Exploring the Effectiveness of Social and Digital Media Communications on Organization-Public Relationship Building with Employees

Iris Cumberbatch
Antioch University - PhD Program in Leadership and Change

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Exploring the Effectiveness of Social and Digital Media Communications

on Organization–Public Relationship Building with Employees

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Ph.D. in Leadership and Change Program of Antioch University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

October 2019
This dissertation is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in Leadership and Change, Graduate School of Leadership and Change, Antioch University.

Dissertation Committee

- Mitchell Kusy, PhD, Chair
- Carol Baron, PhD, Committee Member
- Mike Porter, EdD, Committee Member
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The Prophet Jeremiah wrote, “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future.” I first want to thank God for blessing me with a sound mind and a thirst for knowledge. I would like to acknowledge the love and support of so many who walked the long journey to this dissertation with me. First and foremost, I am thankful for my parents, who were my first and best teachers: my mother, Eula Johnson, who was my greatest lifelong cheerleader and the best mother I could have hoped for, and my father, Fitzgerald Cumberbatch, who instilled in me the unwavering belief that I could accomplish anything I set my mind to. I acknowledge and honor the sacrifices and dreams of all my ancestors on whose shoulders I stand, especially my great-grandfather, Hughes Johnson, who, though the son of slaves, passed down a love of learning that I am thankful for, and my great-grandmother, Fannie Johnson, who nurtured me in every way. I am thankful to my sister, Carol Cumberbatch, for always believing in me and for making me want to be a big sister worthy of that title. I pray that this work will inspire my son, Itua Cumberbatch, and my grandsons, Cameron and Caden, to seek truth and knowledge wherever they may be found. I am thankful for the unwavering support of my sister-cousins, the Johnsons, and for my aunts, uncles, and cousins in the Johnson, Palmer, and Cumberbatch family trees, whose prayers and encouragement kept me going. I am particularly thankful for my many friends who were by my side throughout this journey, especially Ava Walker and Carolyn Williams, who kept me pressing on. I am eternally grateful to my employer, ECMC Group, and my CEO, Jeremy Wheaton, who allowed me access to complete this dissertation study, and to my Corporate Affairs team members and my fellow members of the ECMC Group executive leadership team, who were so very supportive of me and my work.
I thank my committee chair, Dr. Mitch Kusy, for always being my advocate and friend; I thank my committee members Dr. Carol Baron and Dr. Mike Porter for their guidance; and I thank the Antioch faculty and staff for their support.

I love you all. My heart is full. My cup runneth over.
Dedication

I dedicate this to the memories of my mother, Eula Johnson, and my father, Fitzgerald Cumberbatch, and to the memories of all my ancestors: those whose names I call every day and those whose names I do not know; and to my son Itua, my grandsons, Cameron and Caden, and my descendants yet unborn. I pray that my life and my work will be a blessing and will honor them all.
Abstract

More than a decade after the emergence of social and digital media, professional communicators increasingly use these channels to interact with a wide array of stakeholders. Simultaneously, public relations (PR) and communications leaders seek to understand whether their efforts to communicate and engage with stakeholders through these channels are effective in establishing and building relationships, as well as to measure “effectiveness” in the new technology-driven communications landscape. With this study, I addressed a gap in the academic research with regard to understanding the effectiveness of social and digital media as a communications tool by assessing employees’ perceptions of their organization with respect to five communication concepts, both in general and based specifically on the company’s social media communications. I assessed the relationship between the employee stakeholder and the organization from two viewpoints: first, from the viewpoint of the employees with whom the organization is communicating, and second, from the viewpoint of the communications professionals who post social and digital media messages on behalf of the organization. The results showed that an intervention to educate employees about the organization’s social and digital media communications did not result in employees’ increased positive perceptions of the organization as a whole or of the organization’s sites with regard to each of the five communications concepts. The increase in employees’ positive perceptions of the organization’s social and digital media sites, which reflected the communication concept “promoting communal relationships,” was significant at $p < .10$; also, increases for three individual statements that were part of the communications concepts were sufficient for statistical significance. The intervention did result in statistically significant increases in employee use of social and digital media to engage with the organization and in usage of specifically LinkedIn to engage with the
organization. The communicators who are responsible for the organization’s social and digital media communications generally held the same perceptions as other employees with regard to how the organization in general and its social media sites specifically fostered the five communication concepts. This dissertation is available in open access at Antioch University Repository and Archive, http://aura.antioch.edu/ and OhioLINK ETD Center, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/

*Keywords*: social media, digital media, social media measurement, public relations, PR leadership, communications, communications leadership, corporate communications, communications measurement, organizational communications, organization-public relationships
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## Glossary of Terms

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<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<td>Complexity leadership theory</td>
<td>A framework for leadership in organizations or organizational units that aims to foster the dynamics of complex adaptive systems while enabling control structures to coordinate formal organizations by integrating complexity dynamics and bureaucracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate communications</td>
<td>The process by which a company or organization gives the public and its employees information about its goals and activities for the purpose of developing, cultivating, and maintaining a positive corporate/organizational identity, reputation, and image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowdsourcing</td>
<td>“The act of a company or institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined network of people” (Howe, 2006, p. 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital media</td>
<td>Digitized content that can be transmitted over the Internet or computer networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Internet</td>
<td>A global computer network providing a variety of information and communication that is self-supporting and not reliant on any single entity for its existence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass audience</td>
<td>In communications, a large, heterogeneous audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilogging</td>
<td>An organization’s management of its reputation with multiple stakeholders simultaneously in the social and digital media age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niche audience</td>
<td>In communications, a targeted audience with a unique profile or interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Internet</td>
<td>A global computer network providing a variety of information and communication that is available to be used by anyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Internet</td>
<td>A global computer network providing a variety of information and communication that is accessible to people worldwide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations (PR)</td>
<td>A strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR/Communications leader</td>
<td>A senior professional who leads a group of PR/communications practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational leadership theory</td>
<td>A framework for leadership as a social influence process through which emergent coordination and change are constructed and produced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems theory</td>
<td>The study of society as a complex arrangement of elements that continually affect each other over time and operate toward a common purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems thinking</td>
<td>An approach for studying individuals within the contexts of their interactions and interrelationships with others operating in the same system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncontrolled Internet</td>
<td>A global computer network providing a variety of information and communication that is not regulated by any one entity</td>
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Chapter I: Introduction

The business of communicating is more complex than ever for organizations. The advent of the Internet as a communications channel in the mid-1990s transformed business communications and shifted the process by which organizations build relationships with stakeholders including customers, shareholders, business partners, regulators, government officials, and employees. This new information system is open, public, independent, and uncontrolled, making the traditional audience segmentation and targeting by communications professionals obsolete (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007). The Internet is open in that it is available to be used by anyone; it is public in that it is accessible to people worldwide; it is independent in that it is self-supporting and not reliant on any single entity for its existence; and it is uncontrolled in that it is not regulated by any one entity (see glossary of terms). The digital network revolution, global integration, and stakeholder empowerment have forever changed the environment in which communications professionals operate (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007).

The Internet has provided public relations (PR) and communications leaders with both benefits and challenges. Audiences have become more fragmented and harder to target and reach, multiple Internet communication channels have increased the time and resources required to reach those audiences. Messaging consistency has become more complicated to maintain, transforming public relations from a one-way communication to a dialogue with stakeholders (Evans, Twomey, & Talan, 2011). Accurately identifying the intersection of stakeholders, communications channels, and engagement is increasingly important for today’s PR and communications leaders.

Today, the relationship-building process between organizations and stakeholders frequently occurs online. As Valentini, Kruckeberg, and Starck (2012) noted, “Increasingly, 21st
Century relationships are about online communities, social networks, and other types of online linkages” (p. 876). Kathuria (2010) observed that, “Companies now communicate with consumers and stakeholders in a significantly different way and through new channels that didn’t even exist a few years ago” (p. 1). As a result, Kathuria said, “Businesses recognize that they will increasingly need varying but integrated messages to reach different constituents…[while] at the same time, an evolving array of media will be employed to reach these key audiences” (p. 1).

Today, the communications channels companies use to communicate with stakeholders include Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, and others. The ways in which companies communicate with consumers and stakeholders also have changed from the letters and telephone communications that were common for most of the last century to emails, instant messages, texts, photographs, and videos posted on the new channels. Organizations can build relationships with their stakeholders by using the Internet strategically to communicate with and not just to their audiences (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Among those audiences, relationships with employees have long been viewed as among the most important for organizations to cultivate (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1985) and necessary antecedents for building relationships with external publics (Seitel, 1992).

**The Leadership Challenge**

PR and communications leaders have seen a transformation in the profession over the past few years as a result of the increasing use of social and digital media. Social media refers to forms of electronic communication such as Web sites for social networking and microblogging through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content such as videos. Digital media refers to digitized content, including text, audio, video, and graphics, that can be transmitted over the Internet or computer networks. The shift to
online relationship building via social and digital media communications has caused significant changes in how PR and communications leaders approach and evaluate their organizational communications. With these changes in how organizations interact with stakeholders, these leaders seek to measure whether their organizations’ online interactions to build relationships with their stakeholders are effective. Social and digital media effectiveness is significantly more complicated for PR and communications leaders to measure because they seek to bridge the gap between how they measured communications in the past and how they must measure it in the present. Efforts to measure and assess effectiveness are complicated further because there is not a common framework among communications professionals, also called communicators, with regard to determining whether their organizations’ stakeholders, including their own employees, are effectively engaged through digital and social media. This lack of assessment highlights the need for a leadership-theory-based practical framework for professional communicators using social and digital media in their organizational communications to build relationships with their stakeholders.

In this new communications environment, communicators are seeking new ways to understand how to communicate effectively with key audiences through these new conduits. Assessing how well different social and digital media channels reach key stakeholders is necessary for strategic communications today (DiStaso & McCorkindale, 2013).

In the 21st century, organizations and their stakeholders are in a state of constant interaction in terms of access and reaction to information and communications. Pressures arise from the interactions between individuals and organizations receiving and reacting to communications and information. PR and communications leaders in today’s organizations seek new ways to build relationships with an increasingly diverse group of internal and external
stakeholders, each with different points of view about the organization and its leadership and each with different communications touch-points with the organization and its other stakeholders. Today’s organizational communications environment is one in which barriers to messaging have effectively disappeared and where stakeholders have as much of a voice as organizations. In this environment, communicators are challenged to engage and work together with stakeholders in a way that increases the capacity for the organization and the overall system to change and grow.

Leadership theory and practice can offer organizations and their communicators insights into a model that can help navigate these new waters. Specifically, organizations and their PR and communications leaders could benefit from a greater understanding of how systems theory can inform the use of social and digital media to affect the complex adaptive systems that exist in organization-public relationships. Organizations and their communicators also could benefit from a greater understanding of how complexity leadership theory can inform the organization-public system of communications and relationship building that has become increasingly more complex because of the proliferation of online communications. Finally, organizations and PR/communications professionals could benefit from a better understanding of how relational leadership theory can illuminate the ways in which relational interactions are contributing to the emergence of a new social order between organizations and their publics wherein social and digital media interactions are leading to organizational change.

**Statement of the Problem**

The 21st-century information age presents an environment in which individuals and organizations continuously receive information, react instantaneously to unfolding developments, and exert pressure for change. Almost every day, we learn of a company, a
government agency, or a country that was transformed by unprecedented access to information and communications. Almost every day, we also see organizations and leaders who are damaged, sometimes irreparably, because of their response to the shifting communications and information environment.

In recent years, we have witnessed the power of social and digital media communications to topple leaders and governments as well as to help propel them into power. For example, in just the past few years, we saw the 23-year rule of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia collapse in a matter of days during the first two months of 2011 because of a popular revolution fueled by widespread Internet-enabled access to information. According to Robert Mackey (2011) reporting in the New York Times, Tunisia’s uprising began when a street vendor set himself on fire outside of a government building in December after police confiscated his merchandise (p. A13). This led to protests that were recorded on mobile phones, uploaded to the Internet, shared across Facebook, picked up and broadcast by satellite news media, and spread across the world. Weeks after the uprising in Tunisia, we witnessed a similar phenomenon in Egypt – a nation of 80 million people who erupted in mass protests on January 25, 2011; in just days, the 29-year rule of President Hosni Mubarak came to an end. In that case, the Egyptian government’s response of shutting down the Internet in an attempt to stem the flow of information and communications is believed to have exacerbated the unrest and hastened Mubarak’s political demise. Quoted by Mackey (2011) in the New York Times, Prof. Mohammed el-Nawawy, a native of Egypt and an expert on the country’s blogging culture, said “The government has made a big mistake taking away the option at people’s fingertips….They’re taking their frustration to the streets” (p. A13). El-Nawawy said Egyptian activists inside the country told him that people who might have otherwise expressed their
frustration on blogs or Facebook instead took their frustrations into the street after Internet access was disrupted.

This phenomenon is in no way limited to the politics of dictatorial governments. In U.S. politics, the Democratic Party lost the 2010 midterm election and leadership of the U.S. House of Representatives after a campaign season marked by rapid-fire information dissemination across traditional news media as well as social media outlets including Twitter and Facebook. Calabrese (2010) reported on pbs.org that the 2010 election demonstrated a major shift in politics, with more candidates and campaigns using social media and technology. Calabrese also noted that just days before the election, Republican Senate candidates had garnered more than four times the number of Facebook friends and more than five times as many Twitter followers as Democratic candidates for the Senate (p.1).

More recently, U.S. President Donald Trump became the first presidential candidate in the country’s history to employ a strategy of circumventing traditional media in favor of using a social media channel (Twitter) to communicate directly with his audience. Baynes (2017) reported that in an October 23, 2017, broadcast interview on Fox News, Trump noted the key role he believes social media played in his election: He called his social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram “a tremendous platform” and added “I doubt I would be here if weren’t for social media.”

The power of social and digital communications also is present in business: Global oil company BP struggled to find its footing in the wake of the 2010 Gulf oil spill and its CEO Tony Hayward was toppled from office following what was widely viewed as his loss of ability to lead and to communicate effectively through the company’s crisis (Kanter, 2010). Hayward’s insensitive initial messaging on social media after the oil spill, followed by his video and other
messaging after his initial communications, were condemned widely and remain an example of social and digital media’s power to topple leaders (Kanter, 2010). Kanter (2010) noted Hayward’s lapse in leadership accountability for the oil spill and stated that as the leader of BP, Hayward’s sole consideration should have been what was best for BP and its stakeholders (p. 1).

More recently, Twitter campaigns such as #BlackLivesMatter, #Ferguson, and #ICantBreathe have shined a spotlight on the issue of systemic racism and police brutality in the United States and helped pressure the U.S. Department of Justice into opening investigations into cases in which Blacks have died in police custody. The #BringBackOurGirls Twitter campaign, launched after Boko Haram militants in Nigeria kidnapped hundreds of schoolgirls, was embraced and supported by U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama and Nobel Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, putting pressure on the Nigerian government to recover the kidnapped girls.

Social and digital media have changed the way organizations communicate with their publics, including employees, and have changed the way publics, including employees, communicate with organizations. With this study, I examined the impact of these channels on the communications between one organization and its employees to inform PR and communications professionals on how they can assess the impact of social and digital media on its employees. These platforms have intensified the ability of stakeholders to publicize interactions with organizations and amplify their voices. As a result, other stakeholders are influenced significantly by these very visible communications between an organization and its publics.

I also aimed with this study to investigate how an organization’s communications with one of its publics – its employees – might inform a better understanding of social and digital media dynamics. Better understanding these forces at work could influence online interactions
between organizations and broader audiences that are also the focus of professional communicators. In the rapidly moving and ever-changing environment powered by instant access to communications and information, how do PR and communications leaders manage organizational communications in ways that are responsive, effective, and progressive? With multiple quickly evolving systems at work every day, how can these leaders adapt to build relationships with various constituencies, including employee stakeholders? And how do they determine the effectiveness of these new communications channels and tools to achieve organizational goals?

Existing literature and scholarship detail the challenges facing today’s PR and communications leaders. Audience definition and segmentation have been complicated by the proliferation of Internet-enabled communications channels, social media, and other information technologies (Ihator, 2001). Traditionally, communicators focused on audience and message segmentation and reputation management, but the changing environment has made it increasingly difficult for organizations and their public relations/communications professionals to control their audiences, their messages, and their reputations (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007). The constellation of organizational stakeholders has expanded to encompass a wide range of interested parties beyond the employees, journalists, investors, regulators, and customers with whom PR/communications practitioners traditionally interacted; now it includes community organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals who are engaged in relationships with organizations (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007).

Adding to the loss of control, conversations about an organization can increasingly occur with or without the organization’s involvement, sometimes without the organization’s knowledge and outside its control (Aula, 2010). Ihator (2001) refers to this as “an emerging
power sharing” (p. 199). With this audience diffusion and loss of organizational control over messaging, communicators can no longer view stakeholders as belonging to one mass audience but must instead think in terms of individual niche audiences (Phillips & Hockey, 2013). In communications, “mass” refers to a large, heterogeneous audience, whereas “niche” refers to a targeted audience with a unique profile or interest.

