in hedonistic terms that emphasized appreciation of positive affect and enjoyment. This emphasis limited their capabilities to account for appreciation of negative affect and meaningful entertainment that depicted and activated profound mixed feelings.

With the consideration of the aforementioned limitations, scholars began examining eudaimonic concerns of entertainment content, which led to the theorization of elevation. They conceptualized and operationalized the paradoxical appreciation of meaningful cinematic entertainment featuring portrayals of moral virtues (i.e., sad, dramatic entertainment) as mixed affect (Oliver & Raney, 2011). Oliver and Raney (2011) broadened the conceptualization of entertainment selection and created a scale to include both "pleasure-seeking" and "truth-seeking" as motivators (p. 984). In terms of the outcome and response to such entertainment, Oliver et al. (2012) identified the feelings triggered by eudaimonic concerns and meaningful entertainment as elevation. Elevation refers to "an other-praising affective response to witnessing moral beauty that involves mixed affect—feelings of both sadness and happiness" (Oliver et al., 2012, p. 361). Elevation is signified as meaningful affect (e.g., touch, inspired), physical responses (e.g., tears, goose bumps, a lump in the throat), mixed affect (e.g., feelings of happiness and sadness simultaneously), and motivations to embody moral virtues (e.g., being a better person or helping others) (Oliver et al., 2012, p. 360).

In the context of this study, these aforesaid apsects of elevation responses echo the second goal—the transcendent impacts—of public interest communications. Elevation responses cover not only the emotions and well-being that are related to universal empathy (i.e., meaningful and mixed affects, physical responses) but also prosocial and altruistic tendencies (i.e., motivations to embody moral virtues and do social good). The previous hypotheses pose that the narrative perspective and interaction depiction will interact in such a way that the storyline narrated from the ingroup perspective with a positive interaction depiction is more likely to elicit positive intergroup attitudes and transportation. However, these hypothesized outcomes might not be the case for elevation responses. According to the eudaimonic concerns, the outgroup perspective with a negative depiction might better fulfill audience members needs in truth-seeking through making them paradoxically appreciate the outgroup perspective and negative intergroup interaction experience. Thus, the researcher hypothesizes:

H3: People's meaningful affect, mixed affect, physical responses, and motivations to embody or enact moral virtues vary as a function of narrative perspective (Ingroup Perspective vs. Outgroup Perspective) and interaction depiction (Negative vs. Positive), such that the storyline with transgender outgroup perspective and negative interaction depiction is more likely to elicit higher levels of meaningful affect, mixed affect, physical responses, and motivations than the storyline with cisgender ingroup perspective and positive interaction depiction.

As previously discussed, it is important to differentiate narrative perspective from identification so as to explore the effects of narrative perspective. Thus, the researcher poses:

RQ1: Is there a difference in how narrative perspective and interaction depiction influence intergroup attitude, transportation, and elevation when we control for identification and consider it as a covariate?

Methods

Participants

A sample of 117 undergraduate participants from a large Southern public university completed a lab experiment in exchange for extra credit. The respondents were, on average, 20 years old (*SD* = 1.69) and comprised of 76% biological female (*n* = 89) and 24% biological male (*n* = 28). Participants who identified as transgender person (i.e., transman, transwoman, gender fluid) were manually eliminated from the final data for the purpose of the study.

Most participants were Caucasian (76.1%, *n* = 89), followed by African American (17.1%, *n* = 20), Other Hispanic (3.4%, *n* = 4), Asian-American/Oriental/Pacific Islander (2.6%, *n* = 3), and Mexican-American/Chicano (0.9%, *n* = 1). Two-point-six percent (*n* = 3) did not identify with any of these categories. Additionally, 57.2% (*n* = 67) estimated their family's household income as $80,000 or above.

Study design and procedure

To address the hypotheses and research question, the current study employed a 2 (Narrative Perspective: Ingroup Perspective vs. Outgroup Perspective) x 2 (Interaction Depiction: Positive vs. Negative) between-subjects laboratory experimental design. The researcher used clips from ABC Family's *Becoming Us* for the stimuli and performed manipulation checks on their perceived narrative perspective and interaction depiction.

