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Gabrielle Leigh Dudgeon, Student

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AUTHENTICALLY ADVOCATING: PUBLIC RELATIONS' ROLE IN SOCIAL ISSUES MANAGEMENT

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Communication at the University of Kentucky

By
Gabrielle Leigh Dudgeon
Lexington, Kentucky
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2022

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

AUTHENTICALLY ADVOCATING: PUBLIC RELATIONS' ROLE IN SOCIAL ISSUES MANAGEMENT

Now more than ever, organizations utilize public relations to build, maintain, and even strengthen relationships with internal and external stakeholders. Many public relations strategies and tactics serve to bridge an organization's interests with those of their publics, while also building, maintaining, and strengthening trust. Social issues management is one of the tools that has the potential to build long-term trust and commitment. Public relations practitioners have recognized this opportunity, and most engage in social issues management in a variety of ways to strengthen their organizations while also contributing to society (Fall, 2006). This double-edge tool can create long-lasting impact in all areas of business continuity. The existing research on social issues management, both value advocacy and CSR, showcases how PR has utilized these techniques to build upon existing relationships and create new ones. However, in examining the research on social issues management, a consensus is missing on how to label and define the process. In order to support the paradigm of social issues management, the research questions in this dissertation explore how CCOs engage in strategic decision making to develop and utilize social issues management.

This dissertation explores social issues management based on practitioner views, suggesting the integration of both corporate social responsibility and corporate social advocacy as ways to define social issues management. Through qualitative, practitioner-based research, this dissertation also proposes a conceptualization of social issues management, based on literature and data from public relations professionals. Additionally, using Rokeach's Values Systems guidelines (1973), this research evaluates how both instrumental values and terminal values are integrated through social issues management. Finally, a best practices of social issues management is provided for practitioners.

KEYWORDS: social issues management; social responsibility (CSR); corporate social advocacy (CSA); values systems; issues management; stakeholder theory

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7/29/2022

Date

AUTHENTICALLY ADVOCATING: PUBLIC RELATIONS' ROLE IN SOCIAL ISSUES MANAGEMENT

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Date

DEDICATION

To my mom, Sandra Howard, you taught me how to read, the value of hard work, dedication, and passion, and more importantly to never give up. You were there through every heartbreak, rejection, and stressful all-night writing session, cheering me on and believing in me. Because of you and your love, support, and sacrifice, I know that I can achieve beyond any set expectation. To my husband, Andrew Satornino, you have picked me up in my moments of doubt and have always provided me a moment of logic and clarity to my creative and chaotic ideas. Thank you for pushing me to become the best version of myself. To my loyal companion, Snow, you deserve an honorary Doctorate for all the nights you stayed by my side as I strained my eyes grading papers and for all the puppy kisses as I struggled to write one more sentence. You are the true definition of a woman's best friend. To my daughter, Allie Satornino, I hope you remember you are immeasurably important, and I hope this dissertation is a reminder of beautiful things you can accomplish.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2020, it's undeniable, organizations were at a cusp of a revolution in their day-to-day operations, especially with their communication to stakeholders. After the announcement of COVID-19, organizations adapted in new and innovative ways to the changing directions that the world was evolving. High-end retailers, selling $300 bottles of perfume, started producing and distributing $3 hand sanitizer. Food industry companies donated thousands of pounds of food, solely for the purpose of supporting stakeholders depending on them. Organizations "stepped up to the plate" in big ways and showed that true advocacy and responsibility are inherent in an organization's culture and ability to utilize public relations strategies to build and maintain a mutual benefit for all. More than ever before the public is looking to business to ignite social change. This expectation follows current research; according to the Edelman Trust Barometer (2021), organizations are the most trusted institution, over government, non-government associations, and media. Organizations recognized this responsibility, and opportunity, and it has led us to a new era of social issues management.

Public relations' goals and strategies are intrinsically reflective of the relationship between the consumer and the organization. Inherently so, public relations processes are reflective of its name and focused on "the relationship" with the public. However, over time, as new models and processes are developed and new forms of public relations emerge, public relations processes continue to differentiate from other forms of communication, as they stress the two-way, mutual benefit for each side of the relationship (Taylor, 2018). In order for public relations to be encompassing of this mutually beneficial definition, the public must be able to not only participate in information exchange, but also, they must get added value from the relationship (Grunig, 1984; Holladay, 1994; Kent & Taylor, 2002). As organizations adapt to achieving the mutual benefit, they focus on building stable, trustworthy relationships based on reputation and trust; reputation is built on the trust that is created with all stakeholders. However, as the world continues to technologically advance, and public issues become associated with organizational values (Heath, 2018), reputation and trust are only two steps of a very complicated path to adding value. Corporate social responsibility can help improve stakeholder trust in organizations, but it may be short-lived, if the follow-up communication is faulty or if stakeholders are exposed to negative information about these companies (Bögel, 2015). Because of this, social issues management emerges from public relations and strategic management literature as one tool that public relations practitioners can place in their toolkit. Social issues management can allow organizations to manage the stakeholder relationships that help secure and maintain trust and reputation (Decker & Sale, 2009).

Organizations have been tasked as "one of the great institutions capable of the greatest social change," especially concerning social issues where governments and non-profits may fall short (Fyke et al., 2016, p. 218). Increasingly, organizations are choosing to take public stances on social issues. Organizations are not just stating their intentions and beliefs, they are advocating for those causes, and organizational management of these social issues has the potential to deepen the relationship between the consumer and the organization, beyond just a typical surface-level or one-time, limited interaction (Parcha, Kingsley, & Westerman, 2020). Social issues management has the potential to build long-term trust and commitment. Public relations practitioners have recognized this opportunity, and most engage in social issues management in a variety of ways to strengthen their organizations while also contributing to society at the same time (Fall, 2006). Some practitioners refer to social issues management more commonly as corporate social responsibility or corporate social advocacy. Lim and Greenwood (2017) purport that these are newer terms that have evolved from the changing role of social issues management as a corporate image enhancer to one of managing issues and reputation based on boundary spanning.

Others have specialized terms representing CSR that connect to the ethics of the organization and have suggested that CSR dates to a proposal made by Henry Ford in 1917 for sharing corporate wealth (Lee, 2008). In fact, even in PR and strategic management literature, there is not a consistent term to encompass organizational social issues management. There is also no single accepted definition of social issues management, and many scholars and practitioners alike seem confused about what constitutes being an organizational advocate for social issues (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Yet, research findings have indicated that customers who experience higher perceived value and experience stronger levels of commitment are more willing to contribute as customer advocates through word-of-mouth marketing, repurchase intentions, information sharing, and market research support (Freeman, 2009; Mosavi & Ghaedi, 2012).

1.1 Specific Purposes

To further the literature of organizational social issues management and provide a definition of its acts, research is needed to examine the terms that have been associated or labeled as social issues management. Because of the growing importance of social issues management in public relations, attention must be given to the role that it has with reputation development, expectations, and the customer-organization relationship. If organizational customers and constituents are expecting “more” from organizations, especially to fulfill the mutual benefit inherent in public relations, researchers must explore how organizations can continue to provide value while also remaining cognizant of their brand’s identity, mission statement, and goals. The goal of this dissertation is to fully establish a conceptualization of social issues management based on a practical consensus of practitioners. By doing so, this dissertation also explores, the role of social issues management within public relations-inherent of both its tangible and intangible benefits and offers both practical can academic insight into the evolving nature of social issues management.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1.1 Social Issues Management

Over time, different terms have been utilized to examine social issues management within organizations. Wood (1991) purported that social issues management originally was alluded to when scholars in the 1970s were heavily examining various business-related and social problems, primarily looking at the corporation's responsibility to those problems. Because many who study social issues management accept the concept that business and society are elaborately connected, the field of social issues management has rapidly evolved to include many different theories, frameworks, and terms. This has led to a lack of cohesion that the field of social issues management really needed to evolve (Wood & Logsdon, 2019). At the basis of social issues management research, scholars are concerned with not only the relationships that exist between business and society, but the improvements that each can provide others for improving all quality of life. Wood & Logsdon (2019) conclude that the way to sustain the future and legitimacy for social issues management is to fully integrate other fields and to critique other scholars who have failed to address the gaps in social issues management research. The various terms being utilized in place of or in conjunction with social issues management are clouding the field of public relations by not only presenting various terms to label social issues management but also by presenting varying processes associated with social issues management. In order to move forward, it's necessary to review two of the most commonly associated terms with social issues management: values advocacy and corporate social responsibility.

2.1.2 Value Advocacy

Value advocacy is an encompassing term that historically has been utilized to conceptualize most forms of charitable giving, social action, volunteering, and activities that cannot strictly be connected to tangible money or profit gain (Bhagwat et al., 2020). Scholars have always referred to value advocacy, but they have not always consistently utilized the term. Therefore, value advocacy is commonly associated with corporate social advocacy, corporate social marketing, corporate social responsibility, cause marketing, cause-related advocacy, and even philanthropy (Ho et al., 2016; Kotler & Lee, 2011). Regardless of what the value advocacy actions are called, today organizations are routinely engaging in value advocacy or the appeal to shared cultural values. Before explicating the operational level of value advocacy, conceptually, value advocacy is defined as the act of an organization or company to support and promote a value, ideal, or belief that is held externally or internally to the organization. This promotion or support is completed for the purpose of adding organizational value (Bosdorff and Vibbert, 1994; Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Dodd, 2016).

2.1.3 Internal and External Values

When an internally driven value is communicated, it might be related to a mission statement or a core value of the organization. For example, if an organization's mission statement was based on a positive environmental stance, then the organization might be a proponent of the value of protecting the environments in which they operate. Kotler and Lee (2003) examine this internally driven value in terms of socially responsible business practices, or the idea of being present and cognizant in the environment in which an organization operates. Another type of internal value that can be promoted is connected to the CEO's or leadership's decision making and voice. This is usually executed through the cause marketing of an organization or corporate philanthropy. Organizations are usually identified with the CEO or leader of an organization, so even if the entire organization does not support a cause, if the leader or CEO makes a public support statement of a value, the entire organization will be associated with that view (Heath, 2009; Marias, 2012). Organizations that build value advocates upon internally driven values have the potential for developing a strong, positive relationship because the causes that are supported are reflective of the organization and its internal culture (Ni et al., 2015).

While internal values can be reflected in value advocacy campaigns, external values can also be identified by an organization and promoted through these campaigns. External organizational values might be defined as "hot topic" issues that appeal to the general public or involving issues-only publics, who are only concerned with issues that are popularized (i.e., equal rights, animal rights, public corruption, etc.). These issues are powerful because they have already generated an abundance of media and public attention, but with the high reward comes a larger risk (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Organizations run the risk of being seen as jumping on the bandwagon of supporting an issue or just trying to make a profit. Skard & Thorbjørnsen (2014) suggest that consumers are more likely to regard companies with bad reputations involved in social issues activities as "commercially motivated as they attempt to improve their negative image" (p. 152, para. 2). This same type of backlash from social issues activities can even be seen in organizations with a neutral or positive reputation. For example, this can be seen in the backlash that Gillette initially experienced with its “Best a Man Can Get” campaign that referenced the hot topic of men’s masculine role in society versus being respectful of others (Gillette, 2019). Even though the campaign playfully utilized Gillette’s tagline to state a value issue in the campaign, it still received criticism, with many audience members stating that Gillette was just trying to make money off the cause. Gillette’s audience stated that just because the commercial, and the money donated by the company, supported a worthy cause (one that was also rooted in the organization’s identity via the tagline), the organization did not entirely reflect this change. Many stated that the high price of women’s razors versus men’s razors was a good example of how this campaign was just a mask or a way to yield profit (Bogen et al., 2021; Milfield & Flint, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Gillette’s example reflects the changing scrunity of value advocacy within organizations and publics and the need for more research on how value advocacy works and why organizations engage in it.

2.1.4 Change in Perception of Value Advocacy

Value advocacy has always been around in the form of speeches or lobbying for different causes through public meetings, but the strategic nature of the advocacy has changed. Bosdorff and Vibbert (1994) claim that there are three reasons for the change in value advocacy from the 1990s forward. First is the proliferation of public relations and the recognition of image management and the knowledge that the public’s viewpoint is integral for success. The second reason is believed to be the generally non-controversial nature of value advocacy. However, this point could be argued because of the differing values of the publics, as noted above, and the increase in polarity of issues among audiences. Bosdorff and Vibbert (1994) note that their reasoning behind the second reason is connected to when organizations select a cause and their rationale that organizations select values and causes that most audience members would approve of and through which values are explicitly visible. In this way, organizations can also use value advocacy as a bridge to gain access to new channels of communication, media, or audiences that have denied them before. The third reason for value advocacy's evolution is the overall success that has been associated with it in the past and the companies that have imitated others' success in the process. Coombs and Holladay (1996) state that long-term effects of public relations campaigns are hard to determine, but for the most part, organizations that engage in value advocacy show positive results in terms of brand preference and reputation. More recently, scholars have confirmed the positive results of value advocacy for increasing brand reputation and trust, while also affirming that value advocacy can increase employee advocacy and brand likability (Lee & Kim, 2020). Value advocacy when strategically managed can be an integral aspect of an organization's strategic management function.

2.1.5 Value Advocacy's Functions

As previously mentioned, organizations utilize value advocacy as a tactic to create, reaffirm, or increase their public image. Bosdorff and Vibbert (1994) further explicate why organizations engage in value advocacy and the appeal to shared cultural values by stating its three functions: 1) to enhance an organization's image; 2) to deflect criticism of the organization and/or its policies, products, and services; 3) to establish value premises that can be used in later discourse.

When value advocacy is serving the first function of enhancing an organization's image, it is directly connected to public relations and the imagery associated with a brand. An organization's image is directly connected to how, who, and what publics associate with the brand. For some, a brand's image could reflect attitudes and beliefs, but it can also be more forward thinking and toward a definition that is more closely aligned with how one is supposed to think or feel. Crable and Vibbert (2000) state that images are altogether descriptive, evaluative, and predisposing, so value advocacy works to affect these images and make the brand images more cohesive and pertinent.

2.1.5.1 Shaping Image with Value Advocacy

Value advocacy allows organizations to take a direct or indirect approach through messages that are strategically placed in the crafting of the message, in order to directly affect their image. Organizations can explicitly support a societal value, or they can go against their competition to associate themselves with a different belief. In order to do so, the organization is not required to even state the adversary, but rather, they only have to insinuate that a value that their organization holds is aligned with society's values, while others (i.e., competitors) might not be aligned (Coombs, 2012) This is a common tool that is utilized in not only value advocacy, but marketing as well. Many organizations prefer to implicitly support a value or belief, especially if these goals are important to audience members. If the audience members already rank the issue or value as important, associating the brand with the value or belief will create a positive connection between the two (Wang & Huang, 2018).

Another way that organizations can build upon image is through discussing other activities that are associated with their charities or philanthropic areas. Doing so creates a halo type effect that is often referred to in crisis communication and allows organizations to reap the benefits of charitable giving, while also associating with the cause (Coombs, 2012). Basically, organizations can "do good" and have a barrier of reputational protection around the organization. This form of crisis communication is closely associated with issues management and the belief that organizations can mask themselves in front of a positive event, build trust, and allow that trust to carry the relationship with the audience past the point of crisis, into renewal (Heath & Palenchar, 2008; Waymer & Heath, 2007).

Another way to bolster image is associating with people or icons that represent the brand. For example, a celebrity endorsement or a brand ambassador might emerge from an organization to increase the salience between the organization, the value, and audience. If the organization's voice is the only one communicating the message, an advocate inside the organization might be identified (usually the CEO or official spokesperson). When primarily leadership communication is repeatedly utilized to communicate values, credibility is established which leads to a trusting relationship and reputation with audience members. While value advocacy can build an image from the very beginning of an organization, it can also help shape and continue to build an organization's image, especially after a crisis. For instance, when organizations choose to focus on issues that are favorable to them in advocacy campaigns, other issues are often deflected or minimized, rather than directly communicated about through socially responsible actions (Woods, 2019; Yang & Veil, 2017). An example of this type of issues management can be seen when certain companies try to "jump on the bandwagon" with hot issues without considering timing or brand audience. For example, Airbnb launched its #WeAccept campaign in the middle of a refugee crisis, which ultimately had success because of the conversations already taking place about refugees in the social sphere.

Ultimately, Airbnb released a statement that said, “The painful truth is that guests on Airbnb have experienced discrimination, something that is the very opposite of our values. We know we have work to do and are dedicated to achieving greater acceptance in our community” (We Accept, 2017). While very altruistic and certainly a motivational and meaningful message, the campaign was criticized because Airbnb was already generating community resistance all over the world because of raising property values and pricing issues that were pushing local people out of high-pressure rental markets (Boone, 2017). With regulatory and policy questions looming abut Airbnb, some stakeholders questioned the true intent of the #WeAccept campaign and what they were really asking the public to accept.

2.1.5.2 Deflecting Criticism with Value Advocacy

The second function that organizations can utilize value advocacy for is to deter criticism from something presently occurring or an issue that might occur in the future. This function is particularly important during a crisis, when the organization needs to focus on something that the organization and audience both agree upon. For example, after a supply-chain crisis or public health crisis, the health and safety of the public becomes the focus, and companies might start a campaign that gives back to a population or helps a community. Organizations utilize this value advocacy to evade responsibility or detract attention from the cause by focusing all attention on rebuilding or renewing after the crisis. Sometimes this redirection can be directly related to the crisis or completely different. Additionally, an organization can utilize value advocacy in this manner to “wrap itself in the flag of societal virtue and thus discourage criticism from anyone who attacks the organization” (Bosdorff & Vibbert, 1994, p. 104). In this way, anyone who attacks the organization might also appear to be attacking the values that the organization represents. Often, especially with larger, publicized companies, the communication of these CSR values comes off as disingenuous and a half-hearted apology. An example of this can be seen with the fashion company, Forever 21, who has a social responsibility webpage listing all they do, such as only utilizing recyclable bags in their stores and requiring vendors to agree to certain ethical conditions (Forever 21, 2022). While all noteworthy and important causes, which quite arguably no stakeholder could refuse to support, the webpage redirects and does not mention the harmful environmental impact and short lifespan of the company's clothing, which was ultimately highlighted in 2019 and critics have said led to Forever 21's bankruptcy (Goinkberg, 2019; Wicker, 2016).