Large corporations and their executives no longer have the upper hand in messaging and communications, including those aimed at employees; the Internet has given individuals a platform and a voice, leveling the playing field (Gaines-Ross, 2010). Because of the Internet, individual ideas, experiences, and opinions are now scalable in a way that enables widespread distribution, organization, and activism on a global level (Arthur W. Page Society, 2012). The addition of social media has provided stakeholders including employees with forums to discuss ideas, experiences, and knowledge in the moment, at any moment, which has fundamentally and permanently changed decision-making, communications, relationship management, and marketing (Bulmer & DiMauro, 2009).

In this environment, organizations need consistent messaging. They also need strong stakeholder relationships across a variety of audience segments, including employees. Finally, they need the ability to “multilog,” i.e., to participate in simultaneous relational communications across multiple parties in the relationship (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007, 2012).

More than a decade after the emergence of social and digital media, professional communicators increasingly use these channels to interact with a wide array of stakeholders. At the same time, PR and communications leaders seek to understand whether their efforts to communicate and engage with stakeholders through these platforms are effective in establishing
and building relationships, and to measure “effectiveness” in the new technology-driven communications landscape.

PR/communications leaders would benefit from having a framework for articulating the distinct and varied steps in developing internal organizational relationships online through social and digital media and for assessing the effectiveness of those activities. Such a framework is foundational in measuring the effectiveness of these communications channels in engaging a broad array of stakeholders. This study is intended to offer this framework, enlightened by systems, complexity leadership, and relational leadership theories.

Research on systems theory, complexity leadership theory, and relational leadership theory can inform PR/communications leaders who are navigating a new environment in which they are leading organizational communications and seeking to enhance organization-public relationships across individuals, groups, and large social systems. These communicators may benefit from a systems-thinking viewpoint that highlights the whole and not just the parts to better understand the interrelationships and patterns in the relationship. Complexity leadership theory offers PR/communications leaders insights into the common purposes and outlooks that bond an organization and its employees in relationships. These communicators may utilize relational leadership theory as a framework for understanding leadership, as Uhl-Bien (2006) describes it, as a social influence process that produces an evolving social order and new approaches, values, attitudes, behaviors, and ideologies (p. 654). Together, systems, complexity leadership, and relational leadership theories offer PR/communications leaders a rich context for enhanced understanding of the effectiveness of social and digital media in engaging stakeholders.
Purpose of the Study

With this study, I addressed a gap in the academic research with regard to understanding the effectiveness of social and digital media as a communications tool by assessing the relationship between the employee stakeholder and an organization from the perspectives of multiple parties in the relationship. I also furnish PR/communications leaders with a theoretical framework for addressing the unique challenges presented by the role of social and digital media in the current organizational communications environment.

The research incorporates the tenets of systems theory related to patterns of interrelationships, the tenets of complexity leadership theory related to the complexity of human beings and their intricate systems of interacting, and the tenets of relational leadership theory with regard to how relationships are produced by social interactions. In the process, I aimed to illuminate the relationship between organizations and their employee stakeholders and offer leadership guidance to PR/communications leaders who oversee the strategic communications that are so critical to organizational effectiveness. I sought to advance knowledge pertaining to organizational communications leadership in an era of social and digital communications and offer strategies for integrating systems, complexity leadership, and relational leadership theories to enhance the effectiveness of social and digital media in fostering organization-public relationships.

PR/communications leaders are challenged to understand the dynamics of fostering relationships with multiple employee constituencies by effectively using social and digital media communications. In the same way that the three forces of digital network revolution, global integration, and stakeholder empowerment have challenged professional communicators, they also have opened new opportunities for communicators to develop deep and meaningful
relationships with organizational stakeholders (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007). Current literature concerning systems thinking, complex adaptive theory, and relational leadership theory offers guidance for PR/communications leaders seeking to adapt to this new environment to enhance organizational relationship building across individuals, groups, and large social systems. Systems theory is useful in understanding the more democratic, holistic, nonhierarchical interrelationships fostered by social and digital media communications. Complexity leadership theory is helpful for advancing organizational communications and organization-public relationships through open, complex online communications systems. Relational leadership theory is useful in building capacity to engage productively with stakeholders and to build and measure relationships across social and digital media.

The Intervention

This study reflected my hypothesis that an intervention would improve the organization-public relationship between employees and their employer organization. I designed the intervention to educate and inform employees of the organization’s social and digital media presence in the hope of strengthening the employee-employer relationship. An in-person social media fair as well as email communications and visual reminders including informational flyers and desk drops handed out before and during the fair were used throughout a four-week intervention period to raise employees’ awareness of the organization’s social and digital media sites and messages.

Research Questions

Researchers on the effectiveness of social and digital media tools have not yet studied the viewpoints of the various parties in the organization-employee relationship to assess the effects of online communications on the relationships between stakeholders and organizations. Given
my role as a PR and communications leader in a large organization and my interest in developing
leaders in my area of professional practice who understand communications effectiveness
broadly across existing and emerging communications tools and channels, I was motivated to
explore these issues from multiple perspectives. I thus investigated questions that are related to
communications effectiveness from the standpoint of two groups of the organization’s internal
stakeholders—the communicators and all other employees. The research questions were:

RQ1: How do employees view this organization in general with respect to fostering five
communications concepts before and after a social and digital media intervention?

RQ2: What social and digital media do employees use for any purpose as well as specifically to engage with the organization before and after the intervention?

RQ3: How do employees perceive the messages on the organization’s social and digital
media sites with regard to the fostering five communications concepts before and after the
intervention?

RQ4: How do the communicators, the PR/communications professionals who are
responsible for this organization’s social and digital media communications, perceive the
effectiveness of those communications tools in fostering the five communications concepts
before and after the intervention?

The first research question was to investigate how employees perceived the organization
as a whole with regard to fostering five communications concepts: generating trust,
demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment, generating satisfaction, and
promoting communal relationships. The second question was about which social and digital
media platforms employees used: first, for any purpose and, second, specifically to engage with
the organization. The third question aimed to investigate how employees perceived the
organization’s social and digital media sites with regard to fostering the five communications concepts. The fourth question investigated how communicators, who are the employees responsible for posting online content on behalf of the organization, perceive the organization’s social and digital media sites with regard to fostering the five communications concepts. The fourth question also looked at whether the communicators’ perceptions differed significantly from the perceptions of other employees. I investigated all four research questions before and after a social media fair that I hosted and an email intervention I designed to educate and inform employees about the organization’s social and digital media messages related to the five communications concepts. This research reflected the hypothesis that social and digital media intervention and education activities positively relate to improvements in the organization-public relationship between employees and the organizations that employ them.

**Methodological Approach**

The methodological approach focused on collecting and analyzing data before and after a planned communications intervention. This was a three-phase mixed-methods study, comprising a survey with both closed- and open-ended questions and a post-intervention staff focus group meeting to reflect on how the intervention worked to accomplish the stated goal.

Phase 1 consisted of designing and administering a pre-intervention social and digital media survey with closed- and open-ended questions. I designed the survey to assess employees’ use of and engagement with these channels, as well as their perceptions of the organization and its online sites in terms of

- generating trust, i.e., increasing employees' confidence that the organization is trustworthy;
• demonstrating control mutuality, i.e., demonstrating a co-equal relationship between the organization and the employee;

• demonstrating commitment to employees, i.e., showing employees that they should spend their time and energy maintaining a relationship with the organization and demonstrating that the organization spends its resources to maintain a relationship with employees;

• generating satisfaction for the employee, i.e., making sure employees feel good about their relationship with the organization; and

• promoting communal relationships, i.e., community involvement/building relationships with the community.

I also incorporated a focus group interview protocol that solicited post-intervention narrative responses from the communicators. For the focus group, I asked open-ended questions about how the communicators perceived the intervention and the organization’s social and digital media effectiveness.

Phase 2 comprised an intervention educating and informing employees of the organization’s online presence through the in-person social media fair as well as through email communications and visual reminders including informational flyers and desk drops throughout the four-week intervention period.

Phase 3 consisted of disseminating a post-intervention social and digital media survey with closed- and open-ended questions. I designed this survey to determine whether there was improvement in social and digital media use and engagement among employees as well as any change in their perceptions of the organization’s ability to generate trust, demonstrate control mutuality, demonstrate commitment to employees, generate employee satisfaction, and promote
communal relationships. Phase 3 also included the post-intervention communicators’ staff meeting, structured as a focus group. This focus group followed a semi-structured interview protocol to reflect on the value and outcome of the intervention.

I analyzed the collected data by collecting responses to the social and digital media survey through SurveyMonkey and transferring the data to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. I used descriptive statistics, including percentage and frequency distributions, to describe current employee social and digital media usage as well as employees’ perceptions of the organization and its online messages as they pertained to generating trust, demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment to employees, generating satisfaction for the employee, and promoting communal relationships; I also conducted comparative analysis—chi-square and t tests—to measure types and effectiveness of social and digital media. I report mean scores and standard deviations, and I also summarized the narrative data from the post-intervention focus group with the communicators.

**Positioning of the Researcher**

As a PR and communications leader in 2019, I am deeply aware of the challenges for corporate and organizational communicators who are seeking to influence the public’s perceptions of their organizations. According to the Pew Research Center (2013), the percentage of Americans who had a favorable view of business peaked in August 1999, when 73% of Americans viewed business favorably, before plummeting below 50% after the 2007-2008 financial crisis for the first time, hitting a record low of 38% in August 2011; today, that percentage is 53%. By income, the public has very different views of corporations: Among Americans with more than $75,000 in annual income, 59% have favorable views of corporations and 37% have unfavorable views; for Americans who earn less than $30,000 annually, just 50%
have favorable views and 43% have unfavorable views. For context, the top 25% of American wage-earners make more than $70,000 annually while the bottom 50% earn less than $34,000 a year.

A recent Pew Research study reported by Kochhar & Cilluffo (2018) found that the gap between Americans at the top and the bottom of the income ladder increased 27% from 1970 to 2016. For banking and financial services, the industry in which I have led communications and PR for more than three decades, the public perception is even worse. Saad (2018) reported that just 30% of Americans who responded to a Gallup poll said they had a great deal of confidence in banks.

As a PR and communications leader, I practice my profession within the context of public sentiment about business in general and the financial services industry in particular. Wall Street, which is synonymous with banking and financial services, was the key force responsible for the 2007-2008 financial and economic crisis; this was the worst economic downturn in the United States since the Great Depression. At its worst, the U.S. unemployment rate peaked at 10.0% in October 2009, and since the U.S. government started collecting unemployment data in 1948, there has never been as much long-term unemployment, with people who have been out of work for six months or longer who are looking for work, as there has been since the most recent recession. In today’s globally interconnected world, the economic effects ripple far beyond U.S. shores, causing financial and economic pain around the globe.

These issues present a dilemma for PR/communications leaders like me. On one hand, I know that the organization I work for, and many others in my industry, do much good work whether through financial literacy programs to educate children and adults about money management, or initiatives to provide work experience to young people from underserved communities, or employee volunteer programs and foundation giving that serve people in
underprivileged communities. At the same time, I also know the financial services industry contributed to recent economic challenges that affected many Americans, including the slowness with which bad loans and the resulting foreclosure problems that hit underprivileged communities especially hard were addressed. The challenge for me as a professional communicator is to publicize and promote my organization’s good work while taking care not to discount the criticism. In my role as an advisor to CEOs and presidents, my responsibility as a scholar and a citizen is to be the voice of the people we serve: all of our customers and prospective customers, our employees, and the public, across all income, race, and class demographics. In today’s world, I need to communicate effectively with constituents across existing and new media channels.

Over the past several years, I have seen PR and communications leaders struggle to address this new world in which an organization’s every word and move are observed, reported, dissected, and judged by stakeholders with newfound power to affect the organization’s reputation as well as the leaders’ very ability to communicate effectively with stakeholders. With multiple rapidly evolving systems at work every day, how can a PR and communications leader adapt to working with varied constituencies that have different and sometimes conflicting goals and priorities that affect the leader’s organization and that are communicating with the organization across multiple varied social and digital media communications channels? With this study, I aimed to offer insights into answers to these questions.

**Rationale for Studying the Problem**

Research studies, literature, and my interviews with eight PR and communications professionals in July 2014 for a paper that informed this dissertation study all confirmed that the Internet and social media have significantly changed the practice of PR and communications.
Stakeholders, conversations, and relationships increasingly reside in an online, technology-driven environment in which communications channels proliferate, audiences fragment, and messages diffuse. Professional communicators are charged with many diverse tasks, such as understanding the interrelationships between organizations and their stakeholders; determining the communications and the channels organizations and their stakeholders use to interact; assessing the level of stakeholder engagement through those communications channels; and determining the effectiveness of communications and engagement with stakeholders in online channels.

The history of PR in the United States is intertwined with the history of business and democracy. Many historians trace the beginnings of PR as a field of practice to 1900, with the formation of the first PR agency, the Publicity Bureau. PR was born out of a desire by businesses to combat public outcries in response to frequent newspaper and magazine articles about business fraud and business-related political corruption; PR emerged to defend corporate interests, including political manipulation, against the media of the day. In some ways, PR was, from its inception, designed to protect the interests of the wealthy and powerful against the sometimes different interests of the masses. From a social and cultural standpoint, it can be said that America, for its entire history, has walked a business and political tightrope between the rich and privileged and the non-rich and non-privileged, with PR sprouting up in the middle over the last century.

Given the profession’s genesis as a means for businesses to address media stories and public outrage over business-related fraud and political corruption, PR initially prioritized the interests of the corporation over the public interest; however, the pendulum has swung over time to seek more balance in the profession and more concern for the greater good. When I studied
communications as an undergraduate student more than 30 years ago, the focus was squarely on
the media as the intercessor between organizations and the public. Reflecting this reality,
corporate communications over the vast majority of my career involved building relationships
with journalists as the conduit to a variety of stakeholders: customers, shareholders, business
partners, regulators, government officials, even employees. Measuring the effectiveness of
media interactions was relatively straightforward in terms of assessing the number and tone of
articles that resulted from media interactions and then extrapolating “reach” across the readership
of those media outlets in which articles appeared.

Professional communicators now operate in a world in which messages about an
organization are no longer controlled by the organization but are created, shared, shaped, and
changed by a huge ecosystem of employees, communities, customers, business partners, interest
groups, and interested individuals (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007). With the widespread use of
the Internet, social media, and digital media, individuals have unprecedented power to
communicate with other individuals and groups about organizations and to influence the public
perception of an organization. For most of the time that PR and organizational communications
have existed, organizations held the position of power with regard to communicating messages
about the organization to the public. This power position was bolstered by the ability of
organizations to influence favorable coverage in newspapers, radio, television, and other mass
media as a result of work of the organization’s PR and communications leaders who were tasked
with ensuring favorable public perceptions of the organization and by the ability of organizations
to purchase advertising in media outlets. As a result, organizations were able to communicate
powerful positive messages while individuals lacked the power and the tools to counter these
messages.
This is no longer the case. For example, McDonald’s is considered one of the iconic corporations and brands of the 20th century, in part because of its extensive advertising, PR, and consumer communications; for decades, McDonald’s was synonymous with fast, quality food at low prices. But in March 2012, a news story was published in the digital news outlet The Daily about “pink slime” used in hamburgers; the story in The Daily and other news articles that it generated were shared across social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and blogs, as well as across digital media such as YouTube. Shortly after the Daily story was published, a Harris Poll found that 88% of Americans were aware of the pink slime, and 76% were at least “somewhat concerned” (Swann, 2014, p. 171). Although McDonald’s had stopped using “pink slime” before the news articles were published, the corporation was nevertheless embroiled in the controversy and forced to defend itself (and is still defending itself) against perceptions that its food contained pink slime. In the pre-social and digital media era, such rapid dissemination of the message that McDonald’s hamburgers were tainted and inferior was impossible, but in the current communications environment, such messages circled the world online almost instantaneously.

As the example above illustrates, and as Gaines-Ross (2010) observed, organizations have considerably less control over positive messaging than they did in the past, and they have considerably less control over their reputations. With this shift has come a loss of organizational control over stakeholder relationships at the same time that communications between and among stakeholder groups has increased. For today’s communicators, the emphasis has shifted from target audiences to target individuals and target stakeholder segments, and the focus has moved beyond messages that shape opinion to relationships intended to create value that spurs advocacy
Increasingly, successfully holding these interactive conversations with stakeholders requires companies to engage via social media. In today’s digital environment, organizational stakeholders are using social and digital media more than they did in the past, so organizations are going where their stakeholders are and using these online platforms to engage and communicate with those stakeholders (DiStaso, McCorkindale, & Wright, 2011). As a result, social media have become key communications vehicles for companies seeking to connect with their audiences (DiStaso & McCorkindale, 2013), and to make these connections, organizational communications are occurring across social and digital media channels and platforms. Social networking sites are being integrated into public relations plans and are being used successfully in communications campaigns (Evans et al., 2011). In time, social and digital communications are likely to be included in every company’s strategic communications (DiStaso & McCorkindale, 2013).