In the main laboratory study, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. The first condition was a video narrated by the perceived ingroup cisgender character with negative interaction depiction; the second condition was a video narrated by the target outgroup transgender character with negative interaction depiction; the third condition was a video narrated by the perceived ingroup cisgender character with a positive interaction depiction; the fourth condition was a video narrated by the target outgroup transgender character with a positive interaction. After being randomly assigned to one condition, participants were instructed to proceed to watch the assigned stimulus and answer questionnaires measuring the key dependent variables (i.e., attitudes toward the transgender character, attitudes toward the transgender outgroup, transportation, elevation responses), the covariate (i.e., identification), and demographics. Such a one-time exposure experimental design with video stimuli has been widely used in mediated intergroup contact research (e.g., Joyce & Harwood, 2014; Harwood et

al., 2016). The study protocol and materials were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the researcher's university.

Independent variables / stimulus manipulation

This study used 8-minute clips edited from ABC Family's docu-series *Becoming Us* as the stimuli. The structure, component, and main storyline were the same. The main chosen storyline was about transwoman Carly—the outgroup character—talking about her gender transition with her son, Ben, the ingroup character. Material from *Becoming Us* was used because it portrays a relevant and salient outgroup for the study population and has a relatively even mix of positive and negative footage of intergroup interaction. Most importantly, this show has parallel narratives to tell the same storylines from different characters' perspectives.

Narrative perspective
To manipulate the narrative perspective, the opening introduction was narrated by the cisgender son, Ben, in the ingroup perspective conditions and by the transgender mother, Carly, in the outgroup perspective conditions. The manipulation of narrative perspective was further enhanced by inserting interviews and voiceovers of the cisgender ingroup character or the transgender character within the context of the chosen storyline.

Interaction depiction
To manipulate interaction depiction, each scene from the show was labeled as positive or negative by the researcher. Scenes were labeled as positive when characters showed empathy, perspective taking, cooperation, or affection (Joyce & Harwood, 2014). Scenes were labeled as negative when the characters were aggressive or were engaged in conflict or arguing. Through editing and assembling the footage, video stimuli composed of varying ratios of positive and negative interactions between the featured transgender character and her cisgender family members were created. The positive condition contained at least 80% positive interactions, and the negative condition at least 80% negative interactions.

Stimuli structure
Regardless of the manipulation of narrative perspective and interaction depiction valence, all conditions shared the common themes in their storylines in the same order: 1) the transgender person negotiating the use of personal pronoun with the son, 2) a discussion of her surgical transition with the son, and 3) her overall relationship with her family members, particularly her son. All conditions shared a similar introduction and structure but were given different narrated opening introductions, written prologues, and epilogues to strengthen the manipulations. In the opening introduction, either Ben or Carly introduced himself or herself, talking about how he or she used to live a normal life until Carly's transition. Following this narrated introduction, the stimulus then presented the previously mentioned shared structured storyline. Throughout the storyline I inserted the interviews and voiceovers that align with the narrative perspective and

interaction depiction manipulations of the condition. For example, the interviews inserted in the ingroup-negative condition were mainly Ben talking about how Carly's transition had negatively impacted his life while commenting on the storyline. Before each scene depicting a positive or negative interaction between the trans character and her family members, text-based prologues were presented on the screen to set the valence tone for the scene. For example, the outgroup-positive prologue for the segment where Carly negotiated the use of her gender pronoun with Ben read, "I finally asked Ben to call me mom and use female pronouns so that I can feel that I am living a normal life. Surprisingly, he is very receptive to that idea." The epilogue was designed to strengthen the manipulation and provide closure to the narrative. For example, the epilogue for the ingroup-negative condition read, "I think we all have a hard time dealing with changes in Carly's life. Sometimes I feel that our relationship is falling apart. I just need to deal with it one day at a time." The final stimuli consisted of clips from episodes 1, 3, 7, and 8.