2.1.5.3 Establish Value Premises for Future Value Advocacy

The last notable function of value advocacy is the foundation that can come from its establishment. Historically, the act of establishing warrants is a technique that has been strategically utilized to make fixed relationships to certain events and characters in speeches and other types of discourse (Boyd, 2000; Mahon & Wartick, 2003). By laying the groundwork for warrants and linking them to future events, an organization can establish a connection between itself and an issue that might be important in the future. Utilizing value advocacy in this manner is an intentional act and requires active issue awareness and monitoring, which many organizations fail to do (Cowden, Kimberly, & Sellnow, 2002; Yu, Sengul, & Lester, 2008).

Value advocacy's functions are very intertwined and connected. It's most beneficial to see value advocacy as a cyclical process where an organization needs to build, maintain, and repair its image, while also deflecting against criticism and monitoring issues and preparing to utilize value statements in the future. The present research considers that value advocacy is most successful when all these functions are (or at least appear to be) occurring alongside one another, while also incorporating the other side of the now two-sided spectrum: both publics' and stakeholders' views.

2.1.5.4 Competing Definitions: Advocacy and Responsibility

Value advocacy, as previously mentioned, is an umbrella term and often becomes a catch-all term for all advocacy-related activities within an organization. In both the corporate and academic world, there is uncertainty on how value advocacy and corporate social responsibility should be defined. Some scholars say, "We have looked for a definition, and basically there is not one" (Jackson & Hawker, 2001, para. 7). From examining the literature and terms associated with value advocacy, this statement is quite a stretch. The problem is not that there aren't definitions associated with value advocacy, but rather there is an overabundance of them. According to Van Marrewijk (2003), often these definitions are biased toward specific interests and thus restrict the development and implementation of the concept. Some scholars purport that because of this, brands need to develop their own definition addressing the specific values and CSR issues the organization has defined (i.e., push for context-specific definitions). For each organization to develop their own definition of CSR or value advocacy, they would start by defining what the specific issues are to be addressed with personal stakeholders and how to engage with them. However, a definition that addresses this question would not be applicable across a variety of contexts and thus would be less of a definition and more of a guide. This is consistent with the definitions analyzed in the present research, and the questions of value advocacy should be kept open to be context independent. Further knowledge is needed of how CSR and value advocacy are socially constructed among organizations and publics and how these groups can base their decisions off advocacy campaigns. In the value advocacy literature and case studies, differences exist in the conceptualization and operationalization of the terms corporate social advocacy (value advocacy) and corporate social responsibility.

2.1.6 Corporate Social Advocacy

Corporate social advocacy (CSA) is interchangeably referred to as value advocacy activities throughout the literature and is conceptualized as the taking of a public stance on a pertinent social or political issue by corporations when they “align themselves with a controversial social-political issues outside their normal sphere of CSR interest” (Dodd & Supra, 2015, p. 288). CSA can refer to the intentional or unintentional alignment with issues by a company or a CEO (Dodd, 2018). In this way CSA emerges because of the shift in societal expectations surrounding the role of business in a democratic society. In an age of engaged consumerism, the public targets businesses to influence the government on large policy decisions. Recent examples of CSA include organizations such as Dick’s Sporting Goods and Walmart making statements and actions that are in favor of tough gun control, whereas other organization have decided to take the opposite stance on the issue (Business Leaders for Gun Safety, 2022).

Other social issues, such as same-sex marriage, women’s rights, and reproductive rights have also provided opportunities for organizations to state their values and establish a public stance. Whether stances are planned, aligned with organizational initiatives, or unintentionally associated or discussed by corporate leadership, the results are still the same: the public perceives that the organization is aligned in some way with the issue (Park & Berger, 2004). This in turn leads the public to associate the cause with the organization and brand, which can result in added value for the organization and the public (i.e., trust is built between the public and organization because of the stance and then in turn, the organization receives trust from the public support).

CSA grows out of research in a very important field of communication and public relations: strategic issues management (SIM) (Coombs & Holladay, 2018; Dodd & Supa, 2014). SIM "blends strategic business planning, issue monitoring, best-practice standards of corporate responsibility; and dialogic communication needed to foster a supportive climate between each organization and those people who can affect its success and who are affected by its operations" (Heath & Palenchar, 2009. P.8-9). SIM is focused on ensuring that an organization is perceived as legitimate and operates in a way that benefits stakeholders and that matches and aligns with stakeholders' beliefs.

2.1.7 Corporate Social Responsibility

Closely related to CSA, but very different in practice, corporate social responsibility (CSR) is understood as the "voluntary actions that a corporation implements as it pursues its mission and fulfills its perceived obligations to stakeholders, including employees, communities, the environment, and the society as a whole" (Coombs & Holladay, 2012, p. 8). CSR places an emphasis between business and society (Snider et al., 2003) and involves organizational actions that are connected to more sophisticated societal, economic, ethical, legal, or philanthropic concerns (Kim & Reber, 2008).

Over the years, research has shown a positive and substantial relationship between CSR activities and consumers' intentions on purchasing (Margolis et al., 2009; Owen & O'Dwyer, 2008). Based on the level of connection or how involved stakeholders feel about the social issue or cause, they are more likely to associate positively or negatively with the brand. "It's important to understand the antecedents and consequences of creating a positive CSR image because of its effect on the responsible purchasing citizenship" (Lee & Yoon, 2018, p 760, para. 2). These relationships have provided evidence that the CSR actions taken by an organization have consequences on the financial bottom line, but there is no clear consensus on the ideal methods of CSR engagement with stakeholders. CSR initiatives create a sense of public good by fulfilling social responsibilities that businesses have to the areas in which they operate, either by creating good will, mitigating negative organizational impacts or by providing benefits to a community (Benlemih et al., 2018; Brunk & De Boer, 2020). CSR benefits can be monetary, but they can also be more intangible. Kirat (2015) explains that only primarily examining the relationship with profit is against the notion of CSR's impact on the welfare of those on the other side of the relationship and also refers to the lack of consensus on stakeholder engagement.

Matten and Moon (2008) have also suggested that CSR is more complex than one realizes, and it might be better to consider who or what the organization is responsible to when choosing strategy. When examining CSR definitions that were utilized in academic research from 1980 to 2003, Dahlsrud (2008) found that there were five basic dimensions of the concept of CSR: economic, social, environmental, voluntariness, and stakeholder. Ultimately, research has shown that CSR initiatives are designed to portray a company as responsible to the needs and concerns of the society, generating good will, and in so doing giving the business a reputational boost (Austin et al., 2019; Ellen et al., 2006).

While there are similarities between the value advocacy approach of CSA and that of CSR, a main difference emerges that seems to differentiate the two strategies. The main difference in value advocacy via CSA actions and CSR is the intention of associating the actions with the cause. With CSR, the intentions of the organization are made quite clear through the planning and voluntary actions that it completes in supporting a value. A number of studies have examined the strategies that are reflective in the CSR paradigm (Dhanesh, 2015; Kim, 2014; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Trapp 2014). In these studies, public relations researchers have maintained that CSR strategies and communication are reflective of the shift to two-way communication in public relations, focusing on listening to key stakeholders and their interests. On the other hand, CSA and value advocacy can occur with or without any strategic planning, with automatic association or natural fit to a brand image, can be a result leadership's management, and may be more connected to social change (Heath, 1980; Zoller, 2004).

Relatedly, another difference between CSA and CSR is that unlike CSR, which involves corporate-sponsored initiatives that simultaneously address a social concern while also benefiting an organization's image, organizations may engage in CSA recognizing that this may not be well-received by all stakeholders (Austin, et al., 2019; de Bakker & den Hond, 2008). A recent example of an organization's advocacy efforts that received polarizing reactions from stakeholders was in 2018 regarding DICK's Sporting Goods' actions toward gun control, following the Parkland, FL, school shooting. The company received some backlash, but ultimately decided to take a stance, despite the potential for the negative reactions and sales impacts (Gaither et al., 2018).

Based on these differences, it is evident that CSA is unique because it represents a very specialized business-society relationship beyond that of corporate citizenship and CSR. With CSA, organizations extend the two-way relationship between stakeholders to take a public stance on something perceived as controversial or providing public commentary on areas in which an organization is working to further address that public issue (Austin et al., 2019; Clemensen, 2017; Dodd & Supra, 2014). CSA contradicts conventional business and marketing advice that suggests that organizations can achieve the maximum overall benefit when they remain neutral on controversial issues (Korschun et al., 2016). Instead, CSA strategies embrace potential polarization and focus more on the alignment of brands with corporate values. Emerging research also supports CSA and states that stakeholders respect and are more likely to patronize organizations that take stances on issues that align with their stated corporate values (i.e., Dodd & Supra, 2014; Gaither et al., 2018; Korschun et al., 2016).

2.1.8 Impact on Strategic Public Relations

Because of CSA and CSR being closely related and usually generating similar benefits, the two terms are utilized interchangeably throughout the literature and in practice. Intention is sometimes hard to measure, especially when evaluating campaigns, so it’s hard to decide in which category one value advocacy campaign would fall. Value advocacy has ultimately become a broad term to describe the value activities of an organization, whether CSA- or CSR-related. Ultimately, this merging of terms has produced public relations with a variety of strategies that can be utilized to promote a cause, intentionally or otherwise. Kotler and Lee (2003) specify six social initiatives (strategies) that have evolved from the value advocacy literature. They are cause promotions (i.e., organization organizes funds to increase awareness or understanding of a cause); cause-related marketing (i.e., organization commits to making contribution of sales to a cause); corporate social marketing (i.e., organization supports the development or implementation of a behavior change campaign); corporate philanthropy (i.e., organization makes a direct donation to a charity or cause); community volunteering (i.e., organization supports employees or members to volunteer); and finally, socially responsible business practices (i.e., a corporation adopts and conducts business practices to improve society).

For strategic public relations, these six social initiatives become strategies that are utilized to support a variety of functions including issues management and promotion. However, for practitioners, because these terms are often interchangeably utilized and even less consistently applied through different contexts, the added value for organizations engaging in these practices has changed. Coombs and Holladay (2012) purport value advocacy has focused on the "triple-bottom line," which is directed at people, profit, and environment (interchangeably, environment could be a policy, cause, or initiative). What this means for organizations is that the conceptualization of what being a value advocate means is expanding, but the core definition has only been added to, rather than explicated in a practical way.

The real change in value advocacy, CSA, and CSR has been in the operationalization of value advocacy campaigns and the change in what issues and values are more important to publics. Because of the stronger focus on two-way benefit, organizations need to be more cognizant of the dimensions affecting value advocacy (i.e., environmental, social, political, economic, and technological), also completing formative and evaluative research on the objectives of the organization, while making sure that publics' interests are aligned with those of the organization. Because of this operationalization evolution, more research is needed on tools to evaluate the impact and outcome of value advocacy research.

2.1.9 Applying Value Advocacy Conceptually to Practice

The conceptualization and operationalization of value advocacy is a practically rooted concept within public relations and strategic communication research because of its focus on adding benefit for both the organization and its publics. In practice, value issues advocacy is being utilized more often than not, and even when not identified at first glance, it is still operating at the foundation of most PR campaigns (Lee et al., 2020; Roszkowska-Menkes, 2016). As the ideal of value advocacy in practice has evolved, PR and communication practitioners have attempted to modernize their strategies and tactics to meet changing demands and a more aware public (Galbreath, 2009).

One of the most beneficial tools for PR practitioners utilized in value advocacy campaigns is that of the Arthur Page Society's model of "Authentically Advocating" (Arthur Page Society, 2018). This model states that organizations must authentically examine their core values and principles in order to define what values they should be promoting and how they will promote them in a cyclical matter. Figure 1 shows how the model can be conceptualized in each of four different stages.

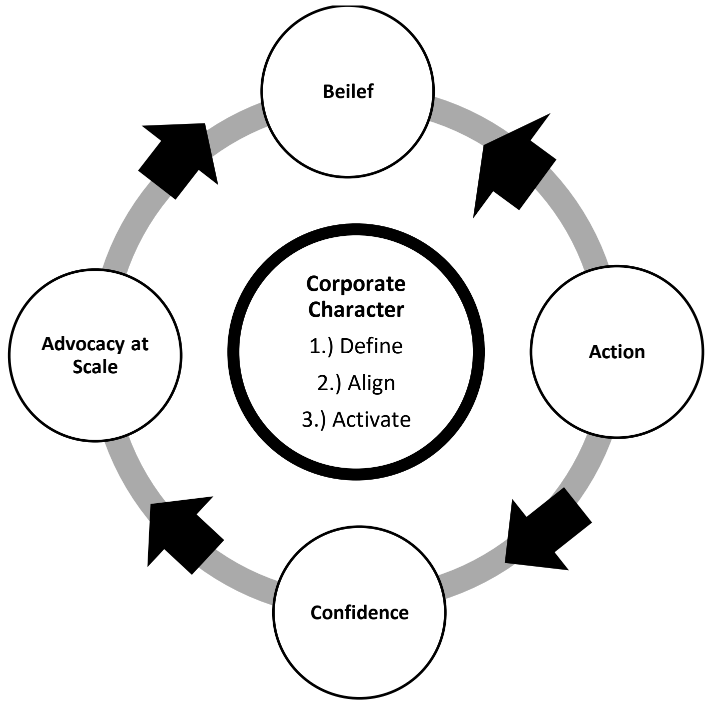

Figure 2.1 Authentically Advocating Model (Arthur Page Society, 2018)

The core of the model is the corporate character, and it is concerned with defining what issues are salient to the core mission of the brand or organization, aligning those interests or values to a substantive issue, and then activating those matched-values in communication messages. The "Belief" stage is concerned with making sure that the communication messages being produced are also aligned with the stakeholders and the decision-makers, external or internal to the organization. Next, the "action" stage is where action is instilled among the stakeholders, and then in the "confidence" stage the organization reaffirms that the actions of those decision makers matter. Finally, with the "advocacy at scale" stage, the audience members are utilized to build more constituents, expanding the organization's advocates. This process is best seen as cyclical and valuable to issue management and awareness.

Organizations have an impact on societies, and vice versa, so there is an innate mutual responsibility. Overall, there is a consensus that trust for organizations and social issues is typically low, and public criticism of organizations' actions is high (Kim & Lee, 2012; Kim et al., 2016). This makes publics choose organizational interactions based upon reputations and perceived trust (Moloney, 2005; Edelman Trust Barometer, 2020). Many companies get involved in social issues engagement as a means to build their reputation and trust and use this as a way to build on strong values, making sure they are reflected in operations and communication both internal and external to the company (Aksak et al., 2016). In this way, managing social issues is a way for an organization and stakeholders to both benefit from the process.

When examining public relations and strategic communication, there is a common notion that the public is intrinsic to success. Some equate success with a business's profits and utilize that as motivation to continue communicating actively (Barton, 1995; Cramer, 2002), while others gauge success as the mutual benefit of both the organization and the public; whether that benefit is tangible or intangible does not matter (Taylor et al., 2001; Sloan, 2009). In order to consider this mutual benefit, while examining social issues management and corporate social advocacy's effect on organizations, this dissertation utilizes Grunig's Situational Theory of Publics and Freeman's Stakeholder Theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Freeman, 1984). These theories were chosen because both theories emphasize the stakeholders' mutual benefit and agree on the value of a stable and trustworthy relationship.

2.1.10 The Situational Theory of Problem Solving

The Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) evolved from Grunig's original Situational Theory of Publics (STP), which examines how groups of people do interact or do not interact with information, and thereby, decide to be involved in an information exchange (Chen, 2020). STP stipulates that groups of people or publics are more likely to be classified as active publics when they recognize a problem, believe that their actions or the organization's actions have consequences, and have some level of involvement in the issue (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The situational theory has two dependent variables and three independent variables. The two dependent variables for the STP are information seeking and information processing. These variables are closely related to how publics interact with information before acting on the communication or the messages being disseminated. Related to seeking and processing information, the STP has three independent variables that can affect how or the level at which messages are processed: problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement. Based on the independent variables, publics will engage with information differently and ultimately become involved in an information exchange with an organization. Grunig (1997) states that prior to this information exchange, publics are disorganized groups of individuals that have not yet recognized a problem, but unknowingly (or knowingly) have the power to become engaged, powerful activist groups that can enact change. Grunig and Repper (1992) state that this information exchange is one of the important features of STP's contribution to public relations. This information exchange is also very important in the way that organizations communicate and how they are able have effective messaging strategies. Grunig & Hunt (1984) state that the ideal, active public is produced when there is high problem recognition, low constraint recognition, and high levels of involvement. Grunig's original theory stipulates that these are the main factors that affect transmission of information, but the theory has been added to and shaped more specifically in recent years (Grunig 1994; Kim & Grunig 2011). However, before discussing the advancements in STP, a better understanding of the independent variables affecting the dependent variables and STP's overall outcomes must be developed.

2.1.11 Problem Recognition

The first independent variable of STP is problem recognition, how publics detect or perceive if a problem exists (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The problem that is detected can be one that has major or minor consequences for an individual; however, the power that is attributed to the problem is exponentially greater when publics give the problem attention. The premise of problem recognition is if publics are cognizant of a shared problem, they will seek information to try to rectify or find a solution to the problem. This is ideal for organizations because that is when publics are actively searching for information and messages (Chen, 2020), but recognizing the problem is only the first step in building an active public.