With the changes in human behavior that have already occurred because of social media and that are expected to continue with increasing connectivity, the nature of relationships between people, groups, and organizations is likely to define the future of online interactions (Phillips & Hockey, 2013). The opportunity now is for organizations and PR/communications leaders to engage in “collaborative influence” with stakeholders through social channels (Bulmer & DiMauro, 2009, p. 98) by interacting with the public in a complex, overlapping, and continuous communications process that Aula (2010) referred to as “multilogging.” Aula’s multilogging construct expands on the concept of dialogic communication; it refers to an organization’s management of its reputation in the social and digital media age, and it is distinct from the concept of “crowdsourcing,” a term Howe (2006) defined as “the act of a company or
institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined network of people” (p. 1).

Moving from mass distribution of written communications to the personal/relational approach advances PR practitioners further in the direction of relationship building (Smith, 2011). That movement toward relationship building is supported by social media, a highly visible and accessible platform that provides a unique environment for relationship development between organizations and stakeholders (Smith, 2012). Organizations can benefit from leveraging the participation of their audiences in social media (Reitz, 2012), but to achieve those benefits, organization leaders need to update their strategies and tactics for building relationships with their stakeholders as social media become more and more conventional.

For example, organizations need to refine their ability to engage in relationship-building interactions with multiple individual stakeholders, in contrast to the mass-audience, one-to-many communications that dominated organizational communications in the past. Relatedly, organizations need to promote strategies to actively engage stakeholders as part of their organizational communications plans to leverage their online audiences in sharing the organization’s messages.

Social media allow organizations and groups to engage and build relationships (McCorkindale, DiStaso, & Sisco, 2013; Reitz, 2012). Furthermore, social media have opened new pathways for organizations to receive immediate feedback and engage in conversations with stakeholders, helping to build relationships (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012). Reitz (2012), quoting Swedowsky and Wong, stated that the dialogue enabled by social media can transform loyal consumers into passionate and outspoken brand and business advocates.
Research from Briones, Kuch, Liu, and Jin (2011) also showed that practicing public relations through social media is effective and necessary in the current digital age. Social media are useful to organizations and PR practitioners because these channels allow organizations to create dialogues with audiences (Briones et al., 2011). In addition, online communities allow organizations to educate and inform their customers as well as to learn more about their customers, fostering the development and cultivation of meaningful relationships (Bulmer & DiMauro, 2009).

Yet no standard method has emerged to determine whether an organization’s stakeholders are engaged effectively through digital and social media communications channels. My past interviews with professional communicators highlighted the variety of ways in which practitioners are assessing their social media activities and also highlighted the lack of consistency in the ways in which communicators approach those assessments.

I aimed with this study to contribute knowledge that will help PR and communications leaders identify and measure the intersection of stakeholders, communications channels, and engagement to assess the effectiveness of social and digital media communications in organization-public relationship building.

**Implications of the Study for PR and Communications Practice**

The fundamental PR goal is to build and then enhance ongoing or long-term relationships with an organization’s key constituencies. Measuring relationships and communications effectiveness, including changes in what people think, feel, and do, is critical for PR and communications practitioners (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

Today, social and digital media are almost ubiquitous means of communication that offer unique and potentially beneficial opportunities for stakeholders and organizations to develop and
build relationships (Reitz, 2012; Smith, 2011). However, successful relationship building in social media requires organizations to actively work to build communities and to learn from their interactions with stakeholder in these new channels (Culnan, McHugh, & Zubillaga, 2010) as well as to develop new concepts, theories, frameworks, and activities for social media interactions with organizational stakeholders (Briones et al., 2010; Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012).

Success in this new paradigm requires communications strategies and programs that are aimed not just at traditional target audiences and segments but also at individuals to spur action and advocacy. These strategies and programs can be analyzed and measured to determine the extent to which individuals and targeted groups are acting and advocating on the organization’s behalf (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007).

In the framework I present in this study, I examine how PR and communications leaders, as well as employees, assess the effectiveness of social and digital media in organizational relationship building. This study delivers quantitative and qualitative data that provide greater insight into social media, as advocated by Khang et al. (2012). It also provides analysis of the effect of engaging in dialogue on stakeholders, as supported by Rybalko and Seltzer (2010). Finally, I measured increased transparency in terms of the organization’s ability to communicate what it does and why, as encouraged by DiStaso and Bortree (2012). In summary, with this study I synthesize research on social media effectiveness and the role of communications in relationship building to deliver new knowledge in this field.

**Implications of Systems, Complexity, and Relational Leadership Theory for PR and Communications Practice**

Social and digital media platforms have quickly become widely used and accepted communications tools for organizational PR and communications professionals. Usage of these
sites has increased sharply in the general populations in recent years; in response, organizations have also increased the use of social and digital media to reach a wide range of audiences. Most companies on the *Fortune* 500 list have adopted social media (DiStaso & McCorkindale, 2014), and companies report success from their use of these platforms (Bughin, Byers, & Chui, 2011). The challenge now is for PR and communications leaders to better understand the effects of social and digital media on building organization-public relationships and the effects of these tools on the complex adaptive systems at work in organization-public relationships. Systems theory, complexity leadership theory, and relational leadership theory provide a theoretical foundation for advancing PR leadership.

Within the system that comprises an organization and its stakeholders, relationships are established and cultivated through communications messages and channels used to interact and share information; operating within this system are interrelated subsystems. This is in an environment reminiscent of what Reitz (2012) described as one wherein organizations, individuals, and the media can each be seen as a societal subsystem in which changes to one subsystem affect other subsystems and the overarching system as a whole, causing the system to adjust and adapt. Systems theory has implications for PR and communications leadership by helping to focus on the nonhierarchical interrelationships that are at work in social and digital media communications and by assisting leaders in taking more holistic and democratic approaches to minimizing traditional top-down power dynamics in favor of more mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.

Within the nonhierarchical interrelationships that exist in social and digital media lie signs of what Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) described as a shift away from the top-down, bureaucratic, predictable, command-and-control view of leadership toward an emergent,
evolving, interactive view of leadership that reflects a specific contextual and historical situation, i.e., the framework for complexity leadership theory (p. vii). Complexity leadership theory addresses the complexity that is fundamental to human interactions in general and that is intensified by the prevalence and speed of social and digital communications. As a result, complexity leadership theory has implications for PR and communications leaders who are change agents seeking to evolve organizational communications and organization-public relationships within the context of these new, open social and digital media communication systems.

As professional communicators engage as change agents fostering nonhierarchical relationships between organizations and their publics through social and digital media, we are witnessing what Uhl-Bien (2006) described as the construction and production of change resulting from emergent coordination and evolving social order, i.e., the framework for relational leadership theory. In this environment, the theory has implications for leaders who need to be social influencers with the capacity to engage meaningfully and successfully with various organizational stakeholders. Relational leadership theory can also inform PR leaders’ efforts to develop flexibility in their thinking and actions to facilitate effective relationship building with stakeholders across social and digital media, influence organizational relationship-building results, and assess the effectiveness of their online communications. The theory has implications for PR leaders in taking an outcome-based view of organization-public relationships with individual stakeholders as well as with stakeholders broadly in terms of the organization’s impact on communities and society.
Implications for Theory

Communications theory has long addressed the changes in communications as a result of technological advances, specifically as a result of the growth of social media. Internet and social media communications channels have developed and grown, extending the public’s access to information and upending mass communications theory. With the growth of the Internet and social media, audience and message segmentation theory and practice have likewise been disrupted; the numbers and types of stakeholders and interested parties have simultaneously multiplied and diffused; and the process of building and maintaining stakeholder relationships has been redefined.

Messaging and dialogic communication have been superseded by multilogic conversations across an ever-increasing number of social and digital channels – channels that are becoming more and more central to organization-public communications. Relationship building with key constituencies via social media has become more critical even as the process of doing so has become more complex. Indeed, relationship building has become a stepping stone to community building in the social media framework, wherein dialogue, transparency, trust, and mutual benefit lead to relationships that build community.

Yet at the intersection of stakeholders, social and digital media channels, and messaging/engagement effectiveness lies a void: There is no unifying theory of social media effectiveness in communicating and engaging with organizational stakeholders, and nor is there a widely accepted methodology to measure whether interactions with stakeholders across multiple social and digital media channels are building relationships and community. With this study I highlight the importance of developing theoretical constructs to inform PR and communications
leaders in measuring the relationship-building effectiveness of communications and engagement with stakeholders through social and digital media.

**Succeeding Chapters**

In Chapter II: Literature Review, I examine the existing scholarship related to organization-public communications and social and digital media, and I synthesize that research with the academic body of literature related to systems theory, complexity leadership theory, and relational leadership theory. The research literature on organization-public relationships and social and digital media suggests that communications effectiveness is in the eyes of both the organization and the stakeholder and that both views are important for assessing social and digital media effectiveness. Researchers have provided this evidence in a range of studies across methodologies, all of which were investigations of the role of communications in building relationships between organizations and their publics.

The extensive body of knowledge and culture of inquiry offered a rich foundation for exploring the research questions and for situating the study in an expansive theoretical context. Given the relatively minimal research literature concerning the interposition of communications effectiveness, social and digital media, and leadership theory, this study will offer practical insights for PR and communications practitioners and leaders. The literature review will focus on detailing the academic research related to organization-public relationships, communications effectiveness, and the impact of organizational communications including social and digital communications on stakeholders including employees, and I factor in leadership theory in the context of organizational relationships with stakeholders.

In Chapter III: Methodology, I describe the study design and the three phases. I designed the study to examine the impact of social and digital organizational communications on
organization-public relationships, specifically on the relationship between an organization and its employees. For the study I utilized a pretest and posttest survey and an intervention to determine how communicators and other employees perceive the effectiveness of those communications in building organization-employee relationships.

In Chapter IV: Results of the Study, I describe the data preparation, the study participants, and the data analysis, which included descriptive statistics as well as comparative chi-square and t-test results.

In Chapter V of the study, Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion, I review and analyze the study results and summarize the data within the context of the research questions, as well as within the context of the study’s implications for leadership. I propose a model for leadership as it relates to social and digital media and organization-public relationships, and I discuss practical implications of the findings and suggestions for future research.

Summary

Social and digital media have spurred a proliferation of online communities, networks, and other connections that PR and communications leaders are navigating as they seek to communicate effectively and build relationships with their organizational stakeholders. The job of corporate communicators has moved beyond the one-dimensional aspects of audience, message, and channel into a multidimensional paradigm in which audiences, messages, and channels are fragmented and dispersed and in which the goal is no longer to simply share messages but to foster relationships and community. At the same time, professional communicators seek to understand and measure the effectiveness of organizational communications initiatives via social and digital media in achieving these relationship-building and community-building goals.
Research studies, literature, and my interviews with PR and communications professionals indicate that there is no standard method of determining whether or not an organization’s stakeholders are being effectively engaged through digital and social media communications channels. Similarly, there is no uniform method of measuring whether ongoing dialogues with numerous stakeholders across multiple channels are building relationships and community. In addition, there is no uniform leadership lens through which PR and communications leaders can inform their organizational communications leadership practice.

The academic and professional fields of PR and communications would benefit from having a common theoretical underpinning for understanding the process by which organizations develop online relationships with stakeholders through social and digital media. Equally important is a common framework for identifying the processes associated with building online relationships and community and for measuring the effectiveness of those processes in relationship and community building. Such a framework is critical to the ability of communications and PR leaders to understand the effectiveness of social media in engaging stakeholders.

PR and communications leaders in the 21st-century information age face the “permanent whitewater” described by Vaill (1996) on a scale that was unimaginable even 10 years ago. The current environment displays all the disconcerting characteristics that Vaill portended, including the elements of surprise, the inability to anticipate developments, the uniqueness of the problems that arise, and the general messiness of the situation (pp. 10-13). Yet this very environment provides unprecedented opportunities for communications leaders to learn and grow as individuals. By integrating systems theory, complexity theory, and relational leadership theory
into this study of social and digital media communications effectiveness, I aimed with this dissertation to illuminate pathways toward such personal and professional growth.
Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter places this study within the context of the academic research and scholarly literature on social and digital communications and leadership. With this literature review, I examined the impact of social and digital media on organizational communications and organization-public relationship building, frameworks that are central to the practice of PR/communications leaders. I also examined leadership theory pertaining to systems theory, complexity leadership theory, and relational leadership theory, to investigate how PR and communications leaders can apply these frameworks in their professional practice. An exploration of the empirical literature on organization-public relationships, systems theory, complexity leadership theory, and relational leadership theory is central to the conceptualization and design of this study. My review of the literature reveals the need to assess the effectiveness of social and digital media in organizational communications and the process whereby PR leaders can situate their leadership of these communications channels within the body of knowledge for organizational leadership.

Literature Review Process, Content, and Organization

For the literature review pertaining to social and digital media communications effectiveness, I searched the academic body of knowledge on social media, public relations, corporate communications, business communications, and organization-public relationships. The literature search included scholarly research on social media in general as well as academic research on specific outlets including Facebook, Twitter, online chat, computer bulletin boards, and blogs; I also incorporated research about engagement through and measurement of social media.
The literature search additionally included research on relationships in general and organization-public relationships more specifically, as well as articles covering enterprise communications and social media, to help illuminate how current practitioner viewpoints may inform the subject. The literature review pertaining to systems theory, complexity leadership theory, and relational leadership theory covered the academic research on these theories to elucidate how they may inform PR and communications leaders in effectively using social and digital media as communications tools for their organizations.

This literature review begins with insights into existing scholarship on building organization-public relationships and overlays research on social and digital media; the results provide the context for addressing the effectiveness of organizational social and digital media communications on stakeholder engagement. I then examine organizational PR and communications within the contexts of systems, complexity leadership, and relational leadership theories in order to elucidate the applicability of these leadership theories to scholarship concerning social and digital PR and communications. The research review is organized to present foundational PR and communications theory; current research on social and digital media communications; and an assessment of all three theories in relation to communications research.

**Relationship of the Literature to the Research Questions**

A significant amount of literature has been devoted to the effects of digital and social media on organizational communications. Over the past few years, academic scholars and PR and communications practitioners have recognized the importance of social and digital media as a communications tool: As the number of people using these platforms has increased sharply, so has the usage of these channels in organizational communications. In their 2013 study of *Fortune*’s most admired U.S. companies, DiStaso and McCorkindale (2013) found that most
companies on the *Fortune* list had adopted channels including Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. Companies report superior performance from the use of these technologies across key stakeholder groups including customers, partners, suppliers, and employees (Bughin et al., 2011).

At the same time that these tools are proliferating, organizations are faced with numerous challenges in successfully integrating them into their organizational communications; PR and communications leaders face difficult decisions including choosing from a wide range of social and digital media options and determining which channels are most effective for communicating with stakeholders. Organizations also face an increased expectation from their stakeholders that they will communicate with stakeholders across more and more channels. Academic literature on social and digital media highlights various factors in assessing the effectiveness of these options as organizational communications tools. This study furnishes these leaders with a quantitative and qualitative assessment of social and digital media effectiveness as well as a theoretical framework for addressing the unique challenges presented to PR leaders by the role of these platforms in the current organizational communications environment.

Increasingly, researchers are exploring the influence of social and digital media on organizational relationship building with their publics; these studies are important to our understanding of social and digital media’s impact on organization-public relationships. My research for this literature review indicates that this study adds to the body of knowledge on social and digital media effectiveness with my assessment of the organization-public relationship from the perspective of the stakeholder as well as from the standpoint of the organization. It also adds to the body of knowledge by providing an expanded understanding of the impacts of social and digital media on the complex adaptive systems at work in organization-public relationships.
and by offering a complexity leadership theory/relational leadership theory frame for leading PR and communications in the age of online communications.

**Research on Building Organization-Public Relationships via Social and Digital Media**

The very name of the field of public relations implies that the industry cares about relationships with the public (Sweetser, 2010). As a management function, PR exists to create relationships and earn public understanding and acceptance (Griswold & Griswold, cited in Watson, 2012). Relationships between organizations and their stakeholders are at the heart of public relations and organizational effectiveness theory (Grunig, Grunig, & Ehling, 1992).

An organization’s good name has value as a reputational “reservoir of good will,” that can help the organization withstand crisis situations (Jones, Jones, & Little, 2000). The advent of the Internet as a communications channel in the mid-1990s transformed business communications and shifted the process by which organizations build relationships with stakeholders including customers, shareholders, business partners, regulators, government officials, and employees.