Pilot study

To test the effectiveness of the stimulus manipulation, the researcher conducted a 2 (Narrative Perspective) by 2 (Interaction Depiction) between-subjects pilot study. Seventy-four undergraduate student participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. To check the manipulation of narrative perspective, one item asked, "Who do you think is the narrator in this video clip? In other words, whose perspective do you think this video is taking?" The participants chose from "Carly (the transgender character)," "Ben (the son)," or "Don't Know." The vast majority of participants (93.24%) chose the answer aligned with our manipulation of narrative perspective, X^2 (1, $N = 74$) = 55.39, $p < 0.001$. People more often perceived the storyline as being told from Carly's perspective (92.11%) when exposed to the outgroup perspective videos and were more likely to perceive the storyline as being told from Ben's perspective (94.44%) when exposed to the ingroup perspective videos.

When it came to interaction depiction valence, participants were asked to rate how much they agreed with six statements describing their general perception of the interaction between the two main characters (e.g., "Most time, the interactions between Carly and Ben are positive," "I think the relationship of the main characters is falling apart") on a 7-point Likert-type scale (Cronbach's α =.94). A 2 X 2 ANOVA was conducted to examine the perceived valence of the interaction depiction in the videos. The analysis revealed main effects for experience, as the participants actually perceived the positive interaction depictions more positive ($M = 5.47$, SE =.17) than the negative interaction depiction ($M = 2.62$, SE =.16), F (1, 70) = 151.46, $p < .001$, partial η^2 =.68. The results yielded no main effect for Narrative Group Perspective, F (1, 70) = .114, $p > .05$, partial η^2 = .002. Also, there was no Narrative Perspective X Interaction Depiction interaction effect, F (1, 70) = .08, $p > .05$, partial η^2 =.001.

Dependent variables

Attitudes toward the featured transgender character and transgender social group

Two sets of five-item scales separately measured perceptions of the featured transgender character—Carly—and transgender social group's warmth, competence, trustworthiness, morality, and respect (Transgender Character: Cronbach's α = .94, M = 4.46, SD = 1.80; Transgender Outgroup: Cronbach's α = .93, M = 4.81, SD = 1.50). The participants responded to a 7-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicated more positive attitudes toward the transgender character/social group (Joyce & Harwood, 2014).

Transportation

Transportation was measured with 12 items adapted from Green and Brock's (2000) scale. Responding to a 7-point Likert scale, participants rated how much they agreed with the statements related to their focus level of the stimuli. This measurement included statements such as, "While I was watching the narrative, I could easily picture the events in it taking place," "While I was watching the narrative, activity going on in the room around me was on my mind," and "I could picture myself in the scene of the events described in the narrative." Items were recoded so that higher values indicated higher levels of transportation. The scale was reliable (Cronbach's α = .80, M = 4.42, SD = .88).

Elevation responses

Affective responses

To assess three affective responses, the scales constructed by Oliver et al. (2012) were used. Responding to a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = Not at All, 7 = Very Much), participants rated how much they experienced each emotion under *Meaningful Affect* (touched, moved, emotional, meaningful, compassion, inspired, and tender; M = 4.34, SD = 1.62, α = .92); *Positive Affect* (cheerful, happy, joyful, and upbeat; M = 2.85, SD = 1.66, α = .93); and *Negative Affect* factors (sad, gloomy, depressed, and melancholy; M = 3.28, SD = 1.43, α = .80). Mixed-affect scores were computed to see each participant's minimum score on either positive affect or negative affect (Ersner-Hershfield, Mikels, Sullivan, & Carstensen, 2008; Oliver et al., 2012): (Mixed Affect: M = 6.14, SD = 2.13). That was, a person's mixed-affect score would be high when both positive affect and negative affect were reported to be at high levels (Ersner-Hershfield et al., 2008).

Physical responses

Physical manifestations of affective responses were measured on a 7-point Likert scale through 11 items like "lump in throat," "tears crying," "rising or open chest," or "muscles tensed" (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Oliver et al., 2012; Silvers & Haidt, 2008). This scale yielded good reliability (M = 2.29, SD = 1.21, α = .89).

Motivational responses

Using a 7-point Likert scale, participants responded to a list of items about how the video might have motivated them to act and behave. The items were created by Oliver et al. (2012) based on Algoe and Haidt's (2009) motivational effects of elevation, including items such as "being a better person," "to do something good for others," or "to seek what really matters in life" (M = 3.94, SD = 1.64, α = .93).