2.1.12 Constraint Recognition

As groups of individuals are issue scanning or detecting a commonly shared problem, they are in fact in the process of becoming a unified public. However, before information can be successfully transmitted and disseminated, publics must be aware of any limitations that might affect their information. Constraint recognition is the second independent variable that accounts for the cognitive awareness of individuals and their perceptions of their ability to do something about an issue or problem (Grunig, 1994). Grunig and Hunt (1984) state that constraint recognition is the publics' examination of any inhibitors or "roadblocks" that prevent the problem from being affected or information being processed. An example of this was seen in Lee and Rodriquez (2008) when they examined the issue of bioterrorism and STP. In the study, even though people perceived bioterrorism as an issue, if they also had the perception of the issue being too large or hard to handle (i.e., because of issues with policy, government, etc.), they did not become an active public or engage in the issue. This variable is important to note because organizations might be able to minimize any inhibitors that exist, or they might be able to make the issue more reflective of a change that a public might actually be able to make. Based on the problem being recognized and the number of perceived constraints, groups of individuals might be more engaged on an issue because they not only recognize the problem, but they also know they can do something about it or that the organization's actions affect the problem.

2.1.13 Level of Involvement

The situational theory of publics' last independent variable is the level of involvement that the public has with an issue. Although seemingly uncomplicated on the surface, this variable has a deeply rooted value to the STP and how attuned publics are with issues. Involvement is concerned with how closely related the issue is to the individual's or public's beliefs, opinions, or values (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). If an issue is closely connected to the public and they perceive it as pertinent, the public is more likely to be active in information seeking and processing. Lee and Rodriquez (2008) purport that involvement is based on more than just matching issues with those that affect publics, but it also connected to the symbols and creations that are associated with the issue. For example, referring back to Lee and Rodriquez's study, it was confirmed that people felt more personally involved with bioterrorism if the people that were talking about the issue had features that closely related to the audience. In fact, if reporters were a certain gender and role and utilized a personal aspect of their role while discussing bioterrorism, the publics who identified with that gender and role were closely involved in the issue, more so than when the spokesperson or reporter was different. This follows more research on likeness of spokespeople and identifying salient traits of people who are trustworthy (Cowen et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2021). In this study, not only did internal involvement with the issue matter (i.e., belief that the problem was personally going to affect them), but it was also evident that external involvement (i.e., how the person identified with the social group and how the communicator looked) mattered to the salience of bioterrorism (Lee & Rodriquez, 2008). Since Grunig and Hunt's (1984) piece on STP, researchers have attempted to expand on level of involvement to include both internal and external reviews of involvement, as discussed below.

2.1.13.1 Internal and External Involvement.

When examining involvement and STP, studies have explored what it means to be personally involved with a problem. Grunig and Childers (1988) stated that the original situational theory developed by Grunig was referring to involvement as ego involvement with an issue. Sherriff et al. (1965) state that internal involvement is ego involvement, the connection between issues and religious, political, and social beliefs that an audience holds and believes in. Furthermore, Sherrif et al. (1965) believed that if a person has strong internal involvement or ego involvement, they are more likely to not change their attitudes regarding an issue or matter. In contrast, Petty and Cacioppo (1983) presented the concept of external involvement and said that external involvement, or the notion that people are involved based on more physical or group connections, was a predictor of people being more willing to change their attitudes. Grunig and Childers (1988) address this differential by explaining that while both perspectives have merit, STP is concerned with publics' information seeking behaviors, while the other two forms of involvement might be more pertinent in attitude change theories.

2.1.13.2 Information Seeking and Information Processing

Information seeking and processing are the two dependent variables that are identified by STP and are affected by the three independent variables explained above. Information seeking and processing are the deciding factors that determine the classification of publics into categories for communication purposes. For Grunig and Hunt (1984), information seeking occurs as an audience collectively understands that a problem exists, and has the ability be affected by or to affect them and having little to no restraints, searching for information to make sense of or improve the problem. This is the active process of the information exchange. On the other hand, information processing is still important to the exchange. While information processing is the more passive reception of the information, active publics are more likely to engage in the information presented when the independent variables of STP are occurring in an ideal way. The figure below shows the ideal model for an active public and for STP to be understood.

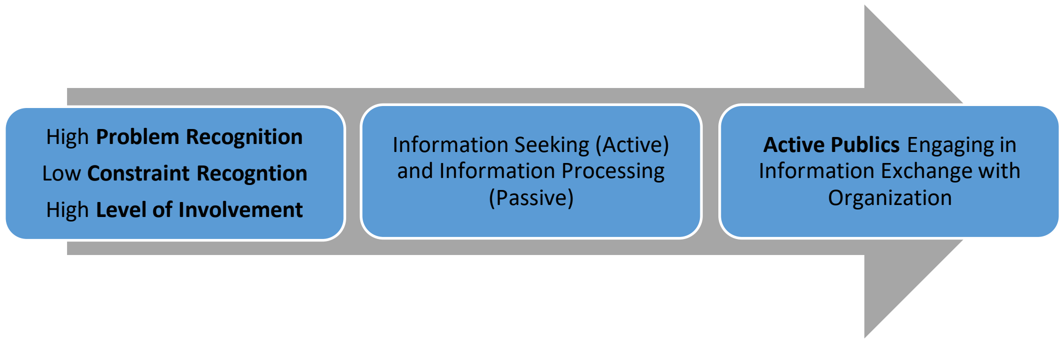

Figure 2.2 The Situational Theory of Publics (Grunig, 1966; Grunig & Hunt, 1984)

2.1.14 Types of Publics

Grunig (1994) explains that the classification of publics is novel in the situational theory, but the ideal of a public is not new. In the theory, Grunig bases the classification of a public on Dewey's (1927) review of a public. Dewey states that publics are groups of individuals that recognize a problem, involve themselves in the issue, and communicate about the issue. Grunig's theory states that depending on the levels of problem recognition, constraint recognition, and the level of involvement that publics have, they will process information in different ways, ideally becoming actively engaged publics, but regardless, organizations can classify the publics into four different groups: non-publics, latent publics, aware publics, and active publics (Grunig, 1966; Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Non-publics are groups of people that do not share a common problem or issue, while latent publics share a common problem or issue, but they have not yet recognized the issue. The next group, aware publics, have a commonly shared issue or problem and are aware of its existence, but they do not act or seek information regarding the issue. This is probably because there are constraints or perceived inhibitors on the issue that are preventing them from engaging in the information exchange. Active publics are what Grunig states that most organizations should be ideally communicating messages to. With active publics, as seen in Figure 1.1, they are cognizant of a problem, have little to no perceived constraints, and they are highly involved in the issue. This leads to the groups being actively engaged in the information exchange.

Originally, Grunig and Hunt (1984) believed that situations would differ, and the type of active public would have different characteristics, because of the theory being applied in varying disciplines (i.e., public affairs, environmental studies, corporate social responsibility, and even crisis management). However, over time studying the theory and the replication of the different scenarios, Grunig and Hunt (1986) confirmed that generalizations of active publics could be further identified. They confirmed that because active publics are the goal of STP, it is necessary to more narrowly define active publics (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). Therefore, active publics can be understood as follows:

- All-Issues Active Public- All issues are important to this group, and they are actively engaging on all issues with an organization;
- Single Issue Only Publics- This group is primarily active only on issues that affect a small subset of the population. For example, these issues could include the infant formula debacle or whale poaching;
- Involving Issues Only Publics (also known as hot topics issues publics (Kim, Ni, Kim, & Kim, 2012)- This group is concerned with issues as they are presented to a large subset of the population and are popularized through media and are frequently covered. Examples of these topics include fuel emissions,

environmental practices, or widely promoted and covered health concerns and research;

- Apathetic publics- This type of public is not affected by any issue, but they are engaging in the information seeking and information processing (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Lee & Rodriguez, 2008; Van Leuven & Slater, 1991).

Based on STP, information consumption becomes less systematic when people find that information matches what they are experiencing in real life and it applies to their lives (Grunig, 1997). For example, when values being communicated by an organization are aligned with the stakeholders' or publics' values, the communication is more likely to be accepted and processed through those stakeholders. Achieving a match and aligning organizational values with both issues and stakeholders becomes very integral. This remains an adequate examination of how publics interact with information they encounter, but research proves that a good theory is one that is continuously examined and developed; it never becomes stagnant. Advancements in the situational theory of publics have developed over time. As more practitioners utilize the theory, its relevance, practical benefit, and support continue to grow. The largest and most notable change that has developed in STP has been Kim and Grunig's (2011) addition of three parts to the theory to advance it and improve its predictive power. The largest change that was made to the theory was the name change from the situational theory of publics (STP) to the situational theory of problem-solving (STOPS). This name change is reflective of the additions and the way that information is processed through the theory, which also increases the theory's theoretical power and its practical utility.

2.1.15 Situational Theory of Problem-Solving (STOPS)

The first tangible change in STOPS is the change in definition of information seeking to more of a communicative behavior. The new definition of the dependent variable includes information acquisition, information transmission, and information selection as important parts. This marks a strong advancement in STP's development because it not only examines the independent variables' effect on information, but it also examines the process that the information goes through to achieve its effect. It follows that if people recognize a problem, have no constraints, and are highly involved, they will acquire information, send that information to others, and then also use that information to drive actions. This addition explained that information processing is more involved than just receiving and sending information.

The second addition Kim and Grunig (2011) made was the inclusion of referent criterion after the dependent variable of information seeking/processing. A referent criterion was originally included in the theory, but it was removed because it was not successful in predictions of an active public at the time (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). According to Kim and Grunig, a referent group is a set of beliefs, ideals, and notions about a topic that makes audience members more likely to act on information. Including it back in the theory is logical because after people have received and processed information on an issue, if that issue is salient and matches with their core values, they are more likely to engage in the information exchange.

Closely related to the referent criterion is that of motivation to search for information (Kim & Grunig, 2011). This addition occurs after the independent variables and states that even though a public might be aware of a commonly shared issue, have no constraints, and a high level of involvement, they still must be motivated to engage in information seeking and processing in order to become an active public. This is important because it accounts for other publics not acting on information while also having no constraints.

The STP and the STOP addition seek to explain the way that information is processed and received by publics and the factors that lead to the creation of publics, ideally an active public engaging in information exchange. While this theory is important in the current research because of its focus on values of publics, another framework, Stakeholder Theory, which encompasses more groups, will further guide this research.

2.1.16 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory is based on the basic premise that if one can reduce the unit of analysis of organizations to the relationships between its activities and the groups of people who have stake in the organization (i.e., stakeholders), you can more ideally understand the organization. According to Freeman (1984), the seminal definition of stakeholders is a group of individuals that have the ability to be affected by or affect an organization's objectives. These stakeholders can include managers, employees, financiers (i.e., banks, shareholders, and investors), communities, customers, media, and government.

The Stakeholder Theory purports that acknowledging each group of stakeholders equally results in three common business problems being adequately addressed. The first problem that the Stakeholder Theory helps is how to study an organization. Stakeholder Theory states that you can understand an organization by analyzing the relationships that the organization has with its stakeholders and how those relationships are created, maintained, and aligned with company values and policies (Freeman, 1984; Freeman 2002; Wood & Jones, 1995; Walsh, 2005). In stakeholder theory, one can examine how value is created and traded over time to see failures and successes in communication. Harrison, Bossee, and Phillips (2010) purport that the executive's job in stakeholder theory is the management of the relationships and making sure that each stakeholder is getting the maximum value. When conflicting interests are presenting, it is the executive's job to mediate and make tradeoffs between groups, while also ensuring that the "pie" is growing, instead of each group's interests being minimized (Freeman et al., 2010). This makes management crucial in providing valuable leadership and being an example of communication efforts.

The second problem that Stakeholder Theory attempts to rectify is that of the capitalist nature of organizations and businesses. While effective, Stakeholder Theory concerns questions of values, choices, and potential harms and benefits for large groups and individuals. Stakeholder Theory emphasizes the match between organizations and their stakeholders, so it is more of a moral endeavor. This is pertinent in explaining how organizations have an ethical implication for making sure that stakeholders' values are understood and accounted for (Phillips, Freeman, & Wicks, 2003). Following the moral and ethical implications, the third problem that Stakeholder Theory helps to explain is that each stakeholder group has unique and intrinsically valuable goals and interests, so in turn accounting for these views is important in furthering business practices and preventing moral failures (Freeman, 1984; 2001; Freeman & Hasnaoui, 2011).

Therefore, the central principles of Stakeholder Theory are: 1.) Every organization has internal and external stakeholders, and this can be defined in a normative way; 2.) Organizations have a responsibility to respect the values of each stakeholder group; 3.) Organizations should evaluate and analyze stakeholder perspectives and interests to match those to the organization's core principles and reflect it in strategies and practice; and 4.) Organizations that are responsive and pay equal attention to every stakeholder group will be more prone to success (Freeman, 1984; Freeman & Hasnaoui, 2011). Stakeholders are integral when considering both communication strategies and tactics, and their values, interests, and goals should be considered when examining an organization's mission statement and vision.

Through multiple studies, Stakeholder Theory has been stated as having a nominal, descriptive, and instrumental role (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). The nominal value that Stakeholder Theory holds is explaining how organizations are working to meet and account for stakeholder values through policies and strategies. The descriptive role describes the relationships and its trade and creation of value over time. The instrumental role is based on looking at stakeholders to accomplish an organization's objectives. For the present study, the descriptive role will be most pertinent because of its connection to CSR.

2.1.17 Connection to CSR

The CSR communication strategy proposed by Morsing and Schultz (2006) is based on the stakeholder approach and focuses upon stakeholders in the communication process in the form of stakeholder information, stakeholder response, and stakeholder involvement. The analysis of CSR communication from the stakeholder perspective shows how there can be both a positive as well as a negative impact of CSR communication and is important to understanding an effective communication process. Through empirical evidence, it is suggested that the managers involved in CSR communication should be aware that CSR communication is like a double-edged sword, which may boomerang. Therefore, it is important that communication managers should try and involve stakeholders in the process of CSR, as a step toward proactive CSR endorsement. Freeman (1999) states that if organizations want to be effective, they will pay attention to all stakeholders, including those who can be affected by the achievement of the organization's successes or failures. That is to say, organizations should manage and maintain all relationships that are important. The relationship is at the core of Stakeholder Theory, and in furtherance of that relationship, PR practitioners are utilizing various strategies to engage and build the connection from each stakeholder group.

CSR is uniquely embedded in communication literature, often placed at the crossroads of a primary purpose of the company and its role in society (Roszkowska-Menkes, 2016). While the concept of CSR is often presented as another avenue or strategy for stakeholder engagement, CSR still lacks a clear paradigm, absent of a universal definition, assumptions, and methods. Some communication and marketing scholars remain critical of CSR, stating that many companies will utilize it only to produce benefits for their own, claiming that CSR is likely utilized primarily as a tool to reduce competition and economic freedom, and most critically to "undermine the market economy" (Henderson, 2001, p. 1, para. 3). In fact, Freeman and McVea (2001) found that CSR initiatives are usually just characterized as an "added luxury or as damage limitation insurance, rather than a core element of the business strategy" (p. 10, para. 4).

When researching CSR, it is evident that both in an academic and practitioner setting, there is no consensus on a definition of CSR (as with social issues management), and the inconsistency in the understanding of the term may be the reason for such criticism of its role within companies (Roszkowska-Menkes, 2016). On top of the inconsistency, as previously mentioned, CSR is in a continuing stage of development and more terms and ideas are being associated with it (i.e., advocacy, social issues management, sustainable value, etc.), which is continuing to add to the obscurity of the term among practitioners and researchers. A clear definition of social issues management and CSR is needed to solidify its role within public relations, and ultimately create a dominant paradigm for its future development.

2.1.18 Research Questions

Regardless of how it's accomplished, one thing cannot be mistaken: PR practitioners are eager to build relationships with stakeholders, while reflecting their organizations' values, beliefs, and ideals. In this way, an authentic connection can occur between the public and the organization, making the benefit even larger for both. The existing research on social issues management, both value advocacy and CSR, showcases how PR has utilized these techniques to build upon existing relationships and create new ones. However, in examining the research on social issues management, as previously mentioned, a consensus is missing on how to label, define the process, and explain why social issues management continues to evolve. The current study seeks to explore social issues management, based on practitioner views, suggesting corporate social advocacy as a way to label social issues management. Through practitioner-based research, this study will develop a working definition of social issues management, as utilized by public relations professionals, while also identifying some of the rationale of how and why organizations are utilizing social issues management in more prominent and pertinent ways. The research questions this study seeks to answer are:

RQ1: How do public relations practitioners label their organization's communication regarding social issues?

RQ1a: How are public relations practitioners defining social issues management?

RQ2: What is a consistent definition of social issues management in organizations?

RQ3: What are the most common benefits of social issues management?

RQ4: Why are companies engaging in social issues management?

RQ5: How are the most responsible corporate organizations using social issues management?

2.1.19 Current Social Environment and Considerations

The research described in this study initially began at the end of 2019, and continued throughout 2020 and 2021 into 2022, which coincided with three very crucial, noteworthy global issues that have been defining and may have affected the findings of the research. First, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic began in December 2019, originating in Wuhan, Hubei province, China, eventually spreading to every continent, expect Antarctica (Peterson et al., 2020; Sauer, 2020). COVID-19, a respiratory disease that can spread person to person and may present itself asymptomatically or with a variety of severe symptoms, has caused disruption in everyday life, including for organizations. Organizations faced the economic, technological, and social implications of a nationwide shutdown and mandatory quarantine. In the United States, while the pandemic affected every state, organizations took the opportunity to send out communication, primarily via email and social media, to reassure customers of their COVID-19 response plans and recommendations (Seetharaman & Gallucci, 2020). Communication that was sent out reflected four important variables that are integral to both crisis and issues management: resolve for the future, cooperation, empathy, and actions the organization was taking (Culp & Johnson, 2020). Brands were eager to stay relevant, and this type of issues management communication was integrated through almost every large, Fortune 500 company, regardless of whether the COVID-19 pandemic was directly affecting the organization (i.e., by shutting down supply chains, manufacturing, or in-store customer traffic) or not. Overall, the response from customers receiving these emails was mixed, with some appreciating the authenticity and transparency, while others considered the messaging as unwelcome noise during an uncertain and serious time (Beer, 2020). Some stakeholders have even called out the discrepancy between an organization's policies and their public statements delivered during times of crises and widespread social movements (Bensinger, 2020). Regardless of the backlash or customer response, businesses persevered with the communication and utilized the pandemic as a time of reassurance of company values.