CEOs surveyed by the Arthur W. Page Society (2007), a professional association for senior PR and corporate communications executives, said that the intersection of technology, globalization, and the empowerment of new stakeholders has resulted in increased transparency needs and has spawned the most critical communications challenge for companies in the 21st century. Changes in the external environment in which organizations operate are challenging the 20th-century corporate operating model and causing organizational changes in which traditionally hierarchical, monolithic, multinational institutions become more horizontal, networked, and globally integrated (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007). Alongside the shifts in the corporate operating model, communicators likewise have experienced a shift in their operating model.
This shift to online relationship building has caused significant changes in how communicators approach and evaluate their organizational communications. With these changes in how organizations and communicators interact with stakeholders, PR/communications leaders seek to measure whether their organizations’ online interactions to build relationships with their stakeholders are effective. Researchers have taken varied approaches to assessing social and digital media within the context of organization-public relationships. One perspective has involved investigating the efficacy of social technologies with regard to enhancing work processes for the employee stakeholder group to determine the benefits conferred to organizations by social tools (Bughin et al., 2011). Another perspective has sought to identify what stakeholders seek to gain from their engagement with organizations on social media (McCorkindale et al., 2013). Researchers have sought to assess the effectiveness of online channels in: delivering business value to organizations (Culnan et al., 2010); engaging in important conversations with and enhance understanding of stakeholders (DiStaso et al., 2011); and positively influencing the attitudes of stakeholders about CEOs (Hwang, 2012). Other researchers have sought to identify linkages between an organization’s level of activity on various social media platforms and the quality of its relationships with its publics (Saffer, Sommerfeldt, & Taylor, 2013) and to assess the ability of an organization’s PR practitioners to influence online conversations about the organization through specific social tools (Smith, 2011).

Research has indicated that social media can be an effective tool for building relationships with stakeholders. For example, organizations that engage in transparent communication with stakeholders through social media can build trust as a means of improving their relationships with key publics to counteract the decline in public trust in corporate America (DiStaso & Bortree, 2012). DiStaso and Bortree (2012) noted that it is widely understood that
social media can help organizations increase transparency, which includes behaviors such as communicating company information that helps others understand what the company does and why. They found that 81.3% of PR professionals responding to a survey of how organizations use social media to communicate transparently indicated that they used social media to communicate about what their organizations did and why. With these studies, researchers have investigated the new communications tools and channels from a range of perspectives. However, investigators to date have not yet offered a comprehensive approach to assessing whether organizational stakeholders are being engaged effectively through digital and social media communications channels from the perspectives of both the organization and the stakeholder. Assessing how communicators as well as stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of online tools in engaging organizational stakeholders in a single study would benefit professional PR practitioners by offering insight into relationship building from the perspectives of multiple parties in the relationship.

**Defining the Environment**

The environment in which organizations interact and communicate with their stakeholders today is vastly different from the situation five or even 10 years ago. According to InternetLiveStats, more than four billion people in the world are on the Internet; in the United States, approximately 312 million individuals, or about 88.5% of the American population, access the Internet (Clement, 2019). In its *Social Media Update 2018*, Pew Research Center (2018a) found that 73% of adults in the United States who are online now use YouTube and 68% use Facebook. Figure 2.1 presents Pew’s statistics for all the major current social media platforms.
GSMA, a mobile industry association, estimates that more than five billion people worldwide used a mobile phone in 2017, reaching more than two-thirds of the global population; half of those mobile phones are smartphones used to access the Internet. Pew Research Center (2018b) found that approximately three out of four adults in the United States were using at least one social networking site. Facebook is the dominant social networking platform in terms of number of users and has the highest engagement levels, with 74% of users visiting the site at least once a day. Figure 2.2 presents the statistics for the other most popular platforms.
Figure 2.2. U.S. 2018 daily usage of popular social media sites. Copyright 2018 by Pew Research Center.

Organizations face new challenges in the social media age, and these challenges call for new approaches to business communications (Arthur W. Page Society, 2012); the Internet has given the public unprecedented access to information, and this shift has created a need for PR and communications professionals to move away from the old professional paradigms (Ihator, 2001). Businesses and institutions are operating in an environment in which the emergence of a new digital information commons, the reality of a global economy, and the appearance and empowerment of myriad new stakeholders have changed how corporations communicate and build relationships with stakeholders (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007). Organizations’ global reputations and even their identities are at risk in the current Internet environment owing to the forces of the digital network revolution, global integration, and stakeholder empowerment (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007).
The challenge for PR professionals is to move from mass communications in order to identify and understand the individuals as well as the stakeholder groups and segments who influence the public perception of the organization (Arthur W. Page Society, 2012). In the information age, it is not enough for organizations to internally make meaning of stakeholder interactions; a critical component in the current environment is for PR and communications leaders and organizations to engage with the constituents that interact with the organization and provide input and feedback. In these interactions with stakeholders on social media sites, organizations should converse openly with stakeholders without ulterior motives (DiStaso & McCorkindale, 2013).

The act of engagement offers communications leaders and their organizations a platform for checking and verifying the internally constructed meaning of the feedback coming from those who interact with the organization. Organization leaders need to develop mechanisms for subsystems to engage proactively and speedily with stakeholders to validate meaning and establish constructive relationships that incorporate stakeholder feedback as a means for moving the organization forward. However, measuring organizational communications effectiveness in building stakeholder relationships is frustrated by the lack of research on whether digital and social media communications channels are engaging stakeholders effectively and simultaneously achieving organizational goals for building relationships with their audiences. With this study, I aimed to test communications theory by assessing how both the professional communicators and employees overall at one organization perceived the effectiveness of the company’s social and digital media platforms in organization-public relationship building from the viewpoints of both the organization and the stakeholders.
Assessing Social Media Communications Effectiveness by Measuring Relationships

Organization executives have long sought to measure the effectiveness of their companies’ communications. According to Watson (2012), measurement practices in public relations were evident at the beginning of the 20th century, when “public relations” began to be widely used to describe sets of communication activities (p. 390). The advent of organizational communications via social media has extended the efforts of professional communicators to measure effectiveness into this new realm and has challenged them to redefine how success is measured (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007).

Researchers have suggested a range of options for measuring communications success in the new social and digital media paradigm. Watson (2012) proposed measuring success in terms of creating value and dialogue among organizational stakeholders. Culnan et al. (2010) proposed measuring success as a function of the growth in the size, interactivity, and engagement of the organization’s stakeholder community. Reitz (2012) proposed success measures that take into account the achievement of four functions, one of which is the organization’s opportunity to build relationships with its publics. The Arthur W. Page Society (2012) viewed success through the lens of spurring organizational stakeholders to action and advocacy on the organization’s behalf.

These viewpoints offer different ways of measuring organizational relationship building through social and digital media, but they share a perception that is predicated on the organizational view of the relationship. As outlined above, organization leaders have historically sought to build relationships with stakeholders to advance the organization’s goals; for example, organizational relationships with consumers often are intended to ultimately increase the sales of an organization’s products, while relationships with shareholders often have the goal of
increasing ownership in the organization’s stock, and relationships with employees are intended to foster employee engagement and, ultimately, productivity for the organization. Relationships, however, are not one-sided; they cannot be assessed based on solely observable or solely subjective aspects. In the literature across a number of disciplines including interpersonal relations, family relations, group dynamics, labor-management relations, counselor-client psychotherapy relations, organizational studies, and international relations, researchers define relationships in terms of both behavioral (i.e., observable) and cognitive (i.e., subjective) elements (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997). Stated differently, “relationship” can be defined both subjectively based on the individual viewpoints of the participants in the relationship and objectively via observations of interactions that occur between the participants (Duck, 1973; Gelso & Carter, 1994; Surra & Ridley, 1991). Relationships can also be defined as combining participants’ subjective perceptions with independent qualities (Broom et al., 1997).

**Research on Organization-Public Relationship Building and Measurement**

PR and communications researchers have referred to the multifaceted and multi-stage nature of relationship building. The goal of PR is first to build relationships between organizations and their publics and then to enhance those relationships over time in an ongoing manner, with the goal of building long-term stakeholder connections (Hon & Grunig, 1999). The relationship management perspective provides a theoretical framework for PR research that guides PR theory and practice, informs PR program evaluation, and allows PR practitioners to track relationship changes over time using quantitative evaluation methods (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999). Within the relationship management perspective, organizations can provide building blocks for relationships with the publics they serve by developing practices that
facilitate exchange, starting with awareness as the first condition of the organization-public relationship and progressing to dialogue (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999).

Grunig et al. (1992) highlighted reciprocity, trust, credibility, mutual legitimacy, openness, mutual satisfaction, and mutual understanding as the most important concepts for measuring strategic relationships, and later, Hon and Grunig (1999) noted the importance of measuring relationships in public relations; these authors stated that the fundamental goal of public relations is to build and then enhance ongoing or long-term relationships with an organization’s key constituencies. According to Hon and Grunig, PR effectiveness can best be measured by “changes in what people think, feel, and do” (p. 6). They found that relationship outcomes can best be measured by focusing on six components of the relationship: control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relationship, and communal relationship. The first four components are still widely used in PR research and measurement today; exchange relationship and communal relationship are not widely used today to measure relationship outcomes.

Kim (2001) proposed a scale for measuring public perceptions of organization-public relationships through the dimensions of public trust, commitment, community involvement, and reputation. According to Hon and Grunig (1999), PR professionals need a way to measure relationships as they develop and are maintained, and communications programs can be evaluated by measuring their effects and correlating them with the attributes of a good relationship. In this way, both process and outcome measures can be useful in evaluating the effectiveness of PR in relationship building. According to Hon and Grunig, PR researchers should measure relationships as seen or predicted by both parties – the organization and its publics; PR contributes to organization effectiveness because of its ability to foster positive
relationships as perceived by both parties (Huang, 2001). As those relationships are nurtured and maintained over time via communications and PR initiatives, they can be measured in terms of relationship attributes from the viewpoints of both the organization and its stakeholders (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

A central question of relationships is who defines them. Specifically, do the participants define the relationship subjectively or are there objective observations that can indicate the nature of relationships? This question is important for PR/communications practitioners. Broom et al. (1997) noted that the definitions of relationships in the literature of several disciplines (including interpersonal relations, family relations, group dynamics, and labor-management relations) include both behavioral (i.e., observable) and cognitive (i.e., subjective) elements.

Examples of observable versus subjective measures of relationships abound. Surra and Ridley (1991) considered observable “moment-to-moment interaction” a measure of the degree of a relationship (p. 37). Duck (1973) argued that social relationships must be defined within the context of the individual’s viewpoint; Duck (1986) also stated that relationships as a concept may not be definable in empirically observable ways. Cappella (1991) argued that understanding relationships requires studying patterns of message interchange between partners in relationships and how they experience those relationships.

Gelso and Carter (1994) defined counselor-client relationships as both the feelings and the attitudes of the counseling participants and the ways they expressed those feelings and attitudes (p. 297). Broom et al. (1997) summarized the state of relationship literature as follows:

Some scholars conceive of relationships as processes observed over time, whereas others define relationships as states that can be measured at a single point in time. Still others use combinations of processes and states to represent what they refer to as relationships. Likewise, some scholars define relationships as subjective reality; others as objective reality. The majority of literature reviewed for this study, however, employed notions of
relationships that combine subjective perceptions of the participants with qualities of relationships independent of the participants. (p. 92)

No widely accepted model exists for measuring the multidimensional, multi-stage relationship-building process that occurs between organizations and their audiences through social and digital media, taking into account both the organization’s and the stakeholder’s views. A unique opportunity exists to investigate the intersection of stakeholders, communications channels, and engagement/messaging to determine how professional communicators and their organizations’ stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of social and digital media communications. Research on relationship building and community building includes proposals that relationship measures incorporate subjective perceptions of the parties in the relationship as well as evaluations of stakeholder/audience views of the effectiveness of engagement in building relationships with organizations.

Scholars and practitioners need new approaches to measuring the relationship-building process that occurs between organizations and stakeholders via social and digital media; these new approaches should combine quantitative and qualitative methods of measuring organizational communications effectiveness (Khang et al., 2012). Understanding how stakeholders are engaged and affected by interacting with organizations through social and digital media has become the goal (Rybalco & Seltzer, 2010; Saffer et al., 2013). As Watson (2012) noted, perhaps the greater use of social media within public relations will move practitioners and evaluators toward measurements that indicate creation of value and dialogue. Firms need to assess their social media applications by measuring the growth in the size, interactivity, and engagement of the community (Culnan et al., 2010), including measuring the opportunity to build relationships with publics, which is one of four functions that organizations can utilize social media to achieve within an open systems approach to PR (Reitz, 2012). With
this study, I have addressed the needs of PR and communications practitioners by determining how these communicators can measure social and digital media communications through the lenses of stakeholder and organizational evaluation of engagement effectiveness.

**Method**

What method(s) should communications and PR researchers and professionals use to assess social and digital media effectiveness in organizational relationship building? Bentz and Shapiro (1998) stated that “the method is a way of answering a question by selecting, approaching, and making sense of information and fitting it into a wider intellectual context”; they also noted that the choice of the research method is a key decision for the researcher given that different methods are best suited for answering different questions (p. 87). Stake (1995) noted that distinctions between quantitative and qualitative methods are a matter of emphasis because both methods are in fact mixtures: Qualitative studies feature recognizing and enumerating differences in amount, while quantitative studies feature natural-language descriptions and the researcher’s interpretations (p. 36). Khang et al. (2012) noted the need for scholars to develop new concepts and theories for understanding novel aspects of social media that cannot be exhaustively explained using the established knowledge structure, and they argued for a balance of quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches to provide greater insight into social media.

In seeking to measure the effectiveness of social and digital media in building organization-public relationships, a blend of quantitative and qualitative methodologies can offer a richer view than the use of either method alone. A blend of methodologies allows measurement and observation to help develop knowledge, while also allowing for interpreting subjective insights into the relationship-building process between organizations and their
stakeholders. A combination of both research methods also allows for investigating the question of social and digital media effectiveness from different perspectives, leading to a more robust understanding of the issue and of the various factors that affect how organizations and their audiences assess their relationships. Scholarly research concerning systems thinking, complexity leadership theory, and relational leadership theory can inform communications leaders who are navigating this new environment that requires leadership across individuals, groups, and large social systems.

Research on Organizational Communications and Systems Theory

Communications leaders in the 21st-century information age need to develop a capacity for creativity, flexibility, and speed not just within their organizations or units but also across systems, some of which are amorphous and difficult to define. This capacity is necessary for leaders to address the needs and expectation of various stakeholders, to influence outcomes, and to continuously assess the effectiveness of their actions.

Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, and Smith (1994) described a system as “a whole whose elements ‘hang together’ because they continually affect each other over time and operate toward a common purpose” (p. 90). Senge et al.’s systemic structure consists of patterns of interrelationships among hundreds of factors including people, processes, attitudes, perceptions, decision-making practices. In Senge et al.’s concept, the structures are often invisible, constructed over time as a result of the conscious and unconscious choices made by the people in the system. Systems thinking emphasizes a view of the whole and not just the parts, in order to discern the interrelationships and patterns at work “behind the curtain.”

Goldstein (2008) speaks of a system as an entity that is coordinated across its part and has a boundary separating it from its environment (p. 20); using this definition, an organization and
its stakeholders can be seen as a system. Organizations and their stakeholders are engaged in relationships that are unique to the specific organization and the specific group of stakeholders with an interest in that organization. Communications between organizations and their publics are coordinated within the boundary of communications channels that are associated with an organization and used by that organization and its stakeholders to share information and build relationships. Reitz (2012) stated that organizations, individuals, and the media can each be seen as societal subsystems wherein as one subsystem changes (i.e., individuals adopt social media), and another subsystem is affected (i.e., organizations) and the system as a whole (i.e., organizations and their stakeholders) adjust and adapt in order to achieve continuity and order (i.e., homeostasis).

Systems theory is useful in informing PR and communications leadership of social and digital media communications in building organization-public relationships. Systems theory aims to address the complexity in which 21st-century leaders and organizations function. By encouraging personal mastery and the ability of all members to develop themselves toward the goals and purposes they choose, and by focusing on forces and interrelationships shaping systems, systems theory empowers individuals to develop themselves as part of a larger collective and supports more holistic and egalitarian approaches inside the organization to foster interdependence that minimizes top-down power dynamics.

Systems theory is especially applicable to PR/communications leadership theory in a globally interconnected world given the view of a whole whose constituents are engaged in interactions that have mutual effect, one on the other, over time. The concept of common purpose at work in systems theory is instructive for PR and communications practitioners seeking to represent stakeholder benefits as a core consideration for businesses and corporations.
The goal is adaptation on the part of the organization to think globally about its stakeholders and to behave in ways that provide mutual benefits to the organization and to the public.

Increasingly, community building is seen as a desired outcome of PR and corporate communications. Organizations that incorporate community building into their social media initiatives can gain business value; consequently, organizations should take deliberate actions to build communities and learn from their interactions with stakeholders on social media (Culnan et al., 2010). The concept of community underpins PR theory.

With the explosion of social and digital media, communicators are facing a new paradigm in building relationships with organizational stakeholders. Smith (2012) defined a relationship as “a system of linkage, featuring overlapping interest, and relationship stakes and stakeholders” (p. 840). Technology and globalization have changed how professional communicators view the idea of publics, which has made the concept of “relationship” even more important for 21st-century public relations theory (Valentini et al., 2012).