Covariate

Identification with the ingroup character

Responding to a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "Extremely Disagree," 7 = "Extremely Agree"), participants rated how much they agreed with the seven statements on their identification with the cisgender ingroup character (Cronbach's α = .87, M = 3.33, SD = 1.29). The measurement includes identification inventory items, such as "I am identified with Ben," "I share commonalities with Ben," "I consider myself in the similar social group of Ben," "I think the narrator would be the ideal group member in my social life." "Broadly, Ben is in the similar socio-economic group that I am in" (Joyce & Harwood, 2014).

Results

H1a explored whether people's attitudes toward the outgroup character varied as a function of narrative perspective and interaction depiction. A factorial ANCOVA was conducted, treating people's attitudes toward the outgroup character as the dependent variable and narrative perspective and interaction depiction as the independent variables, with identification with the ingroup character as a covariate. As Table 1 shows, the analysis revealed a main effect for narrative perspective, indicating that the participants exposed to the outgroup perspective narrative reported significantly more positive attitudes toward the featured outgroup character (M = 4.99, SE = .22) than did those who were exposed to the ingroup narrative perspective (M = 3.92, SE = .23), $F(1, 99)$ = 10.07, $p < .01$, partial η^2 = .09. The results yielded a main effect for interaction depiction, indicating that the participants exposed to the video depicting positive interaction had significantly more positive attitudes toward the featured outgroup character (M = 5.26, SE = .21) than did those who were exposed to the video depicting negative interaction (M =3.65, SE =. 23), $F(1, 99)$ = 27.95, $p < .001$, partial η^2 = .33. The analysis revealed no Narrative Perspective X Interaction Depiction interaction effect, $F(1, 99)$ = .35, $p > .05$, partial η^2 = .004. In addition, identification with the ingroup character was a significant covariate, $F(1, 99)$ = 15.01, $p < .001$, partial η^2 = .13, which supports the researcher's theoretical decision to control for this variable in the analysis.

Table 1. ANCOVA statistics for attitudes toward the featured outgroup character as a function of narrative perspective and interaction depiction, controlling for identification with the intergroup character

Dependent Variables: Positive Attitudes towards the Featured Outgroup Character

	Negative Depiction	Positive Depiction
Ingroup Perspective		
M	3.02_{aA}	4.82_{bA}
SE	.34	.31
Outgroup Perspective		
M	4.27_{aB}	5.70_{bB}
SE	.30	.30

Narrative Perspective X Interaction Depiction: $F(1, 99) = .35$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .004$.
Covariate - Identification with the Intergroup Character: $F(1, 99) = 15.01$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .13$
Within rows, means with no lowercase subscript in common differ at $p < .05$.
Within columns, means with no uppercase subscript in common differ at $p < .05$.

H1b explored whether people's attitudes toward the outgroup as a whole varied as a function of narrative perspective and interaction depiction. A factorial ANCOVA was conducted, treating people's attitudes toward the transgender people as the dependent variable and narrative perspective and interaction depiction as the independent variables, with identification with the ingroup character as a covariate. As Table 2 shows, the analysis revealed a main effect for narrative perspective, indicating that the participants exposed to the outgroup perspective narrative reported significantly more positive attitudes toward the outgroup as a whole ($M = 5.08$, $SE = .22$) than did those who were exposed to the ingroup narrative perspective ($M = 4.36$, $SE = .22$), $F(1, 99) = 5.32$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$. The results yielded no main effect for interaction depiction, indicating that the participants exposed to the video depicting positive interaction have equivalent positive attitudes toward the outgroup as a whole ($M = 5.08$, $SE = .20$) as did those who were exposed to the video depicting negative interaction ($M = 4.36$, $SE = .22$), $F(1, 99) = 3.86$, $p = .052$, partial $\eta^2 = .33$. The analysis revealed no Narrative Perspective X Interaction Depiction interaction effect, $F(1, 99) = .02$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$. Also, identification with the ingroup character was a significant covariate, $F(1, 99) = 16.84$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .15$.