The other integral social issue in 2020 was the reinvigoration of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The BLM movement originated in July 2013 and peaked on June 6, 2020, when half a million people turned out in nearly 550 places across the

United States to protest racial injustice (Buchanan, Bui, & Patel, 2020). According to the Black Lives Matter website (2020), the BLM movement is focused on eradicating white supremacy and building local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by state, vigilantes, and police brutality. BLM has mobilized exponentially, receiving support from politicians, sports teams, celebrities, and even organizations. Similar to COVID-19 messaging, brands once again took to email and social media to remind their customers and followers of their values and commitment to the social issue at hand. For example, on #BlackOutTuesday, brands participated and posted a single black square on their social media channels (Beer, 2021; Mzezewa, 2020). Technology-based companies, like Facebook and Apple, pledged to donate millions of dollars to non-profits supporting the BLM movement, while newer and smaller startups, like Glossier and Peleton, set the precedent for up-and-coming businesses by providing actionable items that the organizations were doing and publicly condemning racism and violence (Sims, 2020).

The third monumental event occurred on January 6, 2021, when Donald Trump loyalists formed a mob and stormed the Capitol during a joint session of Congress. The mob forcibly broke through barricades outside of the Capitol and violently clashed with officers. After breaking down barriers, the mob rushed into the Capitol floor and created havoc for the occupants inside, senators and representatives and their staff members. Following the insurrection event, in which five people died, lawmakers of both parties denounced Trump for encouraging the large group of supporters to march to the Capitol (Teh, 2021). Not only did lawmakers denounce the insurrection, but organizations also utilized the event as an opportunity to denounce insurrection activities and end ties with

Trump and his campaign (Kaplan, 2021). Social media sites Twitter and YouTube publicly banned Trump from posting on their platforms. Initially, this decision was for a set amount of time, but then the ban was extended to a permanent basis (Allyn & Keith, 2021).

Arguably, this list could continue, as there have been quite a few hot topic issues that could be recounted in this dissertation, including the issues of gun rights, abortion access, free speech, etc., but while interviewing a majority of the study participants the issues above were the most discussed and recounted. 2020 truly changed the brand-consumer relationship, even from the relationship that existed five years earlier. Some organizations used to stay silent on social and politicized issues (Rainey, 2020). However, brand patrons, especially millennials and Gen Z, are now holding brands to higher social standards than ever before. “People overwhelmingly prefer to buy from companies that share their beliefs and values, especially now, in the midst of a pandemic-induced recession when spending is limited,” (Nguyen, 2020, para. 3). For example, scholars have pointed out that up until 2017, Nike considered its collaboration with Colin Kaepernick controversial and a risky business move, given how contentious Kaepernick’s kneeling protests were received by both the NFL and its fans (Austin et al., 2019; Gaither et al., 2018). However, in today’s political climate, where the public is more divided than ever, and rallies and boycotts make front-page news, organizations have learned to not stray away from controversy and to speak out about social issues, learning that by authentically presenting values, they may earn more corporate praise and higher levels of positive brand recognition. It’s important to keep the above issues in mind because these were integrated into the research questions for this study and were inevitably on the participants' (and the researcher's) mind.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

Because the research questions for this study were focused on how organizations engage in social issues management, it was important that data was collected from organizations that are actively engaging in social issues management. Therefore, data for this study was collected through primary interviews with participants who have been identified as public relations and corporate social advocacy contacts for their respective organizations. Data collection occurred through qualitative semi-structured interviews with public relations and communication practitioners regarding social issues engagement and loosely followed a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix C). This interview guide was created to connect with the concepts in both theories guiding this study, focusing on why and how the organizations engage in social engagement with consumers. Because of the theories focusing on the relationship with the stakeholder, it was integral to explore the rationale behind how social matters are advocated for and the decision-making process that takes place in order for these issues to become important for communication. Data collected through these interviews were used to examine some of the most impactful value advocacy organizations, based on a triangulation of three top corporate reputation lists.

3.1.1 Purposive Sampling

This study used purposive sampling, which is preferred in research that tries to maximize the discovery of heterogeneous patterns and problems that present themselves in a specific context (Erlandson et al., 1993; Patton 1990). This type of sampling ensures that the emerging data is relevant to the population and the questions in the interview guide provided adequate responses to the research questions. Because this study examined social issues engagement and the organizations that active engage with social issues, the researcher employed purposive sampling of exemplar cases, or organizations that have effectively engaged with social issues and have earned praise and public recognition from engaging with social issues. Using this type of purposeful sampling produced meaningful data into the processes that guided the results of CSR activities.

In purposive sampling, sample size is not an issue because researchers are hoping to achieve quality over quantity (Erlandson et al., 1993). Patton (1990; 2002) agrees that with a small purposive sample, a researcher can have a lot of directed power over the emerging data. While the main downside to purposive sampling is researcher bias, due to the researcher making subjective and generalized assumptions, it does allow researchers to gain a lot of information out of data collected. Therefore, to provide the most power, the participants selected for interviews were selected from organizations based on very specific criteria tied to their respective organization's reputation and the participant's job title.

3.1.2 Selecting Organizations of Interest.

Various sources throughout the public relations industry rank organizational reputation, interactions with social issues, and engagement with publics. These sources utilize data from quantitative research, such as surveys or polling, which are designed to evaluate how a general sample of the population views the organization based on different merits of corporate reputation and other measures of brand trust. While each reputation ranking report utilizes proprietary indicators and questions for compiling their list, there is a consensus on the use of both secondary research via published CSR reports and primary data through surveys with the general population (Olivera et al., 2019). However, because multiple lists ranking CSR and reputation exist, this study utilized two of the most well-known and reputable rankings and then generated a list of highly-rated companies that the rankings have in common. The two polls that were examined are Reputation Institute's RepTrak and The Harris Poll.

Reputation Institute. The Reputation Institute is a reputation measurement and management services firm. Starting in 2011, the firm has published the CR RepTrak, which is an annual compilation of companies that have the best corporate responsibility reputations in the world. This study is conducted by surveying 230,000 individuals in 15 countries over two months. Companies considered in the survey typically have revenue in excess of $1 billion, and they are required to have brand familiarity among at least 20 percent of the general public (Reputation Institute, 2019).

The Harris Poll. The Harris Poll is designed to evaluate organizations based on their Reputation Quotient (RQ) score. The RQ score is determined by The Harris Poll and is designed to measure public perceptions of top companies, as they compare across six dimensions of corporate reputation attributes, resulting in a corporate reputation ranking. The survey is conducted among 18,228 Americans in a nationally representative sample. The six dimensions of corporate reputation are: social responsibility, products and services, vision and leadership, emotional appeal, financial performance, and workplace development. Organizations that do not appear on the lists were not considered for this study because they did not reach a critical level of visibility. For the present analysis of organizations, companies were chosen that had a RQ score above 75. This was chosen based on the scale of responses and 75 being considered an average RQ score. RQ scores range from 83- 45 on the scale, so any organization with a RQ score over 75 is considered above average (The Axios Harris Poll 100, 2019).

The two polls were examined for the organizations that appeared in both rankings. The triangulated organizations were then identified as a "Top-Ranking CSR Organization" and used as contacts in this study. The organizations that were contacted for potential participation in this study are in Appendix D, which also lists each of the organization's respective rankings on RepTrak and The Harris Poll, as of 2020 when this project started.

3.1.3 Participants

After the organizations were selected for the sample frame, appropriate organizational representatives were selected from each organization to interview. Because the research questions were designed to address key topics of social issues management and communication strategy, data needed to be collected from a contact that was responsible for communication and public relations strategy. According to Kiesenbauer and Zerfass (2015), this person is commonly the Chief Communication Officer (CCO) or the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO). This person is uniquely positioned within the organization because they are usually a part of the executive board or report directly to the CEO, which establishes routine linkages of business strategy and communication and involves the person heavily in positioning the organization publicly (Watson & Noble, 2014). Kiesenbauer and Zerfass note that the CCO views communication as a strategic variable to compliment the goals and visions of the organization, maintain reputational value, build trust, and manage stakeholder relationships (p. 19). These job duties align with the goals of social issues engagement, and by choosing the organizations' CCOs as participants, data will be provided by the most knowledgeable source for social issues management. Erlandson et al. (1993) confirm that the ideal respondents are determined based on what the researcher desires to know and from the perspective the information is desired, so therefore, this population was ideal for interviewing.

The participants for this study were senior public relations practitioners in the United States. Specifically, the selected participants were chosen based on their job title at their respective companies. The organizational contacts for the selected organizations were found through a Google search for the main communication contact for the organization, the CCO or CMO. Because of the CCO's role and efforts to support various stakeholder groups, their contact information is usually publicly available on organizational websites (Schobel & Denford, 2013). Additionally, with the advent of LinkedIn, a social media networking site that is mainly utilized for professional networking, the background and position of the person can be further verified. If the organization did not have a publicly available CCO or CMO contact or the information was not provided, the senior media or corporate communications director was selected. As previously mentioned, 'Chief Communication Officers' and 'Chief Marketing Officers' were targeted because of their expertise and connection to the specialized information of importance in this study. If someone was interviewed with a different title than previously mentioned, it was because the CCO or CMO referred the interviewer to that person for more specific information.

3.1.3.1 Issues with Gatekeepers.

Access to organizational contacts as information sources was a major component of the research for this project. Because the data to be collected were focused on primary research with organizational contacts, the “buy-in” or participation of those participants was needed. Often, the two terms that are used to describe the gatekeeping process of information are access and cooperation (Johnson, 1975; Wanat, 2008). Usually, these two processes can be accomplished through engaging a gatekeeper or access point of information that has significant influence in a given area. Patton (2002) suggests that using a known sponsor to gain entry to the information is a powerful way of achieving access and building trust.

For this specific project, the researcher analyzed the social structure of the organizations by examining online resources via both a Google search for each organization and LinkedIn (i.e., every organization has an online organizational command or division chart). The researcher identified Chief Communication Officers as the most beneficial group to interview in this study because of their importance in leading and deciding the communication strategy for each organization. Because all the organizations included in the study are global Fortune-ranked corporations, it made sense to look for a commonality that most of the Chief Communication Officers would have with each other. The commonality was that of membership in the Arthur W. Page Society (Page), which is the world’s leading professional association for senior public relations and corporate communications executives and educators (Arthur Page Society, 2020). Because of the researcher’s role in public relations and with the help of university contacts, the researcher was able to utilize the President of Page, Roger Bolton, to gain access and cooperation as a gatekeeper. After contacting Mr. Bolton and explaining the research and its goals, he agreed to provide support and was able to help the researcher secure an introduction to some of the participants.

To be introduced to the participants, the researcher sent Mr. Bolton an email with a list of the publicly available contact information for the CCOs that the researcher planned to contact to ensure the information was correct and that Mr. Bolton had access to the individuals. After his approval and his initial introduction email, the researcher made their own initial contact with the potential respondents via email. This process was more tedious than first expected, and with a global pandemic and numerous national crises, the researcher had to send 2-4 emails to each organizational contact on the list to get a response or referral.

3.1.3.2 Study Population

Participants were not chosen based upon age, sex, or race. The population characteristics were rather based on job title and work area of an individual within selected organizations. All participants that were interviewed had at least a bachelor’s degree from a college or university, 10 or more years of experience in the public relations or marketing industry and had a senior-level and board position within their organization.

3.1.4 Human-Subject Protections

Assessing ethical concerns regarding human subject research is an important aspect of a research project. In order to protect the research subjects, a detailed examination of their protections and risks as research subjects must be examined.

The research topic produced little to no risk in relation to ethical considerations with the research subjects. The research topic pertains to public relations practitioners and their profession, which all the research participants have been oriented to and experienced. Furthermore, the participants were asked to reflect upon their experiences, and if they did not feel comfortable answering the question, they had the right to decline to answer or skip the question. Upon examination of the interview guide (see Appendix A), no questions were asked that posed any psychological, emotional, or legal risks.

Because this research project studies human subjects, the Institutional Review Board at The University of Kentucky conducted an IRB review of the research proposal and the proposed research topic.

Upon IRB approval (IRB Protocol 57639), each interview respondent was asked to read and review a detailed Informed Consent Form (i.e., Appendix 1), prior to the interview, which was emailed to them with a Zoom/Skype interview link. In this form, the research purpose was highlighted, and respondents were informed as to the design of the study, and more importantly, it was stressed that the respondents would participate solely on a volunteer basis. The Informed Consent Form was constructed without technical jargon to avoid any confusion or ambiguity in the research material. The participants verbally agreed to participate in the research study at the beginning of each interview.

For this study, interviews were conducted. These interviews were audio-recorded with a recording device, either a phone or laptop, in addition to being transcribed for maximum accuracy. Participants were made aware of this fact prior to each interview and had the option of declining to be audiotaped or participating. Another aspect of the

Informed Consent Form was reminding participants that their real identities in reports, projects, and publications would be hidden, and each participant's interview would be de-identified from their respective organization. Because of the IRB approval process, all participants were de-identified by removing any identifying information including organization name, personally identifying information, and information containing descriptors that could connect the individual to an organization. All files, including emails, transcripts, and other research materials gathered in the interviews were kept confidential.

No additional resources were used for this study. The participants completed the interview on their personal or organization's device, and the researcher utilized their own personal device for recording and transcribing the data. For interviews that were conducted via Zoom, Zoom was used for the recordings. For interviews conducted via Skype, Skype was used for the recordings. A hand-held recorder was utilized for telephone interviews as well as in addition to the Zoom and Skype recordings. All recordings were deleted once the transcription process was complete.

3.1.5 Study Design

Interviews in general provide witness and participant accounts of what happened in a particular setting. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) state one of the main reasons for using a qualitative interview is to gain a complete understanding of an interviewee's perspective via their experiences and stories. Interviews also provide internal thoughts, processes, and information that cannot be observed. Qualitative interviews are useful in public relations research because they have the potential to elicit responses from the main actors involved and affected by a campaign or engaged in a stakeholder relationship, such as the employees of an organization or the external stakeholders of consumers. Additionally, interviews can be used to gather information from past experiences, which is integral when attempting to recount knowledge from PR professionals. This is especially useful in PR research, especially with best practices to examine what worked and what would have been more ideal to practice (Bajalia, 2020; Taylor, 2018). Being able to provide the retrospective can help organizations learn from failures, using many theories of PR research. It also helps researchers determine patterns that might help organizations be proactively planning for issues in the future. Therefore, the data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allowed the researcher to ask questions that contributed to answering the research questions, while also making it possible to search for emerging themes through natural answers. The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews with the assistance of an interview guide to help focus the research on the study topics, while also allowing room to be reflexive and open to new questions and topics that naturally emerged (i.e., Appendix C). The semi-structured interview guide was designed to connect to the two theories that guided the research design. For example, by asking the interviewees how they engage with social issues with their audience, the Stakeholder Theory and STOPS theory were being examined. Based on the interviewees' responses, a reflexive analysis can be utilized to see if actual practice is matching the practice the theory explains. The guide was developed to begin with a more specific focus on practitioners' experience with social engagement with their organization, and then move to more general questions concerning social engagement more broadly. The guide was designed in a manner to get practitioners thinking about social engagement and responsibility.

This study was divided into two parts. Many qualitative researchers note that the use of a pilot study or initial interview study can help with the feasibility of the research design and help provide valuable insights to the researcher (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2010; Wray et al., 2017). The first part of the study involved interviews with the CCOs of two organizations with headquarters located in Lexington, Kentucky. This location was chosen due to convenience for the researcher and the connections that allowed the researcher to gain access to the participants at the sites. These interviews provided an opportunity to check the interview guide and structure to confirm that it would provide answers to the research questions. This introductory study helped refine the final interview design and acted as a practical way to familiarize the researcher with the experiences with the semi-structured interview guide. After these initial, informal interviews, the researcher created additional follow-up questions (see part one results below) and allotted more time for open-ended responses. The researcher also was able to change the wording of the questions for more consistent language.

For the second part of this study, after the study's design was refined, similar semi-structured interviews were conducted. Participants, as described above, were contacted utilizing their publicly available contact information and with initial help from Mr. Bolton, the identified gatekeeper (i.e., via their organization's website). All prospective interviewees were initially emailed to gauge participation and see if responses would be returned. In the initial contact with participants, they were given the choice of answering the questions via telephone or video call conferencing. This ensured flexibility with responses and ensured more organizations would participate. If participants did not respond in a timely manner (i.e., within two weeks of the initial message), the researcher reached out again to see if participation could be obtained.

Because of the type of interpretation being used, it was important to the quality of the study for narrative stories and themes to emerge via interview transcripts. In the initial contact, participants were asked to confirm that their contact information was correct and asked demographic questions about their job and experience to generate descriptive data of the participants. In total, the researcher reached out to 100 companies, as described above, to gauge willingness to participate. The researcher started with the first 10 organizations that were identified in the contact list. This quickly grew to contacting all 100 of the organizations identified on the list, as most organizations did not wish to participate because of policies against participation in student research, lack of resources, or unwillingness to discuss their involvement in social issues. The researcher continued to pursue prospective participants until data saturation was reached. In total, 11 interviews were completed for the second part of the study.

The researcher was cognizant that saturation was reached when the concepts and themes that were being coded for in the interviews started to be repetitive and reflective of a pattern. Examining how each organization labeled their social issues management and why they chose to engage in social issues management, in terms of instrumental and terminal values, allowed the researcher to realize when saturation was reached. The researcher transcribed and coded each interview immediately after it was conducted, allowing immersion in the data on an on-going basis. After transcribing and coding the

11th interview, the researcher was able to confirm that sufficient data had been collected to answer the research questions.

3.1.6 Privacy

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and stored on a password-protected computer. Participants were not required to disclose any private information that they felt compromised their position, integrity, or professional reputation. The researcher also agreed to send them the results of the data analysis after study completion. All consent and other study material information were kept on password-protected computers and in locked drawers.