Today, this relationship-building process frequently occurs online, and the relationships between businesses and their publics in the 21st century increasingly transpire via social networking and online communities (Valentini et al. 2012). Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) defined complex adaptive systems as open and evolving entities in which the agents are dynamically interrelated and bonded by a common purpose or outlook (p. 187). According to those authors, in complex adaptive systems, agents, events, and ideas bump into each other unpredictably, generating change (p. 193). Organization-public relationships can be seen as complex adaptive systems wherein the organization and its stakeholders are active and connected in the relationship and are engaged in the relationship for mutual benefit. With this study, I
sought to explore these relationships and the value derived from those them based on the viewpoints of the organization and the stakeholders.

According to Valentini et al. (2012), the unprecedented social, political, economic, and cultural changes that have evolved rapidly in this century gave rise to a global society in which the world’s citizens have become fragmented into global tribes (p. 874). Valentini et al. stated that this evolution precipitated the need for organizations to realize the futility of trying to manage or control publics and necessitated a shift to a need for community building that includes the organization in concert with its publics (p. 874). Wakefield (2000) noted that globalization caused organizational reputations to become increasingly subject to the effects of culture, politics, socioeconomics, and other factors that become more complex in the international arena than in domestic contexts (p. 59). Smudde (2005) stated that as interconnected participants in an environment, organizations must consider their own actions and plans for action in light of their constituencies and other organizations (p. 36). In this light, according to Valentini et al. (2012), the role of public relations becomes helping organizations and publics build community where dialogue and mutual understanding can take place (p. 874). Specifically, in this 21st-century global society, the authors see a role for PR practitioners to help organizations and their community members discover common interests, overcome alienation, find security and protection, promote progress through shared projects, and foster relationships (p. 875). Systems theory can help guide PR and communications leaders in these efforts by offering a framework in which leaders can take a holistic view of the organization-public relationship that encompasses the shared goals of the organization and its stakeholders. Systems theory can help PR/communications leaders take into account the complexity and lack of top-down bureaucracy evident in these relationships in the age of social and digital communications.
Public Relations and Communications Leadership and Complexity Leadership Theory

The spread of social and digital media has made the organization-public system of communications and relationship building more complex and more difficult to navigate. Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2008) define complexity leadership theory as a framework for leadership in organizations or organizational units (p. 196). The framework for complexity leadership theory presented by Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) aims to foster the dynamics of complex adaptive systems while simultaneously enabling control structures to coordinate formal organizations by integrating complexity dynamics and bureaucracy (p. 198).

Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) presented complexity leadership theory as a movement away from the top-down, bureaucratic view of leadership and its focus on predictability and control toward a framework that views leadership as interactive, evolving, and emergent within a specific contextual and historical frame (p. vii). Complexity leadership theory sought to incorporate the inherent complexity of humans and their sophisticated systems of being and interacting. In complexity leadership theory and in today’s organizational communications, agents within systems are open and evolving entities that are dynamically interrelated, and these agents cause “energy” that, as Plowman and Duchon (2008) described, grows and permeates quickly throughout the system to engender change; today, stakeholders communicate dynamically and instantaneously with organizations and expect the same dynamic, instantaneous response in return. Successfully navigating these expectations is central to the ability of today’s PR and communications leaders to effectively lead themselves as well as their organizations through the “permanent whitewater” described by Vaill (1996). Doing so first requires the flexibility and adaptability of the leader.
The opportunity for communications leaders is both personal and professional. Adopting a flexible thinking posture will allow leaders to be open to considering the different viewpoints of various stakeholders and viewing those perspectives as potentially valuable for the leader as an individual and for the organization being led. However, this flexible thinking posture will likely not be easy for PR/communications leaders grappling with the day-to-day pressures to move the organization forward in a predictable manner and working within the constraints of set organizational strategies and goals. Current organizational dynamics simply do not leave much room for leaders and organizations to change their minds and adapt quickly – or even slowly – to new concepts. Yet this capacity is essential for leaders and organizations to develop the nimbleness necessary to function effectively in the information age.

PR and communications leaders can employ complexity leadership theory to support the view that corporations and publics are bonded together by a common purpose or outlook, i.e., the good of the community in which organizations and their stakeholders coexist. This is especially true for the relationship between an organization and its employees, who share the same local communities where the organization operates and the employees live and work. Like the system itself, organizations, and, by extension, their communications leaders, need to have a holding space within which to contain the complexity of the organization’s impact on the global environment, as well as the capability to integrate new and evolving information with leaders’ worldviews and the organization’s goals. Then they must adapt the individual and organizational views to accommodate the new information and envision ways to accomplish needed change. This synthesis and integration are needed to align corporate interests with the best interests of stakeholders.
Public Relations and Communications Leadership and Relational Leadership Theory

Uhl-Bien (2006) described relational leadership theory as a framework for leadership as a social influence process through which emergent coordination (e.g., evolving social order) and change (e.g., new approaches, values, attitudes, behaviors, ideologies) are constructed and produced (p. 654). In an environment of ubiquitous communications and rapid access to information, this capacity is necessary for enabling PR and communications leaders to address the needs and expectation of various stakeholders, develop agility in their thinking and actions, influence outcomes, and assess the effectiveness of their communications.

Furthermore, communications leaders operate today in an environment in which the power dynamic between individuals and organizations has shifted. Eltantawy and Wiest (2011) noted that new communication technologies—especially social media via the Internet—have become important resources for mobilizing collective action and for the subsequent creation, organization, and implementation of social movements around the world (p. 1208). This phenomenon of disruptive change through global social and digital media is evident globally across politics and governments, as well as across corporations and businesses and virtually every kind of institution.

In recent years, many organizations have established communications functions focused on corporate social responsibility; from sustainability to ethical sourcing to environmental conservation, business and corporations are taking steps to implement strategies that benefit not just the organization but also the world. Yet progress is slow, and corporate power is increasingly concentrating economic power and political power in the hands of a few. According to Bloomberg, the top 0.01% of families in the United States – 16,000 families – possess $6 trillion in assets, equal to the wealth of the bottom two-thirds of Americans. Such
wealth inequality is now regularly talked about by politicians and the news media as being a destabilizing force for the country.

The Internet has led to political upheaval around the world, and equal access to information, while not yet translating into equal access to economic power; corporate organizational systems are structured to maintain their privileges. Organizations and the PR leaders who communicate via messages, interactions, and relationships with the public on their behalf have struggled in recent years to address this new reality. Relational leadership theory offers communications leaders insights into navigating a world in which an organization’s every word and move are observed, reported, dissected, and judged by individuals, groups, and other organizations with newfound power to affect the organization’s reputation and relationships with its stakeholders. In the rapidly moving and ever-changing environment powered by instant access to information, organizational communications increasingly need to be responsive and effective in meeting the needs of stakeholders and achieving balance in the organization-stakeholder relationship system. With multiple rapidly evolving systems at work every day in organizational communications, PR and communications leaders are adapting to deal with varied constituencies that have different and sometimes conflicting goals and priorities that affect the organization. Effecting leadership within such a system is critical.

Increasingly, corporate leaders are being called upon to view the organization and its interests within the context of broader societal interests. Starck and Kruckeberg (2003) noted that PR professionals have an obligation to carry out their professional responsibilities by recognizing that the most important corporate stakeholder is society itself (p. 29). Kruckeberg and Vujnovic (2005) then argued that it is through community building that public relations (and public diplomacy) best serves society as well as its organizations, up to and including nations (p.
The authors also noted the “immense importance” for PR theory and practice to respect and appreciate the so-called general public as the foundation for a healthy functioning society (p. 124). This viewpoint represents a change from the traditional stance of PR and communications in that it prioritizes respect and appreciation over influence and control in terms of the goals of organizational communications. It also advocates for a predominant broad general public/societal view of organizational stakeholders rather than the narrower existing view of stakeholders (e.g., customers, shareholders, employees) based on the organization’s self-interests.

These calls for a broader societal view of organizational interests extend beyond U.S. shores and beyond just the business context. On the international relations front, Kruckeberg and Vujnovic (2005) argued that U.S. public diplomacy must be reexamined and reconceptualized as a heuristic construct that adopts a new model of public diplomacy (p. 303). They also noted that this new American diplomacy model must be grounded in the two-way symmetrical and community-building models of public relations rather than on existing diplomacy models that resemble marketing and propaganda (p. 303).

For the past two decades, as globalization rose, PR and communications researchers have been predicting the change in the profession that is now squarely upon us. Kruckeberg (1995) stated the need for communications professionals, facing an increasingly diverse multicultural and international/global “public,” to have better multicultural understanding to communicate not only with those from other lands but also with people who are “different from us within our own geographic locales” (p. 37). This acknowledgement that cultural differences should be respected and even embraced suggests a need for new approaches that incorporate diverse thinking about the broader societal and cultural effects of organizational actions and policies.
According to Kruckeberg and Vujnovic (2005), Western models of public relations center the organization and its interests at the hub from which the “spokes” of an organization’s communication and relationships radiate outward to satellites of stakeholders; in the new paradigm, the organization is no longer at the center but is only one part of the social system. From this viewpoint, there is an opportunity for PR and communications leaders to draw on relational leadership theory to help point the way forward.

Uhl-Bien (2006) posited that the definition of relational leadership as a social influence process through which emergent coordination and change are constructed and produced was applicable to both entity (which are focused on attributes of individuals engaged in interpersonal relationships) and relational (focused on leadership as a process of social construction) perspectives of relational leadership (p. 668). The framework for relational leadership theory Uhl-Bien (2006) presented aimed to addresses the question of how people work together to define their relationships as well as how they collectively “keep things moving” and work together to become more conscious influences on the structure rather than just being influenced by the structure (p. 168). Relational leadership theory focuses on how leadership relationships are produced by social interactions – including individual internal processes and individual relational skills contributing to leadership – as well as how relational interactions contribute to the emergence of social order, i.e., how repeated human interactions result in multiple small changes that cause organizational change. Uhl-Bien (2006) presented relational leadership theory as a framework for viewing relationships from the outcome perspective in terms of how leadership relationships are produced, as well as from the action-oriented perspective in terms of how relational dynamics lead to organizing social structures. The theory posits a rich,
interdependent leadership and organizational view that sees leadership in terms of and focuses on its social interactive aspects and the emergent quality of organizational change and development.

Relational leadership theory and communications theory share a view that relationships are critical to the new paradigm for organizational communications leadership. Today, stakeholders’ relationships with organizations and their leaders can be varied and disparate, and these disparities test the traditional understanding of PR and communications leaders in terms of how to lead themselves and their organizations effectively; they also demand new ways of seeing, thinking, and knowing. Communications leaders need to develop the ability to inhabit leadership roles in an environment where stakeholders increasingly have a voice in the relationship with the organization.

The concept of relational dynamics influencing social structures is useful in considering the role that the Internet has played thus far in effecting societal and political change around the world and likely will continue to play in the future. By incorporating an outcome-based view of relationships with stakeholders globally, corporations and their PR leaders can better focus on the broader impacts of their organizations’ actions worldwide.

**Public Relations and Communications Leadership and Employee Audiences**

The value of employees as ambassadors and advocates for their companies is widely acknowledged. Because of their inside knowledge, employees are viewed as credible sources of information about their organizations (Agresta & Bonin, 2011). In the 2018 *Edelman Trust Barometer*, employees were more trusted than CEOs (Edelman, 2018a; see Figure 2.3) and that employees should be involved in their organizations’ social media activities (Edelman, 2018b; see Figure 2.4). Employees are one of the most important publics for organizations to
successfully engage through social and digital media and a primary audience for assessing the effectiveness of an organization’s social and digital media communications.

**Figure 2.3.** Ratings of employee believability over CEOs by country. Copyright 2018 by Daniel J. Edelman Holdings Inc. Used with permission.

**Figure 2.4.** Worldwide views that employees should have a voice. Copyright 2018 by Daniel J. Edelman Holdings Inc. Used with permission.
Reflection

In the 21st-century information age, PR and communications leaders within organizations are challenged to find new ways of engaging direct and indirect constituencies. Current literature concerning systems thinking, complex adaptive theory, and relational leadership theory offers some guidance for communicating in this new environment that requires leadership across individuals, groups, and large social, societal, and global systems.

Globalization and global interconnectedness, especially as they pertain to U.S. businesses and corporations, have ushered in an environment in which business has a more wide-ranging effect on society than ever before. On one hand, business depends on global financial and consumer markets to survive and thrive. On the other hand, societies and citizens around the world view business as having a responsibility not just for profits but also for supporting and contributing to the greater good. Companies and the PR and communications leaders who represent them in the 21st century are navigating an increasingly diverse group of internal and external stakeholders, whether employees, shareholders, government officials, citizens, or others, domestically and dispersed around the globe. Differences communications professionals are navigating include not only differences in race, class, nationality, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation but also diversity of thought, ideas, morals, and values.

In this new environment, PR leaders are increasingly faced with supporting internal as well as external stakeholders in seeking out new ways of engaging and working together to address each individual’s interests and concerns as well as those of the organization and the broader society. The opportunity for PR/communications leaders is to effectively engage with stakeholders in the information age in a way that increases the capacity for the organization and
the overall system to create and grow a sense of community and shared goals and to deliver benefits not just to the organization but to all of its stakeholders.

For today’s organizations and their PR and communications leaders, the challenge is to address the needs and expectations of various stakeholders, influence outcomes, and continuously assess the effectiveness of their organizations in terms of the benefit to all stakeholders. In an environment of shifting roles and alliances and often hidden interrelationships and impacts of individuals and organizations, communications leaders need to develop agility in their thinking and actions while establishing and maintaining personal and organizational values that achieve mutual benefits for organizations and their publics. They must learn to more effectively represent the holistic view of the organization, with mindfulness toward not just the organization’s view of itself but the public’s view as well, both of the organization and of the role that the organization can and should play as an active part of society.

As Valentini et al. (2012) reported, the concept of “publics” has been altered as a consequence of both technology and globalization (p. 875), and the concept of “relationship” becomes even more central for 21st-century PR theory (p. 876). Kruckeberg (1995) expected the changes resulting from this more global, networked, interconnected, and diverse environment to ultimately benefit PR as a critically needed professional communication specialization within the global information milieu, making the 21st century “the century of public relations” (p. 37). Indeed, the author stated that more than many other professionals, PR practitioners must predict and consider the impacts of technologically driven changes in communication in order to prepare themselves accordingly as professional communicators (p. 38).

PR and communications leaders are in a brave new world in which we can positively affect the well-being of our organizations and our publics by acting as ambassadors not just for
our organizations in the outside world but for the outside world within our organizations.
Viewing the challenges through systems, relational leadership, and complexity leadership theories can positively affect how we as communicators play this role of mediator between the organizations and stakeholders that we represent.

**Implications for the Research Study**

Based on this literature review, research is needed to assess the impacts of social and digital media on organizational communications and organization-public relationship building from the standpoint of both the organization and its stakeholders, including employees. Scholarship addressing how PR leaders can apply systems theory, complexity leadership theory, and relational leadership theory to their leadership of these new communications channels can help integrate the assessment of social and digital media effectiveness with the leadership of organizational communications in the information age. Communications leaders will benefit from a quantitative and qualitative assessment of social and digital media effectiveness that is situated within a leadership framework for navigating the complexity inherent in organizational communications conducted through online media for the purpose of building organization-public relationships.

In Chapter III, I detail the methodology for my research study and the rationale behind using quantitative and qualitative data to answer my research questions.
Chapter III: Methodology

In Chapter III I describe the study design and methodology, including the logistical details of how I addressed the research questions. This was a three-phase mixed-methods research study to explore the topic of the effectiveness of social and digital media communications on organization-public relationship building with employees. The study comprised a pre-intervention survey with both closed- and open-ended questions, a planned intervention, and a post-intervention participant survey as well as a communications staff focus group to reflect on how the intervention worked to accomplish the stated goal.

Phase 1 consisted of designing and administering the pre-intervention social and digital media survey with closed- and open-ended questions. I designed the survey to assess social and digital media use and engagement among one organization’s employees as well as the employees’ perceptions of the organization in terms of the communications concepts of

- generating trust, i.e., increasing employees’ confidence that the organization is trustworthy;
- demonstrating control mutuality, i.e., demonstrating a coequal relationship between the organization and the employee;
- demonstrating commitment to employees, i.e., showing employees that they should spend their time and energy maintaining a relationship with the organization and demonstrating that the organization spends its resources to maintain a relationship with employees;
- generating satisfaction for the employee, i.e., making sure employees feel good about their relationship with the organization); and
• promoting communal relationships, i.e., community involvement/building relationships with the community.

I also solicited post-intervention narrative responses in an internal focus group setting with communications professionals who post social and digital media communications on behalf of the company, referred to here as the communicators. I asked these PR and communications professionals semi-structured questions about how they perceived the effectiveness of the organization’s social and digital media and the intervention.

Research Method

Bentz and Shapiro (1998) refer to Western society as “a society that defines itself as based on knowledge” (p. 2). Within this society and this definition, constructing knowledge is a key concern: How do we come to know the things we know? What are the rules and agreed-upon norms for creating knowledge? How do we validate new knowledge?