Table 2. ANCOVA statistics for attitudes toward the outgroup as a function of narrative perspective and interaction depiction, controlling for identification with the intergroup character

Dependent Variables: Positive Attitudes towards the Outgroup

	Negative Depiction	Positive Depiction
Ingroup Perspective		
M	4.06_{aA}	4.66_{aA}
SE	.31	.29
Outgroup Perspective		
M	4.82_{aB}	5.33_{aB}

SE	.28	.28

Narrative Perspective X Interaction Depiction: $F(1, 99) = .02$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$
Covariate - Identification with the Intergroup Character: $F(1, 99) = 16.84$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .15$
Within rows, means with no lowercase subscript in common differ at $p < .05$.
Within columns, means with no uppercase subscript in common differ at $p < .05$.

H2 asked whether people's transportation varied as a function of narrative perspective and interaction depiction. A factorial ANCOVA was conducted, treating transportation as the dependent variable and narrative perspective and interaction depiction as the independent variables, with identification with the ingroup character as a covariate. As Table 3 shows, the analysis revealed a main effect for narrative perspective, indicating that the participants exposed to outgroup perspective narrative reported significantly higher levels of transportation ($M = 4.57$, $SE = .12$) than did those who were exposed to the ingroup narrative perspective ($M = 4.18$, $SE = .13$), $F(1, 99) = 4.57$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. The results yielded no main effect for interaction depiction, indicating that the participants exposed to the video depicting positive interaction have equivalent levels of transportation ($M = 4.31$, $SE = .11$) as did those who were exposed to the video depicting negative interaction ($M = 4.44$, $SE = .12$), $F(1, 99) = .63$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. The analysis revealed no Narrative Perspective X Interaction Depiction interaction effect, F $(1, 99) = .88$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. Also, identification with the ingroup character was a significant covariate, $F(1, 99) = 28.38$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .16$.

To examine whether people's elevation responses differed as a function of narrative perspective and interaction depiction (H3), a 2 (Narrative Perspective) X 2 (Interaction Depiction) multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted with the four dimensions of elevation responses—meaningful affect, mixed affect, physical responses, and motivational responses—entered into the model as dependent variables with identification with cisgender ingroup characters as a covariate. As Table 4 shows, the results yielded a significant main effect for both narrative perspective, Wilks' $\lambda = .88$, $F(4, 96) = 3.22$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .12$, and interaction depiction, Wilks' $\lambda = .89$, $F(4, 96) = 3.02$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .11$. Also, identification with the ingroup character was a significant covariate, Wilks' $\lambda = .82$, $F(4, 99) = 5.30$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .18$.

Table 3. ANCOVA statistics for transportation as a function of narrative perspective and interaction depiction, controlling for identification with the intergroup character

Dependent Variables: Transportation	Negative Depiction	Positive Depiction
Ingroup Perspective		
M	4.32aA	4.03aA
SE	.19	.17
Outgroup Perspective		
M	4.56aB	4.58aB
SE	.17	.16

Narrative Perspective X Interaction Depiction: $F(1, 99) = .88$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$

Covariate - Identification with the Intergroup Character: $F(1, 99) = 28.38$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .16$
Within rows, means with no lowercase subscript in common differ at $p < .05$.
Within columns, means with no uppercase subscript in common differ at $p < .05$.

The univariate analysis for Meaningful Affect revealed a significant main effect for narrative perspective, with participant exposed to outgroup perspective narrative reporting significantly higher on meaningful affects (M = 4.85, SE = .21) than did those who were exposed to ingroup perspective narrative ($M = 3.74$, $SE = .23$), $F(1, 99) = 11.76$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .11$. A main effect was obtained for interaction depiction, with participants exposed to positive intergroup interaction depiction reporting significantly higher on meaningful affect for transgender people in general ($M = 4.71$, $SE = .20$) than did those who were exposed to negative interaction depiction ($M = 3.88$, $SE = .22$), $F(1, 99) = 8.01$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .08$. There was no interaction effect between narrative perspective and interaction depiction, $F(1, 99) = .05$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$.

The univariate analysis for Mixed Affect revealed a significant main effect for narrative perspective, with participants exposed to outgroup perspective narrative reporting significantly higher on mixed affect ($M = 6.72$, $SE = .30$) than did those who were exposed to ingroup perspective narrative ($M = 5.50$, $SE = .32$), $F(1, 99) = 7.32$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$. No main effect was obtained for interaction depiction, $F(1, 99) = 1.40$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. There was no interaction effect between narrative perspective and interaction depiction, $F(1, 99) = .33$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$.