Coding of the participants' identifying information was used after the initial collection of data. Because the researcher knew the name of the participant and the name of the organization (i.e., after scheduling the interview), after introductions, review of the research study, and the reiteration to not reveal any private information, the interviews were simply coded as Interviews 1-11. The only PII being asked was confirmation of the person being interviewed, involving the name of the person, what organization they work for, and how long they have worked there. The researcher needed this information to confirm that the person being interviewed was the correct person. The participant information and personal attributes were not associated with interview responses, and the information was stored separately from the transcripts on separate devices. Personally identifiable information was not associated with the interviews at any point during the study, and any identifying information that a subject provided during the interview was de-identified. Both the participant attributes (i.e., name, workplace, and number of years they worked) and the interview recordings were permanently destroyed once the transcription process was complete. Two devices were used to store the data. The personally identifiable information/contact information was stored on one password-protected device, and the interview transcripts were stored on a second password-protected device. The devices that held the research data were password-protected and encrypted to protect any information. Both devices were locked in a room, with only the researcher having access.

To record the interviews for transcription, Zoom or Skype was used, depending upon the ease of use and preference of the research participant. The researcher completed the transcriptions and did not use a third- party service. For the study and transcription of the interviews, the researcher relied on the audio recording of the interview, and any video recordings that were recorded were destroyed immediately after interviews ended. Audio recordings were only kept for transcription, and as previously stated, they were destroyed once the transcription process was completed. To permanently delete the files on both devices, the researcher used a third-party application called Permanent Eraser 2.91. The Permanent Eraser app overwrites the data multiple times, scrambles the original file name, and truncates the file size to nothing before Permanent Eraser finally unlinks it from the system. Once the data have been erased, they can no longer be read or accessed, deleting the files permanently from all devices. For this research study, IP addresses were not recorded, nor were they utilized in any part of the study.

The main advantage of this type of qualitative research is the ability to answer the "how" and "why" questions associated with critical inquiry. Qualitative research seeks to identify how people interact with their world (i.e., what they do), and how they experience and understand their world. This allows questions that investigate both the topics of the research questions, while also considering other types of information that could emerge from the participants' experience. Further sub-questions emerge once the researcher immerses themselves in the process of reading the literature and commencing the fieldwork (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). Because the participants were selected based on their experience and employers' reputations, the semi-structured form of the interviews was integral in the data analysis and interpretation of the data. Utilizing this type of interview, the researcher was able to be cognizant of the respondents' experience and knowledge, while also preventing respondent fatigue and encouraging more discussion. In doing so, the researcher collected an abundance of data that required organization and clean-up for a more focused interpretation.

3.1.7 Data Saturation

While the top 100 organizations with social engagement practices were pulled for contact, interviews were only conducted until data saturation was reached. Because purposive sampling is implemented through this study, the participants had a high degree of participant homogeneity, based on the participants being chosen according to common criteria (Guest et al., 2006). For data saturation purposes, this was important because the participants all had similar experiences to render exhaustive data with a smaller number of interviews than a more general population sample.

Bowen (2008) explains that data saturation involves bringing new participants into the study, until the data set is completed, or data redundancy is occurring. Therefore, the researcher continued to conduct interviews with participants in so far that no new outliers in data occurred and themes in the data were repetitive. Strauss and Corbin (1990) further clarify that data saturation is completed when no new data categories are emerging, so for this study, examining if the research questions were fully answered and described was important. Using member checks was also important to make sure that the participants interviewed believed that accurate understanding is recorded. The researcher continued to utilize member checks to ensure they were interpreting the right meaning of the interviews.

3.1.8 Ensuring Valid Inquiry

Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain that qualitative inquiry must have strict standards to ensure validity and trustworthiness of the data. To achieve validity, the researcher established credibility, ensured transferability, showcased dependability, and examined conformability.

3.1.8.1 Credibility

Erlandson et al. (1993) purport that a major concern in establishing credibility is properly interpreting realities that exist in the context being studied, so the researcher's expertise and prolonged engagement in public relations as a practitioner was the first step in affirming the proper interpretation of the data. The two other ways that the researcher confirmed credibility of the data were through the examination of referential adequacy materials and through member checks. Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain that that examining referential adequacy materials, such as documents and photographs related to the research context, can provide a more holistic view of the research. For this research, during the interview, the researcher asked for examples of social issues engagement or CSR campaigns that had been successful for the organization and asked the participants to explain the materials. This allowed the researcher to have a supportive background and stronger contextual background. The other type of credibility check that was used for interpretation was member checks. These member checks were issued after the data analysis was completed by emailing the participants individually to ensure that the data was verified. Each transcription was sent to associated participant, and they were asked for feedback on the transcription and to say if the researcher had missed anything in the interview. Erlandson et al.(1993) confirms member checks also allow participants to have the interpretation first and feel included in the process beyond the data collection.

3.1.8.2 Transferability

When considering a study's validity, findings must be considered in regard to how applicable they might be in other contexts. In traditional, quantitative studies, this measure is often referred to as the generalizability of the findings and is often measured with studies that utilize random sampling (Erlandson et al., 1994). Guba and Lincoln (1989) explain that an important distinction with qualitative research is traditional studies try to ensure that the findings can be generalized to the entire population, and qualitative studies try to demonstrate transferability to those to whom the data would be applicable. To ensure transferability, one should provide a thick description and also engage in purposive sampling. In order to have a thick description, the researcher detailed the data in the context and reported the findings so that readers can almost visually re-create the experience of the participants. For this study, the researcher utilized purposive sampling by selecting the specific organizations and people to collect data from, to ensure that the emerging insights were relevant to the study's population and other populations within the context of other top reputational-based companies.

3.1.8.3 Dependability

This measure of inquiry is usually reflected in concerns for reliability, or a study's consistency (Erlandson et al., 1994). Reliability is a precondition for validity, so therefore, in order for a case to achieve strong dependability, a dependability audit must be able to be conducted. For this study to have the reliability aspect, the researcher took copious notes, including the development of an audit trail, throughout the interview process and kept documents to ensure the study could be replicated. The only type of disruption or variance to a repeated study that the researcher can envision would be one occurring in a different context, social setting, or time. Guba (1981) confirms that a naturalistic researcher would view any repeated study instabilities to be attributed to reality shifts, not error, so the study would be reliable. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and numerous national crises, it would be hard to replicate an exact study of this measure, because reality has now transformed how organizations interact with social issues even more than before.

3.1.8.4 Confirmability

In a quantitative research study, the confirmability of a study is described as its objectivity, which is explained through explication and being free of researcher biases. For this research study, confirmability was ascertained through a confirmability audit that was conducted throughout the interpretation process in that the conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations can be adequately traced to the sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through the interviews, the researcher remained a neutral party, and attempted to listen and guide the participant through the interview, rather than feed a response.

3.1.9 Data Interpretation and Analysis

Lindlof (1995) describes analysis as a matter of hearing the voices of the respondents and the other and deciding which voices should be included and how these voices are to be stitched together. Interpretive researchers recognize that to understand the world of public relations and marketing communications, they must be able to first engage in it actively before interpreting it. Involvement in “the field” enables them to conceptualize reality from the point of view of those involved in it (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). By exploring the evidence before developing an interpretation of it, researchers embrace concepts and theories that naturally emerge out of the data. Experience in the field of study enhances the understanding of the data. In other words, models and theories don’t strictly guide what you discover in the field, but rather the interpretation of what the data explains. Therefore, the researcher’s experience in the field of public relations, both in an academic and non-academic setting, was incredibly beneficial in explaining the data and building credibility with the participants. The researcher utilized their experience to develop rapport with the participants, and the researcher’s experience and education in public relations allowed them to quickly understand the terms that were being repeated throughout the interviews.

3.1.10 Value Analysis

Value analysis is one of the main types of interpretation for this research. It is defined as an interpretation for describing any form of verbal expression (Sillars &

Gronbeck, 2000). This expression can be in the form of a letter to a constituent, an autobiography, a conversation, or even a speech. Values are defined as “enduring beliefs that specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to alternate modes of conduct or end-states of existence” (Rokeach, 1968, p. 160). Commonly recognized value terms are freedom, courage, progress, equality, etc. Often, these values are not explicitly stated, but rather individuals and organizations might imply them through statements or actions. (Aust, 2004). Analysis of this nature is integral for examining the organization’s motives and those of the society in which it is operating. Defining a culture with values is very important to value analysis, especially organizational culture, and the connection to the variety of stakeholder groups. Examining what each values system (i.e., of an organization) believes will show the organization’s intentions behind engaging with social issues engagement and the values behind the decision to engage. The goal with value analysis is not only to identify the values present with strategic decision-making, but also to examine the priorities and relationships between the values (Vitale, 2018).

Values are important to this type of data analysis because they allow patterns to be detected in public settings where values represent a relatively short grouping of core ideas. Rokeach (1979) explains that values merge affects and concept, and they do not stop with a factual explanation of experience, but rather they are attached to varying degrees to the experience, at either extreme (i.e., good or bad, true or false, appropriate or inappropriate) (p.16). Rokeach postulates that people have 36 central dominant beliefs, which can be further delineated as 18 instrumental values (experienced through day-to-day actions in order to achieve terminal values) and 18 terminal values (end-goal and most often what people want to achieve in their lifetime). Instrumental values are classified into moral values, which are interpersonally focused, and competence values, which are personally focused. Terminal values are divided into personal or self-centered values, and social or society-centered values. This led to Rokeach's value theory that has five hypotheses: people's values are relatively few in quantity; the values are the same, with varying levels of intensity; values produce a system of values; values are based on culture, society, and personality; and values are disseminated through messages (Rokeach, 1973). When acknowledged and publicized, these values become part of an organized system, "value system" (Farcane et al., 2018, p. 5).

While Rokeach's original value system has been utilized primarily for the analysis of human values, it is also being utilized for the analysis of corporate values (Aust, 2004; Farcane et al., 2018; Schmeltz, 2014). Because organizations are increasingly taking on advanced humanized roles in society, in the researcher's opinion, it is appropriate to utilize the values system for answering two of the research questions for this study.

The values identified by Rokeach can be seen in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

Table 3.1 The 18 instrumental values (desirable modes of conduct) (Rokeach, 1973)

Type of value	Value	Definition
	Capable	Competent, effective, sure
	Clean	Neat, tidy
	Imaginative	Daring and creative
	Intellectual	Reflective, always learning

Table 3.1 (continued)

	Logical	Consistent, rational
Moral Values	Broadminded	Open-minded, open to change
	Cheerful	Light-hearted, joyful
	Courageous	Standing up for your beliefs
	Forgiving	Willing to pardon
	Helpful	Looking out for the benefit of others
	Honest	Sincere, truthful
	Independent	Self-reliant, self-sufficient
	Loving	Affectionate and passionate
	Obedient	Respectful and Dutiful
	Polite	Courteous and well-mannered
	Responsible	Dependable and reliable
	Self-controlled	Restrained, self-discipline

Table 3.2 The 18 terminal values (end-goal and desirable end-state) (Rokeach 1973)

Type of Value	Value	Definition
Social in Orientation	A world at peace	Free of war and conflict
	A world of beauty	Beauty of nature and the arts
	Freedom	Independence and free choice

Table 3.2 (continued)

	Equality	Brotherhood, equal opportunity for all
	National Security	Protection of attack
Personal in Orientation	Wisdom	Understanding from experience
	Freedom	Independence, Free choice
	Happiness	Contentedness
	Self-Respect	Esteem, confidence
	Salvation	Eternal life, saved
	True friendship	Close companionship
	Sense of accomplishment	Lasting contribution
	Inner harmony	Freedom from inner conflict
	A comfortable life	Prosperity
	Mature love	Spiritual and faithful intimacy
	A world of beauty	Beauty of nature and the arts
	Pleasure	An enjoyable leisurely life
	Social recognition	Respect and admiration
	An exciting life	Simulating and active

After examining the instrumental and terminal values, not all are applicable in an organizational setting, but they can each be slightly modified for examining organization values, without changing their meaning or importance (Aust, 2004). For example, family security in terms of an organization could mean that all employees and stakeholders of the organization are taken care of. As for instrumental values, loving could mean acting on goals with passion and tenacity, and honesty can refer to being ethical and transparent with businesses. A value that is not compatible with an organizational values system is mature love (a terminal value that is defined as sexual and spiritual intimacy in relationships), so it was not utilized in the value analysis portion of the data analysis. Table 3 displays how Rokeach's values can be depicted through an organization's identity.

Table 3.3 Organization's Identity Positioned within Rokeach's Value System (1973)

Organizational Identity Components	Definition of the Component	Rokeach's Value System
Vision	Desired future of the organization	Terminal Values
Mission	Purpose of the company and connected to stakeholder values	Instrumental Values
Values connecting the vison and mission	What we have achieved, what we want to achieve, and how we will do it	Mixture of instrumental and terminal values

Source: Schmeltz (2014)

Nord (1984) completed a value analysis driven study in a different organizational context and examined three major Chicago newspapers, looking to see each organization's values in terms of the role of the stakeholders (i.e., readers or government) and also the society in which they were publishing. The study showed that by analyzing an organization's or stakeholder's value systems and its tangible publications or thoughts, a connection could be made. This served as an exemplar study for how the present researcher tried to identify if a values-match existed between an organization and stakeholders' voices based on the answers provided in the interviews. For the researcher to evaluate this match, questions were asked during the interviews about each of the organizations' stakeholders and how they were considering their communication with each of the groups.

The interviews conducted with communication officers and public relations practitioners were directly correlated with their ambitions, motivations, values, and processes of managing social issues. Each of the interviews showcased what value systems were connected to their organizations' social issues engagement and how these processes are related to corporate identity values and everyday communication and PR techniques. The value analysis of the data illustrates how public relations practitioners label their organization's communication regarding social issues and why they choose to engage in the management of social issues.

Value analysis is not without issues. One of the main issues with value analysis is its interpretative nature and the requirement of other traditions to judge whether the analysis is positive or negative (Farcane et al., 2018; Mueller et al., 2021). This is where the utilization of existing theories and the literature review in the present study provided guidance. Another issue with value analysis is the varying nature of values in different cultures because the meaning can be different or change over time (Farcane et al.). A practical example of this is seen with equality and individualism. Some teens dress the same as each other, which implies equality, but they dress the same to showcase independence. This tendency needed to be accounted for in the interview guide to make sure that the researcher asked appropriate questions to infer the difference between implied and explicit values.

3.1.11 Challenges

One of the biggest challenges of qualitative inquiry comes in the analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of the results. The coding of narratives and the generating of categories, especially in grounded theory, leads to new ideas being formed and theories developed, but it can take a lot of time to gather consensus on appropriate coding schemas and categories. Another disadvantage of qualitative research is the feasibility or actuality that observation or interviews can be conducted. Sometimes observational sites are guarded, too far away, or off limits, and gaining access is impossible. However, due to the increased focus on transparency and the invention of new technologies, such as email, video conferencing, and social media, existing distance barriers are disappearing. Communicating via email and video conferencing was not a major challenge in collecting data for this study because of the norm of video contact, especially during the pandemic. The real challenge of this study was gaining access to the participants, which was only achieved through perseverance, repeated communication, and flexibility.

One of the last disadvantages of this type of qualitative research is the possibility of gatekeepers attempting to protect the information of the research site. This is challenging because gatekeepers can become problematic to not only access, but also because they can skew the collected data, unintentionally or intentionally. If participants think that the gatekeeper might be able to access the collected data, they might be more willing to falsify or intensify answers on questions that they might have answered differently. On the other hand, gatekeepers can be advantageous for researchers who can gain trust and access to the site. Being able to connect to someone like this study's gatekeeper, Mr. Bolton, who had prior access and communication with the participants, helped to establish the researcher's credibility. Also, because the researcher was able to be flexible with data collection (i.e., allotting more time and utilizing more resources to obtain access), they were able to gain access tp the organizations that truly wanted to participate and discuss social issues management, rather than those that did not. This allowed for the collection of enriched data from willing companies that were engaged with the topic being covered and did not ignore the questions being addressed in the interview guide. Because of this, the semi-structured interview worked well because each of the participants added value to the conversation by expanding on their points organically, without any trigger or elicitation of information from the researcher.

To answer the research questions, both a deductive and inductive approach were utilized. For the first and fourth research questions, the researcher focused on a deductive approach, in which analysis is focused on generalizations and theories (i.e., namely Rokeach's values system) to analyze how organizations label any social issues management and why they choose to engage with social issues. To do so, the researcher coded the interviewees' responses for each of the instrumental and terminal values listed in Table 1 and 2 by identifying appropriate keywords. The researcher started with more broad codes of references to personal, interpersonal, social, and competence values and when appropriate coded for the more specific value that was identified (Rokeach, 1973). If a new value was identified or mentioned, the researcher noted the value being discussed.

For the second, third, and fifth research questions, the researcher utilized inductive analysis or a bottom-up approach in which theory and generalizations are presented based on the data. For these questions, it was important to actively engage with the data and build answers to the questions based primarily on what the interviews were telling and using sensemaking to lean into the answers. The researcher benefited from their experience in public relations, which allowed them to dig deeper into some of the interview responses to uncover the underlying concepts of the interviewees' answers.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Data collection for this study was conducted in two parts. Before beginning data collection, the for the main part of the study, the researcher utilized a preliminary study to refine the semi-structured interview guide to ensure that data collection would be optimal and efficient. Two interviews were conducted with organizations in the Central Kentucky area. In these interviews, the standard semi-structured interview guide was utilized, but at the end of the question-and-answer portion of the interview, the two participants were asked to give feedback on the wording, questioning technique, and utilization of the time allotted. Because of the feedback, two changes were made to the semi-structured interview guide.

Both interviewees suggested using more time to elicit responses on how CSR or social issues management was affected by COVID-19.

> "I believe that I would ask about the pandemic [COVID-19]. I know it's changed the way that our corporate communication has worked and even what we have focused on. People have more time to do research…hold companies accountable. We have a duty to do that moving forward."