In the case of research methods, Bentz and Shapiro (1998) define methods as ways of understanding and interpreting data (p. 83) and as means of producing generally valid and reliable knowledge (p. 87). According to the authors, “the method is a way of answering a question by selecting, approaching, and making sense of information and fitting it into a wider intellectual context” (p. 87). Bentz and Shapiro go on to state that the choice of the research method is a key decision for the researcher because different methods are more or less suitable for answering different questions (p. 87).

According to McMillan and Wergin (2005), research has three unique characteristics: It is systematic in that it relies on formal processes to investigate questions, collect and analyze data, and interpret findings, and those formal processes must be able to be independently verified by other researchers; it is rigorous in that it questions the observations made and the conclusions
Creswell (2003) noted that quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches to research are framed by different philosophical assumptions about knowledge claims; different strategies of inquiry evident in different research procedures; and different methods of collecting, analyzing, and writing about data (p. 3). As Creswell stated, “the knowledge claims, the strategies, and the method all contribute to a research approach that tends to be more quantitative, qualitative, or mixed” (p. 18).

As I mentioned earlier, Stake (1995) noted that distinctions between quantitative and qualitative methods were a matter of emphasis because both methods are mixtures. Stake drew attention to the three major differences in emphases in the two methods as between explanation and understanding as the purpose of the research, discovering knowledge and constructing knowledge, and focusing on a personal versus impersonal role for the researcher (p. 37). Stake described the differences in qualitative and quantitative inquiry as the difference in searching for happenings versus searching for causes (p. 37).

Creswell (2003) defined a quantitative approach as one in which the researcher primarily uses cause-and-effect thinking, specific variables, hypotheses and questions, measurement and observation, and the test of theories for developing knowledge; employs experiments and surveys as strategies of inquiry; and collects data on predetermined instruments that yield statistical data (p. 18). He defined a qualitative approach as one in which the researcher primarily uses socially and historically constructed multiple meanings of individual experiences to develop a theory or pattern to develop knowledge; narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, or case studies as strategies of inquiry; and open-ended,
emerging data to develop themes as the method. Creswell defined a mixed-methods approach as basing knowledge claims on pragmatic consequence-oriented, problem-centered, and pluralistic grounds; using inquiry strategies that involve collecting data either simultaneously or sequentially to best understand research problems; and gathering both numeric and text data to represent both quantitative and qualitative information in the method (p.18).

Essentially, Bentz and Shapiro (1998) and Creswell (2003) make the same observation: different problems call for different research approaches. Creswell (2003) stated that problems needing answers to questions such as which interventions are most useful or which factors lead to the most likely outcomes lend themselves to quantitative approaches (p. 22), while problems that seek to answer questions about issues that have been little studied and are not well understood lend themselves to qualitative approaches (p. 22).

While researchers decide on different methods for their studies within an approach framework, they do not decide on their methods in a vacuum. Thompson (2001) stated it simply: “Research is influenced at every stage by an individual’s background and value system, as well as by the inquiry process itself” (p. 154). Friere (1998) noted that, “Whoever really observes, does so from a given point of view” (p. 22). Furthermore, Creswell (2003) observed that personal experience plays into a researcher’s design selection.

**Rationale for Using a Before-and-After Study Design**

My selection of a before-and-after study design reflects my desire to understand current social and digital media usage among my organization’s employees both in general and specifically as it relates to interacting and communicating with the organization. It also reflects my desire to understand whether awareness of the organization’s social and digital media communications would affect employees’ perceptions of the organization. As Cronbach and
Furby (1970) noted, at its core a one-group study design seeks to learn whether an intervention produces significant change or to describe the magnitude of the effect of the intervention (p. 78). The defining characteristics of a pretest-posttest design are baseline measurements before the intervention and a time lapse between the pretest and posttest (Bonate, 2000). As Bonate (2000) noted, a limitation of this study design, which lacks a control group, is that if there is a difference between pretest and posttest scores, it is impossible to determine whether the change was due to unreliability of the measuring instrument or an actual change in the individual (p. 1).

Nevertheless, while a before-and-after study like this one cannot definitively link the intervention to changes in employees’ perceptions, it can provide insights useful to PR and communications professionals. By matching respondents to the pretest and posttest, and controlling for the “person effect,” I hoped to uncover intervention outcomes with meaningful insights. I also hoped the before-and-after study design would yield results that inform future research into social and digital media effectiveness.

**Rationale for Using a Mixed-Method Study**

Mixed methods refers to taking two different approaches, quantitative and qualitative, to the nature of knowledge. Small (2011) remarked on the emergence of integrated multiple analytical techniques in recent years combining approaches from two different paradigms in an inherently complementary manner to yield a more comprehensive picture of a problem than is possible from one perspective alone (p. 76). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) noted that a tenet of mixed-methods research is that researchers should mindfully create designs that effectively answer their research questions (p. 20). Given the stated research goal to investigate, in a single study, the viewpoints of the various parties in the organization-employee relationship and generate percentage data from a wide group of employees as well as more in-depth information
from the communicator narratives, a mixed-methods design was advisable. I aimed with this approach for what Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989) referred to as complementarity, wherein qualitative and quantitative methods are used to measure overlapping but also different facets of a phenomenon, yielding an enriched, elaborated understanding of that phenomenon (p. 258). A quantitative survey was best suited to gather data from hundreds of employees, while a guided interview via focus group was preferable for gathering data from the small number of professionals in the organization who are responsible for posting to social media. This was a mixed-methods design in two ways. First, the survey instrument fielded to all employees included both closed- and open-ended questions, and second, a final focus group with the communicators added narrative meaning to the before-and-after study results and the value of the intervention.

The combined quantitative and qualitative methodology offered strengths and limitations when employed in this study. Specifically, the research study design derived logically from the need to better understand the effectiveness of social and digital media as communications tools by determining how organizations utilize these platforms in building and assessing relationships between the stakeholder and the study organization. The goal was to investigate, in a single study, how messages were shared and how the social and digital media affected employee usage and views of the organization. PR and communications leaders need to understand effectiveness across existing and emerging communications tools and channels; thus, I investigated how communications leaders use and assess social and digital media in organization-public relationship building.

Given the nature of the inquiry, I chose to combine a quantitative approach to understand the usefulness of an intervention and the impact of certain factors on outcomes with a qualitative
approach to explore in more depth employee thoughts on the company’s social and digital media initiatives. This mixed-methods approach facilitated knowledge building based on both quantitative and qualitative data.

**Study Design and Research Methods**

This was a mixed-methods study conducted in three phases. Phase 1 included a pretest before implementation of the intervention (see Appendix A for the employee recruitment emails for the pretest and intervention; Appendix B for the social media fair recruitment flyer; and Appendix C for the pretest survey). Phase 2 was the intervention (see Appendix D for the informational flyer handed out at the social media fair; Appendix E for the social media fair tee-shirt giveaway; and Appendix F for the educational emails sent to employees as part of the intervention). Phase 3 consisted of a posttest that included both closed- and open-ended questions as well as narrative feedback from the communications staff (see Appendix G for the employee recruitment email for the posttest survey; Appendix H for the posttest survey; and Appendix I for the focus group interview protocol used with the communicators).

**Research Questions**

RQ1: How do employees view this organization in general with respect to fostering five communications concepts before and after a social and digital media intervention?

RQ2: What social and digital media do employees use for any purpose as well as specifically to engage with the organization before and after the intervention?

RQ3: How do employees perceive the messages on the organization’s social and digital media sites with regard to the fostering five communications concepts before and after the intervention?
RQ4: How do the communicators, the PR/communications professionals who are responsible for this organization’s social and digital media communications, perceive the effectiveness of those communications tools in fostering the five communications concepts before and after the intervention?

The first research focus area centered on analyzing the effect of an intervention program to educate and inform employees about the organization’s social and digital media communications on employees’ perceptions of the organization as a whole based on any source of information in terms of generating trust, demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment to employees, generating satisfaction, and promoting communal relationships. The second question was to analyze employee use of social and digital media both for any purpose and to specifically to engage with the organization. The third question investigated the effect of the organization’s social and digital media sites on employees’ perceptions of the organization in terms of generating trust, demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment to employees, generating satisfaction, and promoting communal relationships. The fourth focus area centered on determining the PR and communications professionals’ perceptions of the survey findings and intervention. This research reflects the hypotheses that social and digital media intervention and education programs positively relate to improvements in the organization-public relationship with employees.

**Intervention Program**

The intervention goals were to help employees learn about numerous social and digital media platforms the organization used to communicate with its publics and to encourage employees to actively engage with the organization by following and/or liking its sites. The intervention was also designed to foster employee awareness of the organization’s messaging.
The intervention consisted of a four-week program conducted on site at the organization’s two large office sites as well as with the company’s remote employees. The primary feature was a social media fair. The Minneapolis, Minnesota, location for the fair was the canteen area, which is a large open area where employees regularly spend their lunch hours and break time, obtain free coffee and other hot beverages, purchase snacks and refreshments, and attend all-employee events such as town hall meetings and holiday dinner parties. The Mather, California, location for the fair was the Santa Catalina room where employees often congregate for all-hands meetings and events; the large table in the center of the canteen and several tables in the Santa Catalina room were outfitted with TV monitors and computers that the communicators manned. The social media fair featured the organization’s 40 social and digital media sites displayed on the monitors for employees to see, and other tables also manned by communicators held the tee-shirt and cookie giveaways. The communicators wore the tee shirts during the social media fair, and nearly all employees took a tee shirt at the fair. The communicators engaged employees during the fair to educate and inform them about the organization’s social and digital media platforms, including how to follow and like sites and the posted content. Managers encouraged employees during their regular staff meetings to attend the fair and ensured they had the time to do so. Employees also received a flyer on their desks or emailed to them in the case of remote employees; the flyer publicized and invited employees to the fair (see Appendix D).

A variety of social media sites were exhibited at the social media fair, including the organization’s Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Instagram sites; across the parent organization and the affiliate companies, approximately 40 social and digital media sites currently are active on these platforms. For example, both the ECMC Group parent company
and the ECMC Foundation affiliate have Twitter sites, as do each of the seven The College Place centers across the country as well as other affiliate sites; similarly, multiple parent and affiliate entities have separate presences on Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Instagram. Most of the sites were demonstrated to employees during the social media fair. In addition, every attendee at the fair received a flyer explaining all of the organization’s social and digital media sites (see Appendix D) and a tee-shirt listing the sites (see Appendix E).

The intervention program also incorporated three emails to employees throughout the intervention period reminding them to follow and like the organization’s sites and posts if they had not already done so and to visit and engage with the organization’s social channels sites often. Participation in the fair was open to all employees, and the emails went out to all employees; I verbally asked managers and executives during monthly leader meetings to encourage all employees to participate in the program (see Appendix I for the ECMC Group approval letter). Employees who attended the social media fair received tee shirts and cookies, and they were able to take photo booth pictures with the hashtag “#ECMCGroupie.” Most employees took the pictures in groups and some groups took multiple photos; when duplicates were eliminated, 24 photos were taken of groups of employees in the Minnesota photo booth and 33 photos were taken in the California booth. The employees were encouraged to share the photos on their social media sites and tag the organization when posting their photos. Table 3.1 below provides the complete social media intervention plan.

Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Message/Details</th>
<th>Audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 5 days before each social media fair | Pretest survey email | • Get ready for the Social Media Fair!  
• Your participation is | All Mather, CA, and Minneapolis, MN, employees |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Message/Details</th>
<th>Audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2 days before each fair       | Pretest survey email        | • Get ready for the Social Media Fair!  
• Your participation is important!  
• Please complete the attached survey before the fair!  
Then come to the fair for fun, treats, and a cool tee shirt! | All Mather, CA, and Minneapolis, MN, employees |
| Morning of each fair          | Pretest survey email        | • Today is the Social Media Fair!  
• Your participation is important!  
• Please complete the attached survey before the fair!  
Then come to the fair for fun, treats, and a cool tee shirt! | All Mather, CA, and Minneapolis, MN, employees |
| Day of Mather fair            | On-site details             | • Researcher arrived 8:00 am to oversee all set-up including equipment, giveaways, and refreshments  
• IT staff arrived 8:30 am to set up monitors and access to social/digital media sites  
• Photo booth staff arrived 9:00 am to set-up  
• Communications staff arrived 10 am to staff equipment  
• Staff engaged with | All Mather, CA, employees |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Message/Details</th>
<th>Audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>employees from 11 am – 2 pm</td>
<td>employees from 11 am – 2 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• IT staff arrived at 2:15 pm to break down equipment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Researcher oversaw all break-down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Population and Sample**

I included two different populations of participants in this study: employees who were PR or communications professionals (communicators) with responsibility for creating and disseminating social and digital media communications on behalf of the organization and all other persons who are employed by the organization; the eight communicators contributed to the study by facilitating the intervention. Most communicators also participated in a focus group interview after I had completed the intervention and summarized the study findings; the semi-structured focus group questions solicited their perceptions about the study findings, the effectiveness of the intervention, and their reflections on the social and digital communications posts.

All employees were included in the intervention program. Employees had the opportunity to share their experiences in a pretest and a posttest survey. Approximately 906 employees received requests via their specific personal work email to participate in the study along with links to the survey. I encouraged participation as I normally would in my professional capacity but operated within the organization’s code of ethics and the ethical professional conduct requirements of the Public Relations Society of America’s Code of Ethics governing me as a PRSA member. The goal was to achieve a 20% to 30% response rate, or between 180 and 270 employees, to take the pretest and posttest surveys.
**Instruments**

The primary study instrument was a pretest and posttest survey with similar questions on each of them. This data collection instrument was the social and digital media survey that I developed and administered through SurveyMonkey®. A secondary instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol for the post-implementation focus group with the communicators. The survey questions focused on the employees’ relationships with and perceptions of the organization based on the organization’s social and digital media communications; the survey instrument included an introduction and five sections. Table 3.2 describes the survey’s sections.

**Table 3.2**

*Social and Digital Media Survey Sections*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>Provided survey background information and study parameters: pretest, intervention, and posttest; summary of questions; invitation to participate; confidentiality information; ability to decline or stop participation; publication information; availability of results; and IRB approval and contact information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 1: General perceptions of ECMC Group</strong></td>
<td>Asked about employees’ perceptions of this organization in general and based on any source of information in terms of generating trust, maintaining shared control and influence in the relationship, demonstrating commitment to employees, generating satisfaction among employees, and promoting communal relationships. Additional thoughts from employees were solicited via an open-ended question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 2: General social and digital media usage</strong></td>
<td>Asked about social and digital media usage in general.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 3: Using the organization’s social and digital media sites</strong></td>
<td>Asked about social and digital media usage specifically to engage with the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 4: Perceptions of the organization’s social and digital media</strong></td>
<td>Asked about employees’ perceptions of the organization and its social and digital media messages specifically as a result of its posts on social and digital media, in terms of generating trust, maintaining shared control and influence in the relationship, demonstrating commitment to employees, generating satisfaction among employees, and promoting communal relationships. Additional thoughts from employees were solicited via an open-ended question.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 5: Demographics

Asked demographic questions about the employee’s gender, age, length of service with this organization, and position in the organization.

Closing

Thanked the employee for participating in the survey.

The surveys incorporated an introduction describing the purpose of the survey; questions about respondents’ perceptions of the organization in general; questions about respondents’ social and digital media use as well as their perceptions of the organization’s social and digital media communications; and demographic questions (age, gender, length of professional experience, and role in the organization). The Social and Digital Media Survey was a 15-item survey in the pretest and a 19-item survey in the posttest. Social and digital media usage questions were rated on a 6-point Likert scale as 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (somewhat disagree), 4 (somewhat agree), 5 (agree), and 6 (strongly agree). The surveys included both closed- and open-ended questions as well as intuitive questions that were meaningful from a professional practice standpoint. The surveys closed with a thank you for the respondent’s participation.

The study also included a communicator focus group, during which I solicited narrative responses about the survey results and the intervention. The focus group interview protocol utilized open-ended questions about how communicators perceived the intervention and the organization’s social and digital media effectiveness.

Data Collection

I collected the data for this study through pretest and posttest surveys of employees and communicators. I distributed the survey distribution via an email explaining the survey and soliciting the employee’s participation. Each respondent was assigned an identification number.
to enable matching and comparison of pretest and posttests and identification of employment site—Mather, Minneapolis, or remote.

Survey invitations were sent to employees via SurveyMonkey. Employee email addresses were imported from Excel into SurveyMonkey, and each survey recipient received a unique survey link that tied their survey response to their email address. I created four groups of collectors: one for Minneapolis, Minnesota, employees; one for Mather, California employees; one for remote employees; and one for communicators. These separate collectors allowed survey invitations to be sent in alignment with the timing of the different social media fairs. The SurveyMonkey collectors were set up to link responses by unique identifier in the pretest and posttest, and they tracked invitation details such as email opened as well as responses. SurveyMonkey allowed employees to confidentially respond to the instrument and enabled me to track and analyze responses and descriptive answers. Potential respondents were able to exit the survey without completing it at any point in the process. I also used SurveyMonkey to collect and retain administrative data related to use of the organization’s social and digital media sites.