The univariate analysis for Physical Reponses revealed a significant main effect for interaction depiction, with participant exposed to positive intergroup interaction depiction reporting significantly higher on physical responses ($M = 2.62$, $SE = .16$) than did those who were exposed to negative interaction depiction ($M = 2.00$, $SE = .17$), $F(1, 99) = 6.94$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$. No main effect was obtained for narrative perspective, $F(1, 99) = 1.53$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. There was no interaction effect between narrative perspective and interaction depiction, $F(1, 99) = .34$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$.

The univariate analysis for Motivational Reponses revealed a significant main effect for narrative perspective, with participants exposed to outgroup perspective narrative reporting significantly higher on physical responses ($M = 4.45$, $SE = .22$) than did those who were exposed to ingroup narrative perspective condition ($M = 3.58$, $SE = .24$), $F (1, 99) = 6.46$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$. No main effect was obtained for interaction depiction, $F (1, 99) = .86$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. There was no interaction effect between narrative perspective and interaction depiction, $F (1, 99) = .13$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$.

Table 4. MANCOVA statistics for elevation responses as a function of narrative perspective and interaction depiction

	Narrative Perspective				Interaction Depiction			
	Ingroup	Outgroup	Univariate F	Partial η^2	Negative	Positive	Univariate F	Partial η^2
Meaningful Affect								
M	3.74	4.85	11.76***	.11	3.88	4.71	.8.01**	.08
SE	.23	.21			.22	.20		
Mixed Affect								
M	5.50	6.72	7.32**	.07	5.87	6.35	1.40	.01
SE	.32	.30			.30	.28		
Physical Responses								
M	2.15	2.47	1.53	.02	2.00	2.62	6.94**	.07
SE	.18	.17			.17	.16		
Motivational Responses								
M	3.58	4.45	6.46*	.06	3.87	4.16	.86	.01
SE	.24	.22			.23	.21		
	Multivariate: Wilks' $\lambda = .88$, $F(4, 96) = 3.22$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .12$.				Wilks' $\lambda = .89$, $F(4, 96) = 3.02$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .11$.			

Narrative Perspective X Interaction Depiction: Wilks' $\lambda = .99$, $F(4, 96) = .29$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$
Covariate - Identification with Ingroup Character: Wilks' $\lambda = .82$, $F(4, 96) = 5.30$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .18$
*$p < .05$, **$p < .001$, ***$p < .001$

Discussion

In this study, the researcher used an 8-minute experimentally controlled stimulus manipulating the narrative perspective and intergroup interaction valence so as to examine their impact on intergroup cognition and attitudinal outcomes. This study hypothesizes that the storyline with cisgender ingroup perspective and positive interaction depiction is more likely to 1) improve intergroup attitudes at both individual levels and group levels, and 2) absorb and engage the

audience mentally. Also, the storyline with transgender outgroup perspective and negative interaction depiction is more likely to evoke elevation responses that signify prosocial emotions and tendencies, because people might paradoxically appreciate the outgroup perspective and negative intergroup interaction experience to fulfill their eudaimonic/truth-seeking needs (Oliver, et al., 2012). Our findings show that narrative perspective and interaction depiction impact not only intergroup attitudes but also transportation and elevation responses. However, the effect directions of narrative perspective do not entirely align with our predictions. Transgender outgroup narratives are more effective in terms of improving intergroup attitudes, absorbing the audience, and eliciting meaningful affect, mixed affect, and motivational responses. These findings have important theoretical and practical implications.