Upon consideration of the importance of this event and the feedback from the study, the question was added to the semi-structured interview and ultimately became a consistent question in the main part of the data collection, so it was asked in every interview.

The other change that occurred after the preliminary study was the addition of the question asking, "How does your organization define (i.e., and label) the external acts that you (i.e., organization) advocate for?" This question was added the researcher noticed that in each of the two preliminary interviews, the interviewee did not refer to the social matters or acts consistently throughout the interview. Instead, in both interviews, the participants would use the word "issues" or "purposes" when they were discussing a matter that their organization was regularly communicating with their stakeholders, which was inherently part of their organization's mission statement. Likewise, when asking for examples of their corporate social responsibility programs, both interviewees utilized the word "causes" when talking about more short-term, specific marketing campaigns. For example, when asked how their organization chooses certain matters to advocate or support, one of the initial interviewees said:

> "Our issues are driven by our mission statement and our goals as a company that were originally created for us to support several years ago, so communicating those values remains incredibly important for our long-term CSR strategy…We do pick causes that we think support our purpose, and we devote resources to those as appropriate and needed…"

Based on these answers, the researcher believed it important to explore if the organizations being interviewed in the main part of the data collection would continue to differentiate between the terms, without being prompted, and when prompted toward the end of the interview, what the term would be defined as. After the addition of these two questions, the semi-structured interview guide was finalized and used for the collection of the data for the main part of the study.

4.1.1 Main Study Data Results

For the main study, the researcher began the analysis by closely reading each of the transcriptions of the interviews to become more familiarized with the data. After coding for Rokeach's instrumental values (1973) based on keywords, the researcher then set out to answer the first research question (RQ1): How do public relations practitioners label their organization's communication regarding social issues?

Each of the instrumental values was identified at least once in the interviews. Through the questions, interviewees illustrated that both competence and moral values were on the forefront of their minds. Table 3 presents examples of how each of the instrumental values was utilized to label each interviewee's communication with social issues.

Table 4.1 Rokeach's Instrumental Values Illustrated in Interview Responses

Type of value	Value	Example of defining social issues in interviews
Competence Values	Ambitious	"… we do not stop there."
	Capable	"We have proven success so I would say we're know for our issues we advocate for."
	Clean	"Our issues are organized and have a clear plan and path moving forward."
	Imaginative	"Thinking outside the box. We don't want to recycle the same platform, no pun attended."
	Intellectual	"They [goals] are not stagnant and we ask our customers, 'how are we doing?'"

Table 4.1 (continued)

	Logical	"Our social issues are backed by data and market research."
Moral Values	Broadminded	"We want to be a catalyst for change."
	Cheerful	"Our issues are positive and people-oriented, goal-oriented."
	Courageous	"We don't shy away from potentially alienating causes."
	Forgiving	"We haven't always had a good track record, but we're working on it."
	Helpful	"We consistently meet the needs of those we serve."
	Honest	"We do not just say, we do, believe, act."
	Independent	"We believe in the power of our mission."
	Loving	"Giving back meaningfully and purposefully"
	Obedient	"If it's not working [what we are doing], let's fix it."
	Polite	"Our issues are really amplified by examining how can we partner with others."
	Responsible	"If we cannot measure our progress, then we do not want to embark on something that we can't change."
	Self-controlled	"It's about knowing your area, your arena, and fixing the issues that are inherent to your mission."

While Table 3 only illustrates one example of each of the values being utilized, some of the values were utilized quite consistently through every interview. Each of the interviewees would describe the labeling of their social values with an outline of what the company supported, and then when asked to explain, they would utilize many of the values above to describe their organization's process of labeling the values.

4.1.2 Instrumental, Competence Values

When considering the instrumental, competence values, the values of logical and capable were implied in every interview, multiple times. Traditionally, with Rokeach's value system, these terms would be personally focused, but with the CCOs, they were utilized as a way to describe the organizational culture and decision-making process. Both logical and capable values were implied to describe how closely related the issues (chosen by the organization) were to the brand's mission statement. Those values were also utilized to justify the intentional choice of picking specific issues over others.

4.1.2.1 Logical Value

Logical or being able to fully explain or rationalize information is one of the instrumental, moral values (Rokeach, 1973) hinted at when asked how each company labeled social issues management. For example, in one interview with a large-scale, packaged food company, their CCO expressed the logic behind defining their issues by stating, "We truly believe that what you track, what you measure…report on, what you give money to, those are things that you do to see effective change. So of course, we choose environment and social causes that we can measure." Another interviewee, a CCO from a popular athletic apparel company, echoed similar sentiments for their issues being logically connected to their brand's mission, stating, "The organizations and causes that we work with have to be integrated into our brand and our values have to align. We emphasize the alignment of brands because we do not want to mislead our customers or misappropriate company resources." In fact, this same interviewee further stressed the need for logical values by using the word "sensible" more than five times to describe how the company decided on what issues to support.

4.1.2.2 Capable Value

The concept of being capable was the other instrumental, competence value that was present in every interview. When discussing how one of the most successful leaders of CSR defines their issues management, the CCO stated, "They [the issues] are intrinsic to our company's mission." Capable and Competence were always mentioned together, not one without the other. Competence was also showcased by many of the interviewees reminding the researcher how long their company had been supporting issues or mentioning their organization's track record of being recognized as socially responsible. One interviewee said, "[de-identified company] is a food company with over 100 years of maintaining integrity in operations, serving our customers and communities, and creating values for our customers… We've been recognized as one of the most ethical companies, so we take pride in our work, and we try to keep that recognition in mind when we select social issues or campaigns to take part in."

4.1.3 Instrumental Moral Values

The instrumental, moral values were consistently laced through the descriptions of how the CCOs described their issues management process and how they labeled it within their respective companies. More often than not, the interviewees would allude to the instrumental values of being helpful, honest, and responsible to describe their organization's social issues management. These values were more implicitly stated than those of the moral values, which is consistent and follows research on corporate social issues management that suggests that organizations need to be transparent and responsible to the societies in which they operate (Aust, 2004; Dodd & Supra, 2014; Dodd, 2018).

4.1.3.1 Helpful Value

When discussing how the organizations defined social issues management, the CCOs emphasized the need to be helpful by choosing certain issues. The interviewees used terms such as "worthwhile", "productive", "beneficial", and "valuable" to stress how they labeled their social issues. In one example, an interviewee was asked about engaging with issues, and said, "One of our core values is to give back meaningfully and purposefully. This is at the forefront of what we do, so if we are not being valuable, if what we are doing is not worthwhile, then it doesn't make sense for us to do it." Some of the CCOs used the value of helpful to describe their issues management, but they also utilized it to describe their goals for customers. One CCO said, "…It's mission-based marketing and we define this type of strategy as a way to help customers feel like they are making a real impact." Another interviewee from one of the world's largest technology companies said, "For our CSR work, we try to do it in a way that ties back because otherwise it's hollow and it makes no sense at all." The value of helpful in this instance seems to take on both an interpersonal and a moral role, both to the organization and to the stakeholder. Helpful was utilized as a way to convey the organization's wish for mutual benefits for all stakeholders and parties involved with social issues.

4.1.3.2 Honest Value

Transparency and honesty are two pertinent concepts of organizational growth and development (Ellemers et al., 2011). This was another concept that was richly embedded in the interviewees' responses. For nine of the interviews, the value of honesty was communicated as a means to an end of achieving something among their stakeholders. For example, one CCO said, "We want to let our stakeholders know that we do not care about the short-term boost in trust, we want the credibility that what we say matters, and how we proceed with our issues and how we do CSR is how we communicate that." This CCO stressed that honesty leads to trust and credibility, building a stronger relationship, which is not fully realized in Rokeach's values system. Another CCO also mentioned honesty as a moral compass, stating that companies "have to be transparent about goals…" and customers should "…hold us accountable… to a higher standard when we do so."

4.1.3.3 Responsible Value.

Being responsible and recognizant of the fact that organizations have a responsibility was one of the most common terms associated with labeling social issues, which is unsurprising considering social issues have long been associated with responsibility (Dodd 2018). One CCO simply stated, "It's our responsibility to give back, do better, and truly be better, so this is how we label our issues management… our responsibility." Some CCOs associated the term responsible with accountable, and said, "We pick our issues, and we take claim. It's like saying to the public, 'This is our responsibility.' We actively communicate that. We have made progress, but we're still making a difference." For CCOs, responsibility didn't just stand for picking the right causes and issues to support, but it also was about being responsible for the communication about progress and change to stakeholders.

To answer RQ1, based on the analysis of Rokeach's instrumental values that were implied through the CCOs interviews, most socially-responsible companies are choosing issues that are aligned with their mission statements and core values. The primary values inherent to the labeling of social issues management are logical, capable, helpful, honest, and responsible. These key values express that organizations are utilizing strategic decision making when determining their social issues management practices and issues that they support. Organizations are labeling their social issues logically and reminding customers of their capabilities in achieving progress for their issues, while also communicating that customers can and should hold them responsible. Beyond the labels associated with the issues, the way that an organization defines its social issues management can impact the acceptance and adoption of those issues (Farcane et al., 2018).

4.1.4 Issue Management and Public Relations

For RQ1a, the researcher questioned how public relations practitioners are defining social issues management. To explore this question, the researcher asked each of the interviewees questions about under what department their issues management was occurring, what they thought the function of social issues management was in public relations, and how issues management added to their public relations practices. Overwhelmingly, 8 out 11 of the CCOs stated that their organization positions social issues management under the umbrella of public relations. The other three CCOs said that issues management was a responsibility that was divided between the different departments with the CCO having the final say on dissemination materials.

Social issues management was also emphasized as a key part of the public relations process. One of the CCOs stated that "PR has taught us there is a mutual benefit for communicating effectively with our stakeholders. Our stakeholders do their part by purchasing our product…liking and sharing our brand. People now expect companies to do their part and not just appear to be doing their part. This a cyclical process that we must keep up." PR's mutual benefit was also referenced in another interview where the interviewee said, "When you are spreading mindful commerce, you are making the buying experience as gratifying as you possibly can. It's simply not an exchange or a purchase, but it's about creating an experience where customers not only feel good, but they do good." One interview subject referred to the cyclical process of public relations and said that public relations is intrinsic to social issues management because of the accountability from stakeholders. The subject said, "If they [stakeholders] know we're good, we keep our promises, we do good, we continue to do good, they buy our products, refer them to their friends, they root for us... and then again, we are encouraged to do more good."

From asking about public relations and issues management, it was evident that CCOs view it as key function of the public relations sector of their businesses. Not only are public relations practitioners practicing issues management, complimentary to the everyday public relations strategies, but they are integrating it within their PR goals and functions and making sure that it's not a one-time effort, but rather it is given clear definition and direction with defined goals.

4.1.5 Defining Social Issues Management in Organizations

RQ2 asked what a consistent definition of social issues management would look like in practice. As stated in the literature review, the definition of social issues management varies and is often buried among other key words and ideas like corporate social responsibility and corporate social advocacy (Roszkowska-Menkes, 2016). The lack of clarity and consensus prevents theories from being developed and essentially confines the concept of social issues management to its role as a management function. In order for the researcher to develop a clear definition of social issues management, it was necessary to first ask the interviewees what the difference between corporate social responsibility and advocacy was to them. All of the interviewees noted that there was a difference between advocacy and responsibility, but they were interconnected processes. In order to get a clear visualization of these differences, the researcher parsed through the answers and created a table with each of the key words associated with advocacy and responsibility. Table 4 depicts the key differences that were detected when speaking with interviewees.

Table 4.2 Differences between Corporate Social Advocacy and Corporate Social Responsibility

Interview	Advocacy*	Responsibility *	Other terms that were mentioned
One	“Advocacy is being a sustainable partner and fighting for your issues.”	“CSR is just more common.” “Easy definition to classify.” “It’s a broader term.”	Citizenship; Corporate Governance

Table 4.2 (continued)

Two	"To be an advocate, you must seek change, want change, and actually be a part of the change."	"CSR is outdated term and everyone knows companies have responsibility."	Volunteering
Three	"Advocacy is a step beyond responsibility and really can be seen as a marriage of the hard and tangible world of profits and the soft and fuzzy world of doing good and giving back."	"CSR is a set of corporate activities that add business value, while also addressing social issues." "It's inevitable."	Social altruism
Four	"Advocacy is big-picture, and is looking and saying we're responsible and we are doing something about it."	"CSR can be unrelated to your business and can produce negative consequences, unintentionally."	Citizenship
Five	"Using company resources to be a model for other organizations in our industry."	"Responsibility is inherent in companies."	None
Six	"CSA is the active measure of taking our problems and working toward a path to help contribute."	"CSR is consistently evaluating what we have done, how we can do more, and what we should be doing."	Volunteerism; Social Altruism
Seven	"CSA is the actual act of making changes and carrying out goals to rectify the issues."	"CSR is the acknowledgement and acceptance of being responsible for a problem or issue."	Citizenship

Table 4.2 (continued)

Eight	"CSA is interpreting what a 'better place' is and taking that vision to make your company a supporter of those issues."	"CSR is accepting we are responsible to leave the world in a better place."	None
Nine	"CSA goes beyond responsibility to do social good, beyond the interests of the organization."	""CSR is the responsibility to stakeholders, legally and otherwise."	Integrated Communication Advocacy
Ten	"CSA is using internal and external engagement with our stakeholders. This is about using community and employee engagement to make a difference."	"CSR is taking responsibility for the good, bad, and ugly-while also committing to doing better or more in the future."	None
Eleven	"CSA is using hard work, time, dedication, all of the resources to work with other partners and groups for change."	"CSR is an acknowledgement and a give-in. We are responsible in some capacity."	Change communication; volunteerism

*Each of the definitions from the interviews were shortened for brevity and conciseness

Based on the differences highlighted above, it's clear that while corporate social responsibility and corporate social advocacy are different, they remain interconnected in the process of social issues management. In each of the interviews, it was confirmed that social issues management was more appropriately delineated as a process, rather than a standalone function. With consideration to the process, and while also integrating the literature, this researcher proposes the following definition of social issues management.

Social issues management is the process of utilizing issue scanning, news monitoring, and market research to discover an alignment with social issues and the values inherent to an organization. Social Issues Management begins as an acknowledgement of the social responsibility held by an organization, and then based on strategic goal development, an organization authentically advocates (actions) for progress toward those goals.

4.1.6 Benefits of Social Issues Management

The third research question (RQ3) asked what the benefits of social issues management could be identified as. To answer this question, the researcher both analyzed each interview in its entirety and also explicitly asked interviewees what they thought were the benefits. In order to organize the benefits more concisely, they can be differentiated between tangible and intangible benefits.

4.1.6.1 Tangible Benefits

The tangible benefits of engaging in social issues management were most notably identified as profit, increased market share, differentiation of competition, and policy or regulation changes. Most of the interviewees were quick to make note that the tangible benefits of social issues were not the driving factors behind why their organizations wanted to engage with social issues. One interviewee said, “We want to be known for more than our profits.” As for the increased market share benefit, an interviewee from a large technology company stated, “If we do good and show others we are doing good, our market share grows organically because we are appealing to the ‘right’ audiences and showing that we care beyond the boardroom.” The same sentiment was also echoed when discussing competition and two interviewees specifically supported that they wished their competitors would engage in social issues for the betterment of society, but when they don't engage, their organization sees a direct benefit because they stand out as the "change maker."

4.1.6.2 Intangible Benefits

The explanations of the intangible benefits of engaging with social issues varied throughout the interviews. The most common intangible benefits were impact over profit, reputation support, building of trust and credibility, and increased employee engagement and morale. When asked about benefits of social issues management, one interviewee said, "When we consistently fill the needs of the people we serve, and we talk to our customers about the impact of their purchases, we create a long-term, trackable support system." Another interviewer stated that social issues management "should not be done just for the sake of doing it, but rather to make a real difference." In this consideration, the impact speaks more than the tangible benefits, and it leads to increased trust among stakeholders and a stronger reputation. Trust and reputation building was one of the main benefits for the CCOs, as one CCO stated, "People are skeptical of their government, businesses, even their neighbors, which makes them consider more and more what they see and if they can trust it. We engage with social issues to remind customers they can trust us, and they don't have to second-guess it."

One of the most interesting benefits of social issues engagement mentioned was employee engagement and morale improvement. In each of the 11 interviews, each participant, without being asked, brought up employees as catalysts and vehicles for change and support. Each of the CCOs viewed their employees as the "troops", "citizen leads", "drivers of issues," and the "advocates for our issues." While each CCO referenced their employees as different roles within the social issues management, it was clear that employee engagement is both a benefit and a tool to be utilized. One CCO stated that, “Being purpose driven allows us to recruit the top employees and retain them easily. We’re able to show how we’re making a difference and it resonates. We strive to create a positive environment, where making a difference matters and is possible.” Another CCO said, “Our employees are our troops and they are on the ground, in the communities, so not only do they want the issue advocated for, but they know effectively how we should pursue the issue.” Examning the benefits for employees is an element of social issues management that needs further exploration because previous studies have actually shown detrimental effects to employee conduct (List & Momeni, 2021).

Based on the interviews, benefits for organizations engaging in social issues management are plentiful, and they are also highly individualized based on the organization and what the organization is trying to achieve. If the organization has an end-goal or a desired end-state that is embedded within its mission statement or is at the forefront of its employees’ minds, it might be easier and more appealing to engage in responsibility and advocacy to support issues that lead to that desired end-state.

4.1.7 Why Organizations Engage with Social Issues

RQ4 explored why organizations are choosing to engage in social issues management. In order to examine the “why”, it’s important to examine the interviewees’ responses in comparison to Rokeach’s Values Systems, particularly the terminal values (end and desired state) (1973). Table 5 compares the Rokeach’s terminal values with the stated values, conceptualization of the value within the organization, and an example in the interviews.