**Data Analysis**

I utilized several different methods of data analysis in this study. I collected all responses to the social and digital media survey through SurveyMonkey and transferred the data to SPSS for analysis. Then I used descriptive statistics, including percentage and frequency distributions, to describe current employee use of social and digital media, their perceptions of the organization’s social and digital media, and their perceptions of the organization as it relates to generating trust, maintaining shared control and influence in the relationship, demonstrating commitment, generating satisfaction, and promoting communal relationships. I also calculated mean scores and standard deviations. For the comparative analysis, I used t tests and chi-square
to measure types and effectiveness of social and digital media; I completed all analyses in SPSS and report statistically significant findings at $p \leq .10$.

I asked both posttest employee respondents and the communicators’ focus group for their perceptions of the effectiveness of the intervention in enhancing the relationship between the organization and employees through social and digital media. Narrative data from the surveys and focus group were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically, and I discuss the results through the lenses of systems theory, complexity leadership theory, and relational leadership theory. I used the systems theory lens to interpret the study results within the context of organizational social and digital media communications as a complex arrangement of elements that continually affect each other over time and operate toward a common purpose. The complexity leadership theory lens was to translate study results within the context of integrating complexity dynamics and bureaucracy, and I used the relational leadership theory lens to interpret the study results within the context of organizational social and digital media communications as a social influence process through which emergent coordination and change are constructed and produced. I summarized the themes and narrative content from the focus group along with giving recommendations for further promoting the goals for social and digital communications. The data analysis also included a review of administrative data related to the “follow” and “like” information for the organization’s social and digital media sites. I tracked the numbers of rates of change for usage using these data.

**Researcher Position With Respect to Data Collection and Analysis**

I am the senior vice president and head of corporate affairs at the subject organization, with responsibility for social and digital media communications. I do not personally post to social or digital media on behalf of the organization, but I do have oversight responsibility for all
online posts. Some of the communicators who post social and digital media content report to me through my direct chain of management, while some have dotted-line reporting relationships. I am known to employees given my high-profile position on the company’s executive leadership team, and I assured the social and digital media professionals who participated in the post-intervention focus group that their responses would be confidential within the group; I encouraged them to be honest in their survey responses because I would not be sharing any no individually identifying information in the study.

**Position of the Researcher in the Study**

Clearly, in deciding what to study and how to study it, researchers bring their worldviews, lived experiences, and biases into the decision-making process. I know this on a personal level from my research to date, all of which has centered on concepts, issues, and subjects of interest and/or importance to me personally. Indeed, my selection of the research questions for this study reflect my interest in, and bias toward, my profession. There can be no doubt that my questions were heavily influenced by my experiences, expectations, and beliefs, even though I understand the importance of approaching the work as free of bias as possible. My view of the world is uniquely mine and is central to my sense of being and knowing; therefore, my worldview is undoubtedly a factor in my research.

From my perspective as a businessperson with more than 30 years of experience in the highly quantitative field of financial services, I am aware that my life’s work has been in a field that prizes numbers above all things. This preference for the quantitative in my day-to-day work sphere has certainly influenced my preferences for approaching research in terms of quantitative methodology. Quantitative research is the gold standard in financial services, and the majority of my career has been spent reading quantitative studies on a wide range of subjects including Wall
Street stock market behavior, bank lending trends, and business and consumer economic sentiment. While I recognize this bias in my worldview, I also acknowledge the limitations of the studies I am accustomed to reviewing: I often wonder about the why behind the what presented in quantitative research, and I recognize that perhaps the most telling dimensions are missing in most purely quantitative studies. Conversely, my affinity for quantitative research leads me to often question qualitative studies with regard to their generalizability, even though I understand that generalizability is not the point of qualitative research. I do find myself asking whether the phenomenon I am reading about in a qualitative study is the norm or the exception, and I am aware of that bias in my thinking.

Relatedly, all researchers analyze results through the lenses of their lived experiences. I am reminded of my business school statistics professor, who noted that if one knew enough about numbers, one could use them to prove almost anything; the inference was that it is possible to make data prove or disprove preexisting theories that they do or do not support. For the researcher, it is critical to be aware of these biases and their potential impacts on the way the researcher interprets the data and presents results and conclusions from the research.

Finally, the impact of the research conclusions must also be a researcher’s concern; anthropological researchers have long noted the potential for unintended consequences that may stem from research. As an African American woman, I am deeply aware of instances in which research has been used to marginalize and disenfranchise other African Americans. For example, for the Tuskegee study conducted by the U.S. Public Health Service denied syphilis treatment to 400 poor Black men in and around Tuskegee, Alabama, for more than 40 years in order to track the effects of late-stage syphilis. More recently, the family of Henrietta Lacks, whose cancer cells were removed more than 60 years ago without her knowledge or consent and
helped fuel the multibillion-dollar biotech industry, finally had some input into some of the research involving their ancestor’s cells, although they never have and apparently never will share in the financial benefits of that research.

As a combination of these two beings – one a financial industry executive with a bias for numbers, the other an African American woman with a healthy skepticism of research and a bias toward stories – I find myself preferring methods that incorporate both, and this preference is evident in my dissertation study. I undertook a research study that incorporates quantitative and qualitative components. My study included both closed-end, Likert-scale questions designed to identify items correlated to measuring social and digital media communications effectiveness, as well as open-ended, qualitative questions that aimed to enrich the quantitative data by uncovering what Kvale (1996) refers to as “meaningful relations to be interpreted” (p. 11).

Based on the results of the survey, I identified how stakeholders perceived the impact of organizational communications via social and digital media. I also probed actions by PR and communications leaders to assess the effectiveness of those communications based on both objective organizational measures and the subjective feedback of their stakeholders. In doing so, I assessed the what and the why/how as it relates to the research questions, resulting in a more complete “way of knowing” about the questions posited in this research study.
Chapter IV: Results

With this study, I addressed a gap in the academic research with regard to understanding the effectiveness of social and digital media as a communications tool for organizations. For the research, I assessed the relationship between the employee stakeholder and the organization from two viewpoints: that of the employees with whom the organization is communicating and that of the communications professionals who post social and digital media communications messages on behalf of the organization, referred to here as the communicators. The results also furnished PR/communications leaders with a theoretical framework for addressing the unique challenges presented by the role of social and digital media in the current organizational communications environment.

In the communications literature, Hon and Grunig (1999) stated the importance of measuring relationships and noted that “the fundamental goal of public relations is to build and then enhance ongoing or long-term relationships with an organization’s key constituencies” (p. 6). They also said that PR effectiveness can best be measured by “changes in what people think, feel, and do” (p. 6). In addition, Hon and Grunig noted that relationship outcomes can best be measured by focusing on components of the relationship through communications concepts, including trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction, which are still widely used in PR research and measurement today. Hon and Grunig’s communications concepts also included exchange and communal relationships, which are less widely used today to measure relationship outcomes. However, given the relationship between communal relationships and employee relationships with their employer organizations, I included promoting communal relationships as a measurement.
I investigated employees’ perceptions before and after an intervention that consisted of a social media fair and emails to educate and inform employees about the organization’s social and digital media communications. I asked employees for their perceptions of how well the organization as a whole fostered the five communications concepts of generating trust, demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment, generating satisfaction, and promoting communal relationships (see Table 4.1 for details on the survey samples and Table 4.2 for a description of the five communications concepts; as shown, Table 4.2 lists the five concepts, a lay description of the concepts, and the exact survey statements that are included in each of the overall mean scores for each concept).

Table 4.1

*Pretest and Posttest Survey Email Rates, Open Rates, Click-Through Rates, and Sample Sizes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey 1 –</th>
<th>Sent</th>
<th>Opened</th>
<th>Clicked</th>
<th>Responded in</th>
<th>Completed and</th>
<th>Completed &amp; In</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota Employees</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Employees</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote Employees</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicator Employees</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 1 Total</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 2 – Minnesota Employees</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 2 – California Employees</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 2 – Remote Employees</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 2 – Communicator Employees</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 2 Total</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2

Communication Concepts, Terms, Descriptions, and Related Survey Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communications Variables (Description)</th>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Generates Trust (i.e., increases employees' confidence that the organization is trustworthy) | This organization cares about employees like me.  
This organization does what it says it will do.  
Perception of “Generates Trust” |
| Demonstrates Control Mutuality (i.e., shows employees they are equal partners in the relationship with the organization) | This organization listens to the opinions of employees like me.  
This organization and I agree on what we can expect from each other.  
Perception of “Demonstrates Control Mutuality” |
| Demonstrates Commitment (i.e., shows employees that they should spend their time and energy maintaining a relationship with the organization and demonstrates that the organization spends its resources to maintain a relationship with employees) | This organization is committed to employees like me.  
This organization wants to maintain a relationship with employees like me.  
I value my relationship with this organization.  
Perception of “Demonstrates Commitment” |
Generates Satisfaction (i.e., makes sure employees feel good about their relationship with the organization)

I am happy with this organization.

This organization and I benefit from the relationship we have with each other.

Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship this organization has established with employees like me.

Perception of “Generates Satisfaction”

Promotes Communal Relationships (i.e., showing that the organization cares about employees and the community, and that employees care about the organization and the community)

This organization actively works to serve others.

This organization is very concerned about people’s welfare.

Perception of “Promotes Communal Relationships”

I then looked at employee usage of social and digital media in general and of their usage specifically to engage with the organization. Next, I investigated how the messages they saw communicated on the organization’s sites fostered the five communications concepts. This step was followed by looking at how the communicators perceived the organization’s social and digital media sites and how the sites performed in terms of fostering the five concepts. Finally, I focused on whether the communicators’ perceptions differed significantly from the perceptions of other employees. I addressed the following research questions in the analyses:

RQ1: How do employees view this organization in general with respect to fostering five communications concepts before and after a social and digital media intervention?

RQ2: What social and digital media do employees use for any purpose as well as specifically to engage with the organization before and after the intervention?

RQ3: How do employees perceive the messages on the organization’s social and digital media sites with regard to the fostering five communications concepts before and after the intervention?
RQ4: How do the communicators, the PR/communications professionals who are responsible for this organization’s social and digital media communications, perceive the effectiveness of those communications tools in fostering the five communications concepts before and after the intervention?

**Data Cleaning and Preparation**

I fielded the pretest survey to all 906 of the company’s employees; of those, 295 completed and submitted the survey in SurveyMonkey, for a response rate of 32.6%. I then administered the posttest survey to the 295 employees who completed and submitted the pretest; of those, 116 completed and submitted the posttest survey in SurveyMonkey, for a response rate of 39.0%. Of the 295 responses to the pretest, I deleted 49 because of substantially incomplete responses, leaving 246 responses to the pretest that were included in the final analysis. Of the 246 responses to the pretest that were substantially complete and the 116 responses to the posttest, 112 were matched pairs; for the matched pairs, the same respondent provided substantially complete responses to both the pretest and the posttest. I refer in this dissertation to these 112 respondents as the “Matched Pair” sample.

To measure employees’ perceptions of the five communications concepts, I computed them as five new variables as follows:

- **Generating trust** – the overall mean of the scores from the questions “this organization cares about employees like me,” “this organization does what it says it will do,” and “generates trust.”
- **Demonstrating control mutuality** – the overall mean of the scores from the questions “this organization listens to the opinions of employees like me,” “this organization
and I agree on what we can expect from each other,” and “demonstrates control mutuality.”

- Demonstrating commitment – the overall mean of the scores from the questions “this organization is committed to employees like me,” “this organization wants to maintain a relationship with employees like me,” “I value my relationship with this organization,” and “demonstrating commitment.”

- Generating satisfaction – the overall mean of the scores from the questions “I am happy with this organization,” “this organization and I benefit from the relationship we have with each other,” “I am pleased with the relationship this organization has established with employees like me,” and “generates satisfaction.”

- Promoting communal relationships – the overall mean of the scores from the questions “this organization actively works to serve others,” “this organization is very concerned about the welfare of people,” and “promotes communal relationships.”

Participant Description

Participation in the study, consisting of the pretest and posttest surveys and the social media fair and desk drop/email intervention, was open to all 906 employees of the organization: 240 in the California office, 391 in the Minnesota office (including the eight communicators), and 275 remote employees, many of whom periodically visit the California and/or the Minnesota offices.

Intervention participation. The communicators who staffed the social media fair displayed the company’s social and digital media sites on large computer monitors; during the fair, the communicators explained the organization’s sites to employees. All employees also received three emails that incorporated recent social and digital media posts and one flyer either
on their desks (for Minnesota and California employees) or emailed (for remote employees) to educate and inform employees about the company’s social and digital media communications. During the monthly leader meetings, I also asked managers and executives to encourage all employees to participate in the program.

A head count of employees indicated that 210 attended the Minnesota fair, for a 53.7% employee attendance rate, and 110 attended the California fair, for a 45.8% rate. The attendance counts were consistent with posttest findings that 51.1% of respondents said they attended a social media fair. Almost every employee who attended the fair received a tee shirt: Approximately 210 shirts were distributed in Minnesota and approximately 110 in California. Nearly every employee who attended the fair also received a cookie, for the same approximate distributions of 210 in Minnesota and 110 in California. Most employees took photo booth pictures in pairs or groups at the fairs, and some pairs or groups took multiple photos; when duplicates were eliminated, 24 photos of groups of employees were taken in the Minnesota photo booth with 67 employees in total, and 33 photos of groups of employees were taken in the California photo booth with 77 employees in total.

In addition, 84.2% of posttest respondents said they remembered receiving emails about the organization’s social and digital media. Overall, 88.7% of respondents remembered participating in some part of the intervention. Furthermore, 42.1% of posttest respondents said they had engaged with one or more of the organization’s social and digital media sites as a result of the social media fair and/or the informational emails.

**Survey participation.** All 906 of the company’s employees were invited to participate in the pretest. Two hundred forty-six respondents substantially completed the pretest survey, and I refer to them as the Pretest All respondents. One hundred sixteen respondents substantially
completed the posttest survey, and I refer to this group as the Posttest All respondents. The Matched Pair respondents were the 112 employees who substantially completed both the pretest and posttest surveys. In terms of demographics, the Pretest All and the Matched Pair respondents had similar characteristics, as shown in Table 5. Of the 246 respondents in the Pretest All sample who answered the demographic questions (n = 226),

- 61.9% were female and 38.1% were male;
- 12.8% were under 30 years old, 41.6% were between 30 and 44 years old, 38.1% were 45 to 59 years old, and 7.5% were over 60 years old;
- 54.9% had been employed by the company fewer than 5 years, 20.4% had been with the company five to 10 years, and 24.8% had been employed by the company more than 10 years; and
- 77.4% worked as individual contributors who do not manage others, 12.8% worked as supervisors/managers, and 9.7% worked as directors/officers.

All 112 Posttest Matched Pair sample participants responded to the demographic questions. Of these respondents,

- 57.1% were female and 42.9% were male;
- 11.6% were under 30 years old, 37.5% were between 30 and 44 years old, 42.9% were 45 to 59 years old, and 8.0% were over 60 years old;
- 52.7% had been employed by the company fewer than 5 years, 22.3% had been with the company five to 10 years, and 25.0% had been employed by the company more than 10 years; and
- 75.0% worked as individual contributors who do not manage others, 12.5% worked as supervisors/managers, and 12.5% worked as directors/officers.
Table 4.3 presents the detailed demographic data for these participants.

Table 4.3

*Pretest All and Posttest Matched Pair Sample Respondent Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Role</th>
<th>Pretest All</th>
<th></th>
<th>Posttest Matched Pair</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual contributor/does not manage others</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor/Manager</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director/Office</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Employment</th>
<th>Pretest All</th>
<th></th>
<th>Posttest Matched Pair</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 years</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>52.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Pretest All</th>
<th></th>
<th>Posttest Matched Pair</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-44</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-59</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Pretest All</th>
<th></th>
<th>Posttest Matched Pair</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 1**

The first research question asked how employees viewed this organization in general with respect to fostering the five communications concepts of generating trust, demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment, generating satisfaction, and promoting communal relationships before and after exposure to the intervention. All respondents in the Pretest and Posttest Matched Pair samples are included in the Research Question 1 results (see Table 4 for definitions for the communications concept measures).
The mean scores for how employees view this organization in general with regard to fostering each of the five communications concepts in the pretest and posttest, respectively were:

- 3.81 and 3.81 for generating trust;
- 3.63 and 3.62 for demonstrating control mutuality
- 3.78 and 3.79 for demonstrating commitment
- 3.89 and 3.87 for generating satisfaction, and
- 4.04 and 4.08 for promoting communal relationships.

Table 4.4 shows the mean scores, standard deviations, and pretest and posttest sample sizes for each of the communications concepts.

Table 4.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matched Pair Samples Statistics for Pretest and Posttest Perceptions on the Organization in General for the Five Communications Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I conducted paired-samples t tests using the Matched Pair sample to determine the differences in the employees’ perceptions before and after the intervention regarding how the
organization in general fosters the five communications concepts. These results are presented in Table 4.5. Based on the results of the analyses, there were no significant increases in respondents’ view of the organization as a whole for any of the five dimensions after the intervention. The data showed that the intervention did not result in employees’ increased positive perceptions of how the organization in general fostered the five concepts.