The findings of this study show that narrative perspective can influence the attitudinal outcomes of mediated vicarious intergroup contact—that is, people's attitudes toward the outgroup transgender character and the transgender outgroup as a whole. People exposed to outgroup narrative perspective (i.e., the featured transgender character's perspective) are more likely to have positive attitudes toward the featured transgender character than those who are exposed to the same storyline narrated from an ingroup perspective (i.e., the cisgender family character's perspective). This effect direction is different from our prediction. One potential explanation is that the outgroup perspective might have been perceived to be more authentic, which leads to better attitudes. Existing research has shown that the perceived authenticity (i.e., representativeness, candidness) of a reality program is positively associated with enjoyment, learning, and cognitive involvement (Hall, 2009). Telling the outgroup story from the outgroup perspective might make the audience perceive the story to be more authentic and genuine, which results in more cognitive involvement, enjoyment, and learning. Consequently, the outgroup perspective might further lead to better intergroup tolerance and attitudes. Moreover, the current research shows that the attitudinal effects of narrative perspective are transferred and generalized into people's attitudes toward the transgender outgroup as a whole; the storylines narrated through the transgender outgroup character's perspective elicit significantly more positive attitudes toward the transgender social group. These findings resonate with the results from previous research that the attitude change outcomes of mediated intergroup contact can be generalized from an individual outgroup character to the outgroup (Herek, 1987). More importantly, it indicates that the effects of specific narrative strategies (e.g., narrative perspective) could be generalized and transferred from the individual level to the group level. However, the transgender narrative perspective being more effective in reshaping attitudes does not mean that cisgender family characters hinder the intergroup *understanding*. Instead, this finding might indicate that the effects of intergroup persuasion and attitude reshaping are stronger when the story is told by the outgroup character, while both ingroup and outgroup narrative perspective strategies are persuasive at different levels. For example, the mean of attitudes toward the transgender outgroup after exposure to ingroup narrative perspective is 4.36 (as opposed 5.08, the attitudes after exposure to the outgroup narrative perspective), which is not necessarily a negative attitudinal outcome itself. Thus, while applying outgroup narrative

perspective can optimize the intergroup attitude outcomes, we need to be cautious about discrediting the effects of ingroup narrative perspective.

In terms of the effects of interaction depiction on the outcomes of mediated intergroup contact, the findings echo past studies suggesting that positive portrayals of outgroup members lead to favorable attitudes to some extent (Covert & Dixon, 2008; Joyce & Harwood, 2014; Mastro & Tukachinsky, 2011; Power, Murphy, & Coover, 1996). Positive depictions of transgender-cisgender intergroup interaction are significantly more likely to elicit positive attitudes toward the featured transgender characters than negative interaction depictions. However, such effects of interaction depiction do not transfer or generalize into people's attitudes toward the transgender outgroup as a whole; that is, viewers hold equivalent attitudes toward the transgender outgroup after watching the positive or negative interaction depiction. This indicates the valence of intergroup interaction depiction is more likely to change people's attitudes toward a specific outgroup member rather than the outgroup as a whole. While one-time exposure to positive intergroup interaction depiction can effectively improve attitudes toward a certain outgroup individual, it might take multiple or continuous exposures to reshape one's attitudes toward the whole outgroup. Moreover, there is no interaction effect between narrative perspective and interaction depiction in changing attitudes toward the transgender character or transgender outgroup, which means they only work as independent factors to influence people's intergroup cognition in the transgender-cisgender intergroup context. Telling a positive transgender-cisgender intergroup interaction storyline through the transgender character's perspective does not necessarily elicit more positive attitudes toward the transgender character or the transgender outgroup than telling a negative intergroup interaction storyline through the cisgender character's perspective.

Narrative perspective and interaction depiction also have transcendent impacts—transportation and elevation responses—that go beyond shaping attitudes toward specific social groups. Similar to the findings for the attitude outcomes, while interaction depiction does not influence viewers' transportation, transgender outgroup perspective elicits higher levels of transportation. Letting the outgroup members narrate the story, as the findings of this study suggest, absorbs the audience more, which plays an important role in engaging the majority audience who are otherwise apathetic to minority issues, experience, and content. When it comes to elevation responses, outgroup perspective narratives elicit more meaningful affect, mixed affect, and motivational responses compared to ingroup perspective narratives. Moreover, positive interaction depiction is significantly more likely to prompt meaningful affect and physical responses than negative interaction depiction. There is no interaction effect between narrative perspective and interaction depiction in eliciting elevation responses. Elevation responses transcend attitudes toward specific individuals and social groups, which encourage the audiences to tolerate the universal outgroups, feel touched, and be a better self. Telling the story from the outgroup transgender perspective or demonstrating a positive intergroup interaction improves not only people's attitudes toward the transgender outgroup, but also their universal tolerance.