Table 4.3 Rokeach's Terminal Values Illustrated in Interviews

Type of Value	Value	Conceptualization of Value in Organization	Example of defining social issues in interviews
Social in Orientation	A world at peace	Everyone is working together to support issue	"It's important that we are all instigators of change."
	A world of beauty	Leaving our environment and those in it, better than when we found it.	"We should invest in educating our stakeholders about why the issues are important and invest in them to be the change instigators to help us support the issue."
	Freedom	Free to choose issues that match company values	"We do not choose just any issue because that would be disingenuous."
	Equality	Equal division of resources for every goal	"We cannot support all issues, but the ones that we do support, we devote adequate resources to each."

Table 4.3 (continued)

	National Security	Providing long-term support with informed goals	"If we just say we're going to support an issue, and have no plan, we will never really give our all to anything fully."
Personal in Orientation	Wisdom	Understanding from experience	"… must learn from our mistakes and our wins."
	Family Security	Taking care of employees, customers, and business partners	"We consistently fill the needs of those that we serve…"
	Happiness	Content with progress but still working	"When we attain a goal, we're happy. When we don't, we say, let's change this.. time to try again."

Table 4.3 (continued)

	Self-Respect	Esteem, Confidence	"… Engaging with issues has allowed us to become an ethical leader in our industry"
	Salvation	Saved from threat or reputation damage	"Managing issues, in the right way, provides you some reputational good points when something doesn't go your way."
	True friendship	Close relationships with stakeholders	"Our stakeholders are who we are responsible to. They have a say in what we do."

Table 4.3 (continued)

	Sense of accomplishment	Making a lasting contribution to society	“We want to make an impact on the goals that we’re setting, and we are always proud when we can positively affect the issue.”
	Inner harmony	Doing the right thing for stakeholders	“At the end of the day, we have to ask, if it matters to us, and does it matter to them [stakeholders]?”
	A comfortable life	Prosperity and support	“Our partners support our goals and help us accomplish them, so it’s easier, but it’s also beneficial on both sides.”

Table 4.3 (continued)

	Pleasure	Enjoying the rewards	"It makes you feel good when you support an issue and make a change.. The organization really wins."
	Social recognition	Respect and Admiration	"When we do good, people know and they talk about it."
	An exciting life	Active communication with stakeholders	"Our people [stakeholders] are doing a thousand things in a minute, and we want to make issues management attainable so anyone can experience its power."

Each of the 18 terminal values was found in the transcriptions of the interviews, with the exception of the mature love value, which was omitted because of its lack of relevance to the study. The most common answer to the "why" question of social issues management was found with terminal, personal values, rather than social ones. This was interesting because it could be assumed that because social issues are, as the name implies, social in nature, one would believe the "why" behind engaging with them would also be social. Rather, most interviewees' answers to why their organization engages in social issues management were personal, namely social recognition, a sense of accomplishment, and salvation. When asked "why", one CCO stated, "We want to show up for our stakeholders and their communities… We want to achieve happiness for both our internal and external audiences… Our founders said it best, "The value of our good is not measured by what it does, but by the amount of good it does to the one concerned." When considering this statement, the reason why CCOs might have stated more terminal, personal values, is because the organizations being interviewed for this dissertation were recognized as leaders with issues management and corporate social responsibility, so they have already clearly aligned their issues with their organization's mission statement, ultimately making their "why" more personal (i.e., connected to the corporate identity) than those that might have terminal, social values that are more broad in nature.

4.1.8 Best Practices for Social Issues Management

The final research question for this study was focused on discovering how the most responsible corporate organizations are engaging with social issues (RQ5). This question was poised to develop a best practices guide for social issues management. In the interviews and in order to fulfill this research question, each of the interviewees were asked "What are your (and/or your organization's) best practices for engaging with social issues?" The responses were transcribed, and then were copied and pasted into a separate document, so the researcher could code and summarize the best practices that were being listed. Each of the interviewees provided 2 to 4 best practices or pieces of advice to other practitioners. Many of those were repeated from interview to interview, so the following best practices guide is based on a substantive number (more than three) of times the piece of advice was repeated.

1. Social Issues Management should be data driven and informed.

Each of the CCOs stressed the importance of using quality data to ascertain what type of issues were really connected to their brand, organizational culture, stakeholders, and day-to-day operations. Some CCOs discussed how they utilize market research via secondary research to focus on finding quality issues that can drive success, while others discussed utilizing internal stakeholders in communities via primary research to find out where their organization can make differences. One CCO said, “We use our social listening lab to discover issues that our audiences are talking about. We see if it’s in our arena… Rather than focusing on every issue that makes front page news, we want to focus on quality issues that have the potential to impact us and our audience.” When the researcher asked the same CCO about the potential mutual benefit, the CCO, said, “Yeah, we want the mutual benefit because when we just pick random issues, you get something not related to your business and what’s happening in the world… it can drive bad behavior.” Based on this piece of knowledge, public relations practitioners must encourage organizations to engage in social listening and market research in order to effectively select issues that can deliver measurable impact.

2. Create a workplace of giving and encourage leadership to lead with bold transparency.

When considering the stakeholders in their organizations, overwhelmingly the interviewed CCOs discussed the importance of having employee support from each level within the organization. One CCO specifically called on leadership to advocate for their causes at every level because of their notoriety and influence within the organization, saying, "Our employees trust and rely on us [leadership] to make the most thoughtful route to accomplish change. They can trust us to make those decisions and it goes a long way." Another CCO said, "We [leadership] walk the walk and show that we care beyond profit, we care more about the social well-being of our communities and its people." While employees were seen as change advocates, the CCOs also believed that mandatory volunteer hours were not necessarily the reason why their internal support was so strong. Six of the 11 CCOs said that their company does not require the mandatory volunteer hours that some companies require. In relieving employees of that requirement, one CCO said, "Without forcing our employees to volunteer, we [leadership] model the change that we have the ability to make. We go out in a grassroots effort and let the employees take lead on what's important. This empowers them as ambassadors of change." Considering this emphasis on employee and leadership engagement, public relations practitioners should be introspective when evaluating their social issues practices to consider from not only the external stakeholders (i.e., customers), but also consider utilizing employees and putting them as social issues leads in the communities where they already hold an integral seat.

3. Show up for your stakeholders and their communities.

Delivering quality information and supporting local causes was another integral issue that CCOs discussed as a best practice. Four of the CCOs discussed specifically focusing on some causes that were important to communities where employees live. A

CCO said, “We want to impact where our stakeholders live. We want to achieve happiness in the communities.” Focusing on issues at a local level also seemed to be more achievable when considering goals, and it was not as overwhelming as “trying to enact large scale change at once.”

CCOs unanimously agreed that all organizations have the responsibility to be good stewards in the communities in which they operate, more importantly for the stakeholders that they support. One CCO gave an example that during COVID-19, employees took it upon themselves to utilize the resources available to give food to communities. They explained, “Employees saw some people were struggling during COVID, and they communicated among their neighbors and took on the role of being a citizen philanthropist to give back.” In order to help this particular cause, the organization promised bulks amounts of food to be delivered to specific food banks, and the employees would be the liaison for delivering and communicating the need. This example further emphasizes the mutual benefit that is part of the social issues management process.

4. Communicate with passion and integrity.

When CCOs were giving best practices pieces of advice, they often mentioned that one of the most essential parts of the social issues management process was ensuring that there was an alignment between organizational values and the issues that they advocated for. If there was no alignment, CCOs suggested that many social issues that the organization supports could be seen as “fluff” or “superficial”. One CCO said, “If there is no alignment, there is no passion, and it seems just like more work. We want to hit the sweet spot where the issues that we support make sense to our brand, our customers, and anyone who supports us.”

5.Utilize your “corporate soul”- use knowledge and organization history to learn.

CCOs spoke passionately about their “corporate culture” or their “corporate soul”. When asked to expand upon what they defined as the “corporate soul”, one CCO said, “Our corporate soul is our history and where we’ve been and what we’ve learned.” They emphasized the importance of learning and utilizing experience to guide an organization’s social issues management. It was common for CCOs to refer to their organization in human terms referring to the issues management as part of the heart of the organization, stemming from the mission statement.

Three of the CCOs candidly (and without being asked) admitted to not always having the best reputation for handling their social issues or even choosing not to focus on it at all, despite their current status as a leader in the industry. One CCO notably said, “The reality is there’s never a bad moment to start doing the right thing. We need companies to learn this. Don’t delegate the work to other companies or your marketing agency… If you do not know what you want to do, talk to your staff, get people together, and create the space for this discussion around values.” Using employees as a way to instigate what causes or issues to support is a way that these organizations are integrating their corporate soul with the issues that they support.

4.1.9 Summary of Results and Post Hoc Finding

Based on the data collected in this study, there is a clear connection to Rokeach’s values system within social issues management. Many of the instrumental values were seen as launching points in order to achieve the desired terminal, end-state values. The instrumental values helped show how public relations practitioners are labeling their social issues management, while the terminal values were reflective of why they choose to engage with social issues management. Through this study, a working definition of social issues management was proposed.

The definition accounts for two of the most common terms, corporate social responsibility (the process of taking responsibility for an issue), and corporate social advocacy (the process of taking actions to rectify or be an advocate for the issue), as the data showed they are part of cyclical process, and one cannot (and should not) be discussed without the other.

4.1.9.1 Post Hoc Finding

Based on this definition, social issues management aligns very closely with the Authentically Advocating Model discussed previously (Arthur Page Society, 2018). The corporate character is discussed in the differences between CSR and CSA and is overall seen as the alignment of social issues with corporate values in both the organization's mission statement, as well as the organization's vision (Schmeltz, 2014). Its position in the middle of the Page model is ideal because the belief, action, and advocacy at scale must all be connected to those values. The belief is the acknowledgement of the issue at hand, and the action is acts of doing something to enact change. Confidence is achieved through the support and involvement of both internal and external stakeholders. Finally, advocacy at scale occurs when the belief, action, and confidence lead to research-informed strategies being executed to achieve progress. The way to conform this model more fully to the proposed definition, and the findings from the interviews, would be to add a step, responsibility, between belief and action. Adding responsibility would connect the organization more closely to the belief and action by stipulating the acknowledgement of the issue and the organization’s recognition of its role in managing it. Recognizing that a social issue is part of an organization’s mission, vision, or culture, is a way for them to communicate more strategically-driven messaging about their goals and social issues. This can be seen as a tactic to increase rapport and reputational good within the organization.

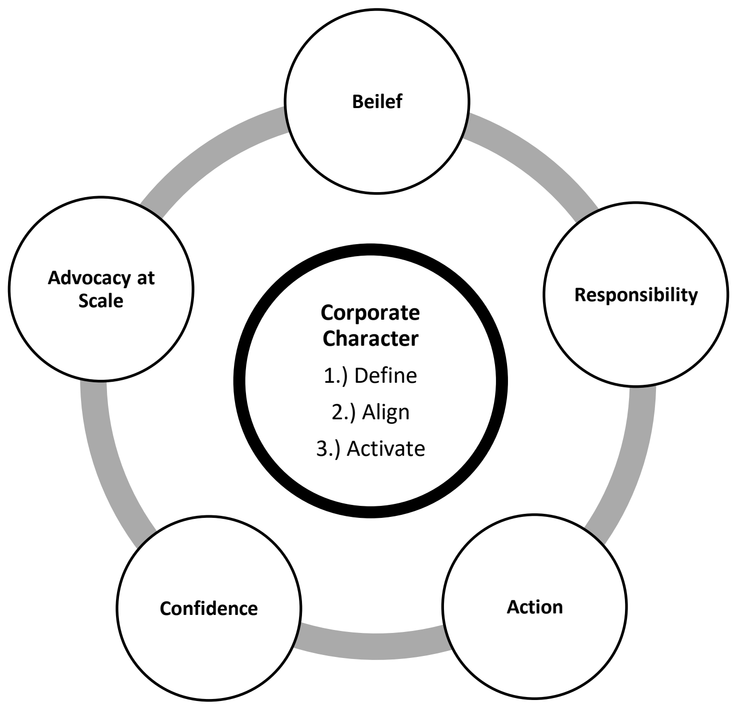

Figure 4.1 Proposed Updated Authentically Advocating Model

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND STUDY LIMITATIONS

Discussing social issues management is more essential than ever, and is more vital to the public relations and communication profession. As stakeholders continue to gain access to an abundance of highly detailed and sometime polarizing information, it's more important than ever that organizations and PR practitioners consider value matching and social issues management to rise above the noise (Schmeltz, 2014). Based on the interviews with CCOs, it is clear that social issues management has secured a permanent role within the public relations function within an organization. An organization has the opportunity to utilize values inherent to their mission statement and vision to advocate and support issues that may historically have been ignored. In doing so, the organization is able to benefit, both tangibly and intangibly, and the stakeholder is also able to benefit, by being a beneficiary of the terminal, end-state result of the issue. This research study confirms that social issues management is transitioning from being simply a philanthropic, charity program to something larger and more meaningful that is meant to generate social change, while gaining trust, strengthening reputation, and ultimately creating value for all stakeholders.

This study also emphasized the practitioner-derived differences that exist between scholars when discussing social issues management (i.e., in the literature review) and for practitioners when discussing corporate social responsibility and corporate social advocacy (i.e., in the collected data). Organizations do not universally align their social issues management in the same manner, and they also do not label the act of supporting issues as the same process. However, in the interviews there was clear consensus that corporate social responsibility and corporate social advocacy should be a part of social issues management, and this should become part of the norm when discussing the practice. However, even with the proposed definition of social issues management, it should be noted, some organizations will continue to use a company-derived version of the term (i.e., citizenship, social altruism, etc.). This in turn might continue to make practitioner-based research challenging for social issues management to be accurately identified and labeled. This further emphasizes the importance of intertwining and continual efforts to marry academic research with practice.

This research study also showcased a real opportunity for a social issues management model to be presented, tested, and studied within the context of public relations. A post-hoc finding of this study indicated that a commonly utilized and accepted model, the Authentically Advocating model (Arthur Page, 2018), is perhaps the most realistic overview of the social issues management process. In the post-hoc finding, it is proposed to add the step of the organization accepting responsibility for a social issue to the process to fully integrate the model with study and practice. This finding is also significant because of the model's connection to the importance of stakeholders in the decision-making process to engage with social issues. Stakeholder importance in this process is inherently integral in establishing its role in public relations, as can be seen through the STOP Theory and the Stakeholder Theory—both prominent theories in public relations research.

A surprising finding of this study was the emphasis interviewees placed on the integration of the mission statement, vision of the organization, founders of these organizations, and the employees. Most of the CCOs interviewed referenced the organization with human features (i.e., having a heart, soul, purpose, etc.), which is not necessarily a novel idea in the history of academic research about organizational culture. However, what did surprise the researcher was the fact that most of the CCOs homogenized how successful their organizations were at social issues management with these human-like characteristics and the development of them. Examples of this include investing in time and energy to be an example for employees or using the founder's original mission as a guiding principle in designing social issues engagement. The principle of these human characteristics in organizations should be further explored, especially with the context of social issues management.

One of the most important contributions of this dissertation is the development of a definition of social issues management. The definition developed in this research study was derived based on current academic research regarding social issues management and its terms, along with the data analyzed in this study. Conceptualizing social issues management is an integral step in furthering the research into the ever-developing paradigm, strengthening the field of study, and expanding the inquiry into other fields.

In summary, this study established the role of social issues management in public relations and confirmed the difference that exists between terms associated with social issues management. Because of this study, the researcher was able to develop a working definition of social issues management, encompassing the values exhibited in the interviews with CCOs and current terms being utilized in academic research and practice. A post-hoc development of a social issues management model for academic research was also suggested. This model, modified from one developed by practitioners, for practitioners, could offer an interesting link to academia. Finally, because of the emphasis of organizational humanism displayed in the interviews and their connection to the success of social issues management, this dissertation has created more opportunities for examining the strategic decision making behind successful (and unsuccessful) social issues management.

5.1.1 Limitations

The data collected through this dissertation were collected through a global pandemic and through multiple social issues crises. Because of this, social issues management was already primed as an important part of organization communication. While this could be seen as a benefit, it is also a limitation because in the old "normal" the data could have had different responses. Closely related to this limitation, it was difficult to recruit CCOs for interviews during the two-year data collection period. Some companies did not want to participate in student research, while others simply didn't have the bandwidth to participate. If data had been collected prior to or after the pandemic, it might have been easier to gain access and time with the CCOs. Another limitation closely connected to the problem of access to participants was the researcher was unable to complete a complete reflexive check. The researcher did email the finalized version of the results to each participant but because of resources and time constraints was unable to wait on feedback. For example, the researcher emailed the results and only six of the 11 participants emailed back a response. However, of those six, all agreed that the results portrayed an accurate representation of what they believe was discussed during their particular interview. They all also agreed to the importance of continuing this type of academic research to practical PR practice.

Another limitation of this study is only interviewing the companies being publicly recognized as social issues leaders. Even though this was a purposeful choice, other organizations might have presented different variations of values when discussing social issues management (or lack of values). This same limitation should be noted with the person being interviewed. However, based on research connected to public relations and social issues management, the CCO was identified as the integral employee for managerial decision making with social issues, and so as they often do, acting as spokespersons of their organization, they presented a very aligned overview of the organization's social issues engagement. Employees with other, more broad perspectives could have provided a different perspective to the study.

Because the data collected in this study was analyzed utilizing Rokeach's Values Identification, the interpretation of the data and the identification of the values in the interviews is based on the researcher's personal interpretation of the data. The researcher has experience with both public relations and academic research, so this lends to the credibility of the value matching that occurred, but it also opens up the limitation that it is limited to only one perspective and one interpretation. Other researchers with different backgrounds and experiences could have identified other values (or the absence of values).

Because this research study is qualitative, the data is quite rich, making the dissertation longer and more dense than other quantitative studies on CSR and advocacy (Aust, 2004; Ellmers et al., 2011). However, because of the richness of the data, the researcher was able to provide best practices advice for practitioners with the hope of advancing the field of social issues management. It is also based on the richness of the data that the researcher was able to utilize value analysis and the researcher's experience with public relations to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 6. FUTURE RESEARCH, IMPLICATIONS FOR PR INDUSTRY, AND PRACTICE AND CONCLUSION

Because of the inductive and applied nature of this research, the researcher believes that the qualitative research examined is most useful for communication and public relations practitioners who make decisions to engage with social issue, so more qualitative research regarding social issues management is warranted. However, public relations scholars should also continue to engage in quantitative research in social issue management research because of the power of the data collected. Specifically, it is important that scholars give appropriate attention to qualitative analysis that examines human symbolic behavior, similar to this study. Qualitative research is an asset to PR scholars and practitioners because of its focus on symbolic behaviors, and these behaviors and narratives are a major focus of the public relations tradition. This type of research should be continued to explore the rationale and reasoning behind strategic decision making.

