

2011

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Deirdre Barrett-England

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Recommended Citation

Barrett-England, Deirdre, "The Social Revoution will be LIVE and Digitized" (2011). *Communications Management*. Paper 1.
<http://surface.syr.edu/cm/1>

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The Social Revolution will be LIVE and Digitized:

**How Social Media Impacts
Corporate Social Responsibility Programs**

The Coca-Cola Company

PRL 605-ISDP
Organizational Public Relations
Syracuse University
Brenda J. Wrigley, Ph.D., APR
September 16, 2011

Deirdre Barrett England
1851 Lake Cove Drive
Atlanta, Georgia 30331
debarret@syr.edu
404-630-2893

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Background

When a revolution starts, what do you do? Embrace it? Run from it? Engage in it? Try to stop it? Compliment it?

Billions of views, millions of followers, thousands of friends, likes and tweets; the explosive growth of Social Media has fueled a revolution. Not surprisingly, half of internet users are members of a social network (Wright & Hinson, 2009).

With over ten years of experience with the earliest form of Social Media, blogs, (Wright et al., 2009); Public Relations Scholars and Practitioners can make a significant contribution to analyzing, planning and influencing current Social Media.

Kent (2010) found that the growth of the digital medium has huge implications for Communications professionals. If Social Media exponentially impacts Corporate Social Responsibility, the implications for Public Relations Professionals, could be transformative.

Social Media is also a tool to engage publics in real world issues like social responsibility (Christians, 1990). Mainwaring (2011) believes “The evolution of social media into a robust mechanism for social transformation is already visible.” Social Media will soon become an influential tool for greater Corporate Social Responsibility (Mainwaring, 2011b, para.3).

Corporate Social Responsibility does present good “corporate citizenship” and results in broad support for the community (Strugatch, 2011, p.44). Mainwaring (2011a) states that current Corporate Social Responsibility efforts, although important, are inefficient.

Together, Social Media and Corporate Social Responsibility provide a complimentary and efficient communication platform. With a sense of community at the core, inherently personal and interactive, Social media is an underutilized tool by Public Relations Practitioners.

Corporate Communicators should understand the nature of the interaction, design measurements of effectiveness and improve the strategy (Regan, 2007).

As a heavy user of Facebook, Twitter, Linked In and YouTube, an advocate for social change, the author is a Student Scholar and

Social Revolutionist. In this case study, the author will examine Coca-Cola's strategic communication choice of Social Media for their Corporate Social Responsibility Program. The author will also examine the impact of Social Media on Corporate Social Responsibility Program effectiveness.

Research Problem

There is little known information about *how* the convergence of Social Media and Corporate Social Responsibility will *best serve* corporate strategy. With limited Public Relations literature available, the author embraces the scholarly study of the synergy between Social Media and Corporate Social Responsibility, as well as the measurement of their complimentary effectiveness.

Social Media Technology has both narrowed and expanded our world, at the same time. Public Relations Practitioners recognize the need to understand the nature of Social Media interactions so that they can improve corporate strategy (Regan, 2007).

With increasing emphasis on social change and corporate relevancy, Social Media interactions may influence Corporate Social Responsibility. Mainwaring wrote that these trends will increasingly

intersect, leading us toward “large-scale global transformation” (Mainwaring, 2011b, para.2).

With enthusiasm, Corporate Communications Managers report that their publics are interacting and engaging through social media technology; whether it is American Express connecting with Four Square’s 10 million users (Carr, 2011); or Ford, with their 2011 Explorer reveal on Facebook (Steve Rubel Blog, 2011); or the NBA, with 2.5 billion video views and 117 million followers on Twitter and Facebook (Feifer, 2011). These empowered publics have become a strong voice with corporations and have “new power to influence business strategy and social responsibility” (Mainwaring, 2011, p.3).

This “new power” (Mainwaring, 2011, p.3) is an opportunity for Public Relations Scholars and Practitioners to provide thought leadership and measurement guidance on the strategic convergence of Social Media and Social Corporate Responsibility. Frandsen and Johansen (2010) wrote that Public Relations scholars and practitioners may choose to adopt a fresh, new extroverted attitude while embracing strategy, management and leadership. (Frandsen et al., 2010)

Research Questions

This case study will examine why The Coca-Cola Company integrates Social Media within their Corporate Social Responsibility Programs and how they measure the effectiveness of these programs.

Two research questions were designed to guide data collection and analysis:

RQ1: Why does a company use Social Media in their Corporate Social Responsibility Program strategy?

RQ2: How does a company measure the impact of Social Media on Corporate Social Responsibility Program effectiveness?

Both questions will help us to understand why The Coca-Cola Company uses Social Media in their Corporate Social Responsibility Program execution and how the company measures program effectiveness.

To best serve overall corporate strategy, it is critical to understand management thinking and planning with Social Media and Corporate Social Responsibility decisions. This study will document how each stakeholder (Communications Manager, Agency, and Senior Leader) planned for the Social Media decisions, developed engagement parameters and set expectations for the effectiveness of the Corporate

Social Responsibility programs. With this approach, the author will be able to explain the correlation between the decision to use Social Media and the ability to measure effectiveness. The study will also explore several theories and models and relate them to the approach.

Definition of Concepts

There are several terms used in this study that require definition for the purposes of this study. The author will provide common interpretation for the following terms: “social media”, “Corporate Social Responsibility”, “engagement”, “strategy”, “integration” and “effectiveness”.

Social Media/Social Network A two-way communication channel, that allows for action and feedback. Although, not new, and a well established communications technology (Kent, 2010). Continuing to innovate and evolve, it includes social networks, video sharing, photo sharing, blogs, text, RSS podcasts, professional networks, and Wikis (Wright et al.,2009). Major Social Media companies include Facebook, Twitter, Google, Wikipedia, You Tube, Flickr, and Reddit (Rucker, 2011). New entrants to the social media network include: Google Plus; group buyers, Groupon and Living Social; social gamers,

Empire Avenue; Q&A sites, Facebook Questions, Linked In Answers, Quora and Focus; and micro bloggers, Posterous and Tumblr. (Steve Rubel Blog, 2011)

Corporate Social Responsibility /CSR Many initiatives that range from strategic philanthropy to risk management to communication (Health and Lan Ni, 2010). As the discipline evolves, CSR stakeholders play a key role because the corporations answer to them (Podnar, 2008). Strugatch (2011) found that, advocates of CSR contend that it produces many benefits to the community including, “environmentally friendlier processes, improved product quality, fuller financial disclosures; community support; and more opportunities for women and ethnic minorities among other benefits.” (Strugatch, 2011, p.44).

Engagement Defined by Hallahan (2010) as “Moving audiences along a continuum from mere awareness to action usually requires audiences to exert increasingly high levels of effort or message processing involvement—paying attention to a message, learning the message, retaining the message, seeking information, sharing

information with others, and making judgments” (Hallahan, 2010, p,633)

Strategy Defined by Frandsen et al. (2010) as the “directed and planned activities within the organization as a whole, or within specific areas or at specific levels of the organization, to reach a specific goal or specific objectives.” (Frandsen et al., 2010, p.298)

Integration A term first outlined by the Public Relations profession nearly a century ago, calling for a correlated use of media that creates synergy and delivers the stated goal (Hallahan, 2010).

Effectiveness Involves the use of the correct media vehicles and channels, using the right resources and achieving the stated objectives (Hallahan, 2010).

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