Theoretical implications

The results contribute to media psychology and social changes in a number of aspects. First, this study explains the effects of mediated contact in the context of current transgender media representation through integrating vicarious contact with social cognitive theory. Second, it explores how narrative perspective interacts with valence of intergroup interaction to redirect people's intergroup attitudes, elevation, and transportation when being exposed to the outgroup-related content. Third, this study separates the effects of narrative perspective from the ones of identification. This complicates both the conceptualization and operationalization of mediated intergroup contact. Fourth, this research examines the mechanism and social effects of current transgender media representational strategies, which is useful for media practitioners who want to contribute to social change through diversity narratives and multicultural economy. Lastly, this study is a timely response to the call for addressing intergroup social change through social psychology in the emerging field of public interest communications.

Practical implications

Collectively, these findings demonstrate the importance of having the minority outgroup members tell their own stories. Conventionally, people assume that in order to better intergroup understanding, the message should come from a negotiator from the dominant social group in which members of the mass audience belong. Research in social psychology has demonstrated that ingroup-and-outgroup status (e.g., David & Turner, 1999) and majority-and-minority status (Crano & Seyranian, 2009) are important factors that redirect persuasiveness. More specifically, when sources are part of the audience's ingroup (e.g., fellow members belonging to the same social category) or constitute a majority (e.g., dominance in the number of ingroup members), they have more persuasive power (Petty & Wegener, 1998; Seyranian, 2017). According to this logic, finding a White straight cisgender spokesperson (with whom the majority general audience members identify with the most) might be the key to intergroup persuasion. However, our findings suggest otherwise: when the same story is narrated by the transgender outgroup character, the audience members 1) feel more engaged/absorbed; 2) hold more positive attitudes toward the transgender character and the transgender outgroup; and 3) have more meaningful affect, mixed affect, and motivational responses.

The findings in the effects of interaction depiction are also valuable for practitioners in public interest communications. If the main goal of a campaign or media content is to improve people's perceptions about a specific outgroup member, it is crucial to ensure that the depiction and narrative are constructed in a positive light. However, when it comes to shifting people's attitudes toward a social group as a whole, the strategy needs to focus on letting the outgroup members telling their stories from their perspectives, regardless of whether their stories are positive or negative.

In addition to attitudinal outcomes, our findings demonstrate the transcendent effects of narrative strategies, which is important for the practice of public interest communication (Seyranian, 2017). According to Seyranian (2017), public interest communications promotes "the expansion of the business-as-usual model of advancing the plight of specific individuals and groups to more broadly analyzing implications from all human angles through a broad 360-degree view" (p. 59). It's crucial to explore narrative strategies that have the potential to encourage "collectives to band together and enact visions of social change that focus on the advancement of all of humanity" (p. 59). In order to prompt such universal prosocial emotions (i.e., meaning affect, mixed affect) and tendencies (i.e., motivational responses), campaign strategists or media content creators should apply the outgroup perspective narrative strategies. If their goal is to attract people's initial attention to or raise people's awareness of outgroup issues and engage/absorb them mentally, it is also important to let outgroup members deliver the story, regardless of the valence of the story. However, positive interaction depiction is more effective in eliciting physical responses (e.g., "lump in throat," "cry with tears").

Limitations and directions for future research

There are limitations to this study. First, this study did not examine the mixed depiction of the interaction between the ingroup and outgroup characters. In reality, there is no absolute negative or positive interaction depiction on television. It is important to examine how the coexistence of negative and positive interaction depictions in different proportions interact with perspective narrative to influence people's attitudes, transportation, and elevation. Second, this study tested only one-time exposure, which is limited in explaining the accumulative and long-term impact that narrative perspective and interaction depiction have on intergroup cognition. Third, this study utilized a student sample, researchers could replicate this study with a nationally representative sample to see if the findings are consistent. Fourth, there is a need to explore the transgender-cisgender intergroup dynamic outside of the family context. The familial relationship that the featured transgender and cisgender characters share might be a factor that moderates the effect of perspective narrative on attitude reshaping. Future research should eliminate such factors when more diverse transgender-related representational materials are available. Lastly, this study only explored the effects of narrative perspective and interaction depiction in the context of transgender-cisgender intergroup relations. Researchers should examine their effects in different intergroup relations (e.g., race, sexuality, ability).

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