Another type of research that should be continually utilized by PR scholars are case studies that incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods. Case studies examine multiple information sources as evidence, from documents to social media communication, to make inferences about human communication. Case studies on social issues management should be routinely updated to integrate new and changing ways to communicate among organizations and to audiences. This will likely continue to be important in the changing environment in which PR now operates. Research specifically focused on the paradigm of social issues management and its role in public relations will be beneficial in not only understanding the case studies, but also adding to the best practices of how organizations engage in value advocacy campaigns. Analyzing how and why organizations engage in value advocacy campaigns can help translate to practitioners their importance and value to the larger society. It's important that the best practices research is continually updated to be more focused on practical information and tips that give back to the PR industry.

In general, future studies focusing on social issues management need to be conducted in a "post-2020" world. Because of the opportunities and challenges that the world faced with a global pandemic, it's evident that public relations and social issues management evolved quickly to fill gaps and to serve a greater function. More research is also needed examining practitioner-based views of academic public relations literature. From the data collected in this study, it appears that practitioner views and analysis in academic research could lend public relations scholars a more realistic and intrinsic examination of what's actually happening versus what is being studied. In this way, qualitative studies with focus groups at PR conferences and trainings or interviews with specific PR practitioners (similar to this one) should be utilized. Qualitative research with practitioners can allow for inductive study of PR, which could produce more meaningful research long-term. Especially over the last three years, the practice of PR has matured from beyond what academic research portrays, so it's important for both current and future PR practitioners that what is taught and examined is close to practice.

Research should also be conducted that focuses on testing the Authentically Advocating model of social issues management. While originally presented to practitioners, in a mainly-practitioner oriented organization (i.e., Arthur Page Society), this model might be applicable to furthering the existing research on social issues management and values advocacy. In doing so, it might be helpful for scholars to have a way of specifically identifying and labeling decision-making and PR strategic thinking that is taking place in exemplar cases of social issues management. This examination could add to the best practices research in the industry.

For PR practitioners, this study reiterated the need of public relations and the importance of social issues management in the field. PR practitioners should utilize this study for justification of social issues management activities, while emphasizing to management how PR can contribute to mutually beneficial strategies. This study also provides practitioners a cyclical means of designing their PR/social issues management communication through the Authentically Advocating model. For example, companies wanting to achieve policy change via social issues management can align their organization with the change, and utilize public relations through communicating support through media, digital, and social channels. This leverages the opportunity to draw attention to social issues to trigger potential policy change, while also increasing brand support and morale. In turn, this builds a network of advocates in the firm's stakeholders. Utilizing social issues management in a public relations function allows for a multi-faceted, strategic approach.

6.1.1 Conclusion

2022 marks the 52-year anniversary since Milton Friedman, a famous economist, asked, "What is the role of business in society?" Friedman believed that there was quite simply one social responsibility of business in society and that was to use its resources and engage in events to increase its profits (Friedman, 1970). For years since, organization, marketing, and public relations research have presented various findings that reinforce this same view. The corporate governance and management rationale of many companies have been influenced by this “responsibility to profit” mode of thinking. Fortunately, for stakeholders and the organization, the meaning of profit has been redefined. It’s not necessarily how one organization can profit monetarily, but has expanded to encompass the mutual benefit of all parties involved. This research study focused on inductively examining how organizations go beyond business profits by engaging in social issues management and really re-examining the same question Friedman asked a half a century ago: “What is the role of business in society?” This researcher would suggest that based on the literature reviewed, the data collected and analyzed, and the researcher’s experience as a PR scholar and practitioner, that the role of business is to create a relationship of credibility and trust with stakeholders and to realize that upholding social cohesion is essential to the mutual benefit that is advantageous to all stakeholders.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: COVER LETTER FOR INTERVIEW

Consent to Participate in a Research Study: Public Relations Role in Social Issues Engagement

Why are you being asked to participate in this research study?

You are being invited to take part in a research study investigating the role that the Public Relations profession has with social issues engagement. You are being included in the study because you are a PR practitioner at a public organization or have extensive knowledge of the profession. If you choose to take part in the study, you will be one of approximately 10 individuals interviewed.

Who is doing the study?

I, Gabrielle Dudgeon, am a graduate student at the University of Kentucky in the College of Communication and Information. The research project is part of research for my dissertation in order to graduate with a PhD. The research project is being guided by my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Beth Barnes, and her email address is bbarnes@uky.edu.

What is the purpose of the study?

My dissertation explores the concept of social issues engagement and advocacy within organizations with higher reputations and trust in the public. The objectives of this research study are (1) Identify a commonly utilized term and definition for social issues engagement; (2) Determine the processes of social issues engagement; (3) Develop a set of current best practices of social issues engagement in the industry; and (4) Determine if processes of advocacy in organizations are reflective of issues management research models.

What will you be asked to do?

Your involvement in this study will consist of a telephone or video-conferencing interview, which will include 15-25 open-ended questions and will last approximately 30-45 minutes. The interview will be recorded and transcribed to aid in the accuracy of the study. In addition to the initial interview, I may wish to contact you with follow-up questions and/or concerns that might arise as the project progresses. Again, your involvement in such follow-up efforts is voluntary, and you choose whether you wish to respond or opt-out of future communication.

What are the possible risks and discomforts?

All interview questions are related to the social advocacy and public relations and either your experience in the industry or at your job. While the material covered in the interview is not likely to pose any risks, in order to best protect your privacy, we ask that you do not disclose any information that could be used to identify you or your organization or that could damage your or your company's reputation.

Do you have to take part in the study?

All involvement is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable or that you prefer not to answer. Furthermore, you can choose to end the interview at any time and for any reason. If you decide to end the interview, any data that has been collected will be immediately deleted and destroyed.

What will it cost you to participate?

There are no financial costs associated with participating in the study. Only 30-45 minutes of your time is required to participate.

Will you receive any rewards for taking part in this study?

There is no tangible reward offered in regard to participating in this study. However, your time and effort in contributing to the public relations and social issues engagement literature will be greatly appreciated.

Who will see the information that you give?

In order to provide as much privacy as possible, the interviews will be conducted over secured networks and in private rooms. After interviews are reviewed, they will be transcribed, and identifiers associated with participants will be kept confidential. All identifying information will be removed from transcripts and the recordings will be destroyed.

We will make every effort to safeguard your data, but as with anything online, we cannot guarantee the security of data obtained via the Internet. Third-party applications used in this study may have Terms of Service and Privacy policies outside of the control of the University of Kentucky.

We will keep confidential all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court, or tell authorities if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else. Also, we may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky.

What else do you need to know?

Please note your information and responses collected for this study will NOT be used or shared for future research studies, even if we remove the identifiable information like your name or organization.

What if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints?

Before deciding whether to participate in this research study, please ask any questions and/or share any concerns that come to mind now. Later, if you have any questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you may contact me at gabrielle.dudgeon@uky.edu. You may also contact the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky (at 859.257.9428 or toll-free at 1.866.400.9428) with questions about your rights as a volunteer in this study. You may keep a copy of this consent form for future reference.

After reading the cover letter, by continuing with the interview, you are agreeing to participate in the interview and the study described above.

APPENDIX 2: INITIAL EMAIL TO POTENTIAL INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT

Hello, (name of participant),

My name is Gabrielle Dudgeon, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Kentucky, pursuing a PhD in Strategic Communication. I am conducting research for my dissertation on public relations and the role of social issues engagement in organizations. I am hoping because of your expertise and experience in the industry that we could have a conversation to explore the role that social issues engagement has inside organizations. Because your organization is publicly ranked on the Harris Poll with a Reputation Quotient score above 75, I am interested in the best practices of how you and your organization navigate social issues and engaging your publics with them. While I do have some questions about the process of social issues engagement, I want this to be a conversation on your particular experience and expertise with the way organizations engage with social issues. The goal of this research is to provide best practices and practical guidance for other public relations practitioners and help improve public relations scholars' research on the subject.

I only ask for around 30-45 minutes of your time, through video conferencing or telephone, at your convenience. If you agree to participate, please let me know what time is most convenient for you and what method (i.e., telephone, Skype, or Zoom) works best for you.

Mr. Bolton has reached out to you solely on my behalf. He is not involved in the research, and all replies should be directed to me at my email address. To reply to the email, or if you have any concerns or questions, you can contact me at gabrielle.dudgeon@uky.edu or by phone at (859) 230-3406.

Again, I appreciate your time and response, and I look forward to talking with you more.

Very Respectively,

Gabrielle Dudgeon

APPENDIX 3: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participants: Chief Communication Officers, Chief Marketing Officers of Public Organizations

Method: Zoom; Skype; Telephone Interviews

Duration: 30-45 Minutes

Initial Email to Participants: Email request that confirms name, position, how long they've worked in their current position and how long they've worked for organization. This will generate descriptive data for the participants.

- What is your name and position within the organization?
- How long have you worked in your current position?
- How long have you worked for the organization?

Initial Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews**

What type of corporate responsibility campaigns does your organization engage in?

How do you engage your stakeholders in a corporate campaign?

How do you determine what issues your organization represent or takes a public stance on ? (i.e. types of issue)

In general, why do you think organizations are engaging in social issues? How does this benefit them?

What are the costs of engaging in social issues?

What are the benefits of engaging in social issues?

Regarding your organization's issues (i.e., those you are advocating for), how do the processes or strategies differ for each one? (i.e., social media, traditional media, online engagement, etc.)

In your perspective, how do you believe engaging in corporate social responsibility builds relationships?

Think of an example of social issue engagement that has worked well for your organization. What were the steps for engaging the audience?

Would you be willing to send me materials related to that example?

What do you think the difference is between advocacy and responsibility? How does the CMO define difference of CSR or advocacy?

How does your organization define (i.e., and label) the external acts that you (i.e., organization) advocate for?

What's the difference between advocacy and responsibility? How does the CMO define difference of CSR or advocacy?

***These questions are structured to focus more on specific actions of the organization at first,*

and then be more mindful of the broader area of the public relations field.

APPENDIX 4: ORGANIZATIONS TO CONTACT FOR INTERVIEWS

Name of Organization	Placement on RepTrak (2020)	Placement on Harris Poll (2020)
Walt Disney	5	5
Microsoft	3	9
The Kraft Heinz Company	47	14
LG	40	15
Boeing	56	19
Unilever	87	25
Adidas	17	27
Dell	44	29
Netflix	20	24
Nintendo	31	30
Johnson & Johnson	86	33
Ikea	10	26
Nike	77	35
Honda Corporation	37	36
Toyota	15	37

HP	30	39
Google	4	41
General Electric	89	43
American Express	96	47
IBM	35	49
Ford	95	58
Starbucks Coffee Company	100	59

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Wood, D. J., & Logsdon, J. M. (2019). Social issues in management as a distinct field: Corporate social responsibility and performance. *Business & Society*, *58*(7), 1334-1357. https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650316680041

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VITA

Gabrielle L. Dudgeon

Ph.D. Candidate
College of Communication and Information
University of Kentucky

Public Affairs Specialist
United States Attorney's Office
U.S. Department of Justice

Education

M.A. Communication
Graduate Certificate: Risk Sciences
University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY
Awarded: May 2015
GPA: 3.8/4.0
Research Area: Crisis Communication
Advisor: Dr. Shari Veil
Committee Members: Drs. Phillip Hutchison and Beth Barnes

B.A. Primary Major: Integrated Strategic Communication
Path: Public Relations
Secondary Major: Political Science
Emphasis: American Government
Awarded: May 2013
GPA: 3.9/4.0

Academic Appointments

University of Kentucky, College of Communication and Information, Lexington, KY
2016 – 2019 Graduate Teaching Assistant, Integrated Strategic Communication

Eastern Kentucky University, College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences, Richmond, KY
2015 – 2016 Adjunct Professor, Public Relations

University of Kentucky, College of Communication and Information, Lexington, KY
2013 – 2015 Graduate Teaching Assistant, Integrated Strategic Communication

Scholarship

Dudgeon, G. L., & Lukacena, K. M. (under contract). Do actions speak louder than words?: A comparative case study of post-crisis responses to sexual misconduct allegations. In S. Chen, C. Chen & N. Allaire (Eds.), *Building Sexual Misconduct Cases Against Powerful Men.* Minneapolis, MN: Lexington Books.

Dudgeon, G. L. (in review) Visualizing renewal: The utilization of appreciative inquiry in the discourse of renewal. *Submitted to Management Communication Quarterly.*

Dudgeon, G. L., (resubmitted with edits). Examining vicarious learning in strategic public relations. *Submitted to Journal of Communication Management.*

Dudgeon, G. L. (in review). Online job boards' influence on newcomer socialization. To be submitted to *Journal of Vocational Behavior.*

Dudgeon, G. L. (in progress, analyzing data). Bad Luck of Bad Timing?: The Role of Compounding Crises on Organizational Legitimacy and Reputation. To be submitted to Journal of Crisis Communication.

Real, K., & Dudgeon, G. L. (in progress; collecting data via interviews). Positive inquiry: Problem solving for organizations. To be submitted to the Journal of Appreciative Inquiry.

Veil, S. R., & Dudgeon, G. L. (under contract). The crisis case study as applied communication research. In H. D. O'Hair & M. J. O'Hair (Eds.), *Handbook of Applied Communication Research.* New York: Wiley Publishing.

Conference Presentations

Dudgeon, G. L., & Lukacena, K. M. (2019, April). Waking Up to Reality: A Comparative Case Study of News Organizations' Responses to Sexual Harassment. To be presented at the Southern States Communication Association Conference in Montgomery, Alabama.

Dudgeon, G. L., (2019, April). Us vs. Them: Narrative Analysis of Competitive Responses in Spillover Crises. To be presented at the Southern States Communication Association Conference in Montgomery, Alabama.

Dudgeon, G. L., & L (2019, April). Us vs. Them: Narrative Analysis of Competitive Responses in Spillover Crises. To be presented at the Southern States Communication Association Conference in Montgomery, Alabama.

Dudgeon, G. L., (2018, January). Leveraging Social Media to Enhance Organization Visibility. Presented at the Graduate Student Future Leaders Conference in Lexington, Kentucky.

Dudgeon, G. L., (2018, November). Visualizing Renewal: The Utilization of Appreciative Inquiry in the Discourse of Renewal. Presented at the National Communication Association Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Dudgeon, G. L., (2018, November). *Examining Vicarious Learning in Strategic Public Relations*. Presented at the National Communication Association Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Dudgeon, G. L., (2018, March). *Innovation as crisis response: The victim of change or the architect of innovation*. Presented at the 2018 International Crisis and Risk Communication Conference, Orlando, Florida.

Dudgeon, G. L., (2018, March). *The old GM vs. the new GM: Bankruptcy as crisis mitigation.* Presented at the 2018 International Crisis and Risk Communication Conference, Orlando, Florida.

Weickel, R., Real, K., & Dudgeon, G. (2018, Nov). Understanding Positive Organizational Change: A Pilot Study. Presented at the 2nd Conference on Global Positive Change, Amsterdam, NL.

Teaching Experience

Student Evaluations of Teaching

University of Kentucky (Fall 2018 – Spring 2019)

Quality of Instruction: 4.6/5.0	Course Quality: 4.5/5.0
College Average: 4.4/5.0	College Average: 4.3/5.0

University of Kentucky (Fall 2017 – Spring 2018)

Quality of Instruction: 4.6/5.0	Course Quality: 4.4/5.0
College Average: 4.4/5.0	College Average: 4.3/5.0

University of Kentucky (Fall 2016 – Summer 2017)

Quality of Instruction: 4.6/5.0	Course Quality: 4.4/5.0
College Average: 4.4/5.0	College Average: 4.3/5.0

Eastern Kentucky University (Fall 2015 – Spring 2016)

Quality of Instruction: 4.4/5.0	Course Quality: 4.3.5.0
College Average: 4.3/5.0	College Average: 4.2/5.0

Professional Experience

Public Affairs Specialist **August 2019- Present**
United States Attorney's Office- EDKY, Department of Justice, Lexington, Kentucky
*****Obtained Security Clearance (August 2020)***

Marketing and Public Relations Intern **August 2018- August 2019**
The Graduate School, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky

Public Information Officer II **Aug. 2015 - August 2016**
Commonwealth of Kentucky: Kentucky Deferred Compensation, Frankfort, Kentucky

Public Relations Intern (2013 PR Student of The Year) **June 2013 - August 2013**
Guthrie/Mayes Public Relations, Louisville, Kentucky

Vice President of Promotions **April 2012 - May 2013**
Student Activities Board, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky

Keeneland Ambassador **April 2011-April 2013**
Keeneland, Lexington, Kentucky

Public Relations Intern and Social Media Intern **Summer 2011 - Summer 2012**
University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky

Public Relations Intern **August 2011 - December 2011**
Kentucky Bride, Lexington, Kentucky

Awards and Honors

2018	University of Kentucky Graduate Teaching Award
2018	Teachers Who Made A Difference Award
2013	National Advertising Student Competition Team (University of Kentucky)
2013	University of Kentucky *Summa Cum Laude* graduate
2013	Guthrie Mayes Public Relations - Public Relations Student of the Year
2013	Maurice A. Clay Development and Leadership Award
2011	James. C. Bowling Scholarship Recipient
2011-2012	Theodore E. Schulte Memorial Scholarship Recipient
2011-2013	JAT General Excellence Scholarship Recipient
2008-2013	University of Kentucky Dean's List (7 out of 8 semesters of undergraduate career)
2008	Governors Scholar (GSP)