Table 4.5

*Paired-Samples t Test for Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores for How Employees View the Organization in General with Respect to Five Communications Concepts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean Differences</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generating Trust</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.492</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating Control Mutuality</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.484</td>
<td>.389</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating Commitment</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>.435</td>
<td>-.216</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating Satisfaction</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.448</td>
<td>.577</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Communal Relationships</td>
<td>-.038</td>
<td>.462</td>
<td>-.882</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.380</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the lack of a statistically significant change in employee perceptions of the organization in general with respect to the communication concepts, employee verbatim comments in the posttest were positive about the social media fair and email/flyer intervention. One respondent commented, “The Social Media Fair was informative about all the platforms that [the organization] is currently using to provide information about what our company does.” Another respondent commented, “I had no idea how involved [the organization] was with social media until I went to the Social Media Fair. Since then I have reactivated my Twitter account...
and have followed some of the [organization’s] groups on Twitter and LinkedIn.” Another respondent commented, “The emails were a nice reminder to get out there and follow [the organization on social media].”

**Research Question 2**

The second research question was, “What social and digital media do employees use for any purpose and to engage with the organization before and after the intervention?” To address this question, I calculated descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage distributions, for questions related to whether respondents used social and digital media platforms both in general for any purpose and specifically to engage with this organization. I also ran frequency and percentage distributions for frequency of use for each social or digital media site. Data for the Pretest All, Posttest All, Pretest Matched Pair and Posttest Matched Pair sample respondents are presented in Table 4.6; this table shows a visual comparison of the data.

**Social and digital media use in general for any purpose.** With regard to social and digital media usage in general, a majority of both the Pretest All and Posttest All survey participants used social and digital media platforms in general for any purpose both before (89.5%) and after (93.1%) the intervention. For Matched Pair respondents, the percentage of participants generally using social and digital media platforms increased from 88.4% before the intervention to 93.8% after the intervention. Table 4.6 presents the frequencies and percentages of participants' responses regarding platform general usage; while the percentage increased for general usage of social and digital media for any reason, it was not a statistically significant difference.
Table 4.6

*Frequency and Percentage Distributions for Social and Digital Media Platform Use in General for all Sample Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest All</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>89.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest All</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>93.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest Matched Pair sample</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>88.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest Matched Pair sample</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>93.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also asked participants how frequently they used each of the individual social or digital media platforms in general for any purpose; the social or digital media sites considered in the study were Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube. Participants were asked to respond using a scale that ranged from 1 (*never use*) to 6 (*multiple times a day*). Based on the results presented in Table 4.7, participants most frequently visited Facebook; 79.6% visited Facebook at least once a week in the Pretest All sample and 78.5% in the Posttest All sample. For YouTube, 60.5% visited at least once a week in the Pretest All sample and 57.9% in the Posttest All sample. For Instagram, 51.2% visited at least once a week in the Pretest All sample and 48.1% in the Posttest All sample. Based on comparative chi-square analysis with the Matched Pair sample, there were no significant differences in frequency of use pre- and post-intervention for general use of any of the digital media platforms.
Table 4.7

Pretest All and Posttest All Sample Frequency in Visiting Social Media and Digital Media Sites for General Purposes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest All</th>
<th></th>
<th>Posttest All</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a day</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never use</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a day</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never use</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a day</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never use</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>38.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a day</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never use</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a day</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social and digital media use specifically to engage with the organization’s sites. With regard to using social and digital media specifically to engage with the organization’s sites, the percentage of participants who reported such usage increased from 40.3% in the Pretest All group before the intervention to 55.1% in the Posttest All sample after the social media fair and flyer/emails. For respondents from the Matched Pair sample, the percentage of participants using social and digital media platforms increased from 46.7% before to 58.7% after the intervention. A chi square test with the Matched Pair sample showed this difference was statistically significant, with $\chi^2 (1) = 29.238, p = .000$. Table 4.8 presents the frequencies and percentages of participants' responses.

Table 4.8

<p>| Pretest and Posttest Frequencies and Percentages of Social Media and Digital Media Platform Use to Engage with the Organization for All Sample Groups |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|
|                                              | Frequency | %     |
| Pretest All (n=211)                           | Yes     | 85    | 40.3 |
|                                              | No      | 126   | 59.7 |
|                                              | Total   | 211   | 100.0 |
| Posttest All (n=107)                          | Yes     | 59    | 55.1 |
|                                              | No      | 48    | 44.9 |
|                                              | Total   | 107   | 100.0 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pretest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matched Pair sample (n=92)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Posttest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matched Pair sample (n=92)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also asked participants how frequently they used each of the individual social or digital media platforms specifically to engage with the organization; again, the sites were Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube. Participants again responded using the scale of 1 (never use) to 6 (multiple times a day); Table 4.9 presents these results. Participants most frequently visited LinkedIn, with 33.7% visiting at least once a week in the Pretest All and 44.3% in the Posttest All group. Twitter was the second most frequently visited, with 32.1% visiting at least once a week in the Pretest All group and 31.7% in the Posttest All group. Facebook was the third most frequently visited platform, with 30.6% visiting at least once a week in the Pretest All group and 36.1% in the Posttest All group.

Chi square test results from the Matched Pair sample conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in employees’ frequency of social media usage specifically to engage with the organization; employee frequency of use of each platform for specific organization engagement somewhat increased or stayed about the same, with statistically significant findings for LinkedIn only ($\chi^2 (1) = 10.134, p = .001$); the pre-/posttest changes for this sample were not statistically significant for any of the other platforms. This organization uses LinkedIn to share messages including editorials by the chief executive officer, stories about employees performing community service activities, and examples showing the positive work environment such as major league baseball outings and yoga classes. It uses Facebook to share
messages about grants disbursed through our foundation as well as financial literacy classes and other activities delivered by employees, among others and Twitter to share messages about community outreach and employee volunteerism activities; employee workplace activities, including town hall meetings and happy hour social events; grant recipients; and employee spotlight articles telling interesting stories about staff. Employees may be more likely to visit these platforms to engage with the organization because the messages shared on the platforms are heavily employee focused. Table 11 presents details of the frequencies of employees’ usages of the organization’s different social and digital media platforms.

Table 4.9

Participants’ Pre- and Posttest Frequencies of Visiting Social Media and Digital Media Sites Specifically to Engage with the Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a day</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never use</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a day</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never use</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a day</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A goal of the intervention was for employees to follow and like the organization’s social and digital media posts. Given the nature of these channels and the inability to tie employees’ use of social and digital media to anything identifying them as employees, it was not possible for me to measure the changes in followers and engagement solely among employees. However, I did measure the overall change in the number of followers and the overall change in engagement on the organization’s social and digital media sites from January 1, 2019, through the end of the intervention period on March 28, 2019. Because of the large number of sites the organization maintains, as well as the differences in the numbers of followers on each site and the varying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Platform</th>
<th>Frequency Distribution</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least once a day</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never use</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least once a day</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never use</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>88.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least once a day</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never use</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
lengths of time each site has been active, I chose to report here only on sites with more than 100 followers to avoid reporting large percentage changes on sites with small numbers of followers.

Among sites with at least 100 followers on January 1, 2019, the number of followers increased between 2.0% and 26.1%; the highest increases were for the Altierus LinkedIn site with a 26.1% increase, the Altierus Instagram site with a 25.6% increase, and the ECMC Foundation LinkedIn site with a 24.0% increase. Among sites with at least 100 followers on January 1, 2019, the change in engagement ranged from a decrease of 45% to an increase of 950% between January 1 and March 28, 2019, and the highest increases were for the ECMC The College Place Connecticut site with a 950% increase, the Zenith Education Group Twitter site with a 273.8% increase, and the ECMC LinkedIn site with a 228% increase. I measured engagement on the platforms as follows:

- Twitter engagement was the sum of interactions received for the tweets published in the selected timeframe including retweets, replies and likes;
- Facebook engagement was the sum of reactions, comments, and shares received by content associated with the pages over the selected time frame and includes comments from the author of the post;
- YouTube engagement was the sum of the views for the given period;
- LinkedIn engagement was the three-month average of the sum of the numbers of clicks plus likes plus comments plus shares plus follows divided by the number of impressions; and
- Instagram engagement was the sum of likes plus comments plus views for the given period.
The organization’s posts across all social and digital media channels primarily reflect activities in the community such as employee volunteer efforts and grants to community nonprofit organizations. Affiliates that focus on students such as Zenith Education Group, Altierus, The College Place, and FAB primarily post about student-focused activities including applying to and paying for college, career information, and community involvement. Most of the organization’s social and digital media sites cross-post content on affiliates’ sites. However, specific platforms sometimes are used for their unique purpose, such as using the professional platform LinkedIn to share messages including editorials by the chief executive officer and examples showing the positive work environment.
Table 4.10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECMC Group Brand/Affiliate</th>
<th>Social/Digital Media</th>
<th>Followers 1/1/19</th>
<th>Followers 3/28/19</th>
<th>Percent Increase in Engagement 10/1/18 to 1/1/19</th>
<th>Engagement 1/1/19 to</th>
<th>Percent Increase in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Change in Followers and Engagement*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>12/31/18</th>
<th>3/28/19</th>
<th>Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECMC Group</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TCP CA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>125%</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECMC Group</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TCP CA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECMC Group</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECMC (FAB)</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECMC (FAB)</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>126%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECMC</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>2,516</td>
<td>2,570</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>3500%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutions</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
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<td>47</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>125%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutions</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
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<tr>
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<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>YouTube</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-52.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>163%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>ECMC Scholars</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>182</td>
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<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Facebook-TCP CT</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Twitter-TCP CT</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Facebook-TCP CO</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>54</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Twitter TCP-CO</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Facebook-TCP-MN</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2400%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Twitter TCP-MN</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>77%</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Facebook-TCP-Richmond</td>
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<td>15</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Twitter TCP-Richmond</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>113%</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Facebook-TCP-Alexandria</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>700%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Twitter TCP-Alexandria</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Facebook-TCP-Oregon</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Twitter TCP-Oregon</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>113%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zenith Education Group</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
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<td>148</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zenith Education Group</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>2,339</td>
<td>2,391</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altierus</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 3

The third research question was, “How do employees perceive the messages on the organization’s social and digital media sites with regard to fostering five communications concepts before and after the intervention?” Specifically, I asked participants whether they agreed or disagreed with statements related to each of the five communications concepts based on their perceptions of the organization’s social and digital media messages. The measures for the five concepts were the overall mean scores for the statements as shown in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11
Matched Pair Samples Statistics for Pretest and Posttest Perceptions on How the Organizations' Social and Digital Media Sites Foster the Five Communications Concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Matched Paired Sample Statistics (n=38)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Generating Trust)</td>
<td>Pretest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Posttest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2</td>
<td>Demonstrating Control Mutuality</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>.777</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.683</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 3</td>
<td>Demonstrating Commitment</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>.651</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.696</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 4</td>
<td>Generating Satisfaction</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>.600</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.578</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 5</td>
<td>Promoting Communal Relationships</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>.546</td>
<td>.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.474</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fewer employees responded to survey questions related to social and digital media than questions about the organization as a whole: Of the 112 respondents in the Matched Pair sample, 92 responded to the question about whether they used social media to engage with the organization. Of these 92, approximately half, 53.3% in the pretest and 41.3% in the posttest, responded that they did not do so, leaving 38 respondents in the Matched Pair sample who responded to the questions that address Research Question 3 in both the pretest and posttest.

**Perceptions of the organization’s social and digital media sites for how the organization’s social and digital media foster for the five communications concepts.** I asked employees their perceptions of the organization’s social and digital media sites with respect to how the sites foster each of the five communications concepts. The mean scores for each of the five concepts in the pretest and posttest Matched Pair sample, respectively, were 3.97 and 4.03 for generating trust; 3.75 and 3.85 for demonstrating control mutuality; 3.91 and 3.98 for demonstrating commitment; 3.96 and 4.02 for generating satisfaction; and 4.25 and 4.41 for promoting communal relationships. Based on the results presented in Table 12, there were no
statistically significant differences in any of the pretest and posttest responses ($p > .05$). The results indicated that the intervention did not affect the participants’ perceptions of how the organizations’ social and digital media sites fostered the five communications concepts.

Promoting communal relationships was the only result, $p = .063$, that could be considered statistically significant at $p < .10$ for exploratory research. A number of employees specifically referenced the organization’s communal relationship building in their verbatim comments about the organization’s impact in the community. For example, one respondent commented in the posttest that the organization “…has taken a more active role in the community and socially than in previous years and I feel a lot of employees are also taking that role now that we are encouraged to do so.” Another commented that the organization “does a very good job to ensure it is helping others through local organizations/charities.”

**Pretest and posttest differences for individual survey statements.** I ran paired-samples $t$ tests with the Matched Pair sample to determine whether there were before-and-after differences for any of the individual statements related to the overall communication concepts both for the organization in general as well as specifically for the organization’s social and digital media. There were significant differences at $p < .10$ for 3 of the 12 statements:

- “I am happy with this organization” in the questions about perceptions of the organization in general, with a mean score increase from 3.90 in the pretest to 3.98 in the posttest, $p = .086$;
- “Employees are happy with this organization” in the questions about perceptions of the five communications concepts based on the organization’s social and digital media, with a mean score increase from 3.97 in the pretest to 4.11 in the posttest, $p = .058$; and
• “This organization actively works to serve others” in the questions about perceptions based on the organization’s social and digital media, with a mean score increase from 4.37 in the pretest to 4.55 in the posttest, \( p = .090 \).

**Research Question 4**

For the fourth research question, I asked communicators their perceptions of social and digital media communications with regard to fostering the five communications concepts before and after the intervention. I asked them to provide their perceptions in two ways: first by completing the pretest and posttest surveys and second by participating in a focus group interview session. Six of eight communicators responsible for posting social and digital media on behalf of the company responded to the survey questions related to the five communications concepts (generating trust, demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment, generating satisfaction, and promoting communal relationships) on the pretest while five of eight responded to those questions on the posttest. For the five concepts, the communicators registered higher mean scores on both the pretest and posttest surveys than did the other employee respondents. As shown in Table 4.12, the communicators’ mean scores for each of the five concepts in the pretest and posttest, respectively, were:

- 4.06 and 4.33 for generating trust, compared with 3.86 and 4.00, respectively, for the other survey respondents;
- 4.06 and 3.93 for demonstrating control mutuality, compared with 3.70 and 3.86 for the other respondents;
- 4.13 and 4.56 for demonstrating commitment, compared with 3.82 and 4.02 for demonstrating commitment for the other respondents;
• 4.17 and 4.35 for generating satisfaction, compared with 3.89 and 4.04 for generating satisfaction the other respondents; and

• 4.39 and 4.80 for promoting communal relationships, compared with 4.13 and 4.38 for the other respondents.
Table 4.12

*Descriptive Statistics and Comparison of Communicators with All Other Employees for Pretest All and Posttest All Respondents for Perceptions of How the Organizations' Social and Digital Media Sites Foster the Communications Concepts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>P</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Pretest All - Generating</td>
<td>Communicators</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>All other employees</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest All - Demonstrates</td>
<td>Communicators</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>All other employees</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutuality</td>
<td>All other employees</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>.826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest All - Demonstrates</td>
<td>Communicators</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>All other employees</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest All - Generates</td>
<td>Communicators</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>All other employees</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest All - Promotes</td>
<td>Communicators</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communal</td>
<td>All other employees</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>All other employees</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>.739</td>
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<td>Communicators</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>All other employees</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest All - Demonstrates</td>
<td>Communicators</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.760</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>All other employees</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutuality</td>
<td>All other employees</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>.739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest All - Demonstrates</td>
<td>Communicators</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>All other employees</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
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<td>Communicators</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>.602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communal</td>
<td>All other employees</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the mean scores for communicators were higher than those for other employees, independent t-test results indicated that the differences were not statistically significant at \( p > .05 \). Despite the small sample size of the communicators group, the Levene test for equality of variances indicated that equal variances could be assumed for each of the t tests.

**Focus group results.** The focus group session with the communicators yielded narrative results that I analyzed thematically to identify relevant themes. Questions asked during the focus group session appear in Appendix J.

**Responses to specific focus group questions.** With respect to their thoughts about the success of the social and digital media fair, communicators ranked the success at between 5 and 8 on a scale of 1 to 10. Those who ranked it 5 said they did so mostly because of the 50% employee attendance rate, which some felt should have been higher. Those who ranked it 8 said they did so for reasons including anecdotal comments from employees expressing the value they found in the fair and the increase in the percentage of employees visiting the organization’s social and digital media sites. One communicator said, “…I think that everybody that attended found great value in it. And I think the results of folks taking action has been very positive.” Another commented, “…in terms of educating [employees about our social and digital media, the social media fair was] an 8, but attendance [also] is probably the goal.”

Communicators thought the most positive aspects of the intervention were that after the social media fair, employees took action to engage with the organization through social and digital media. One communicator said,

I’m most surprised by how many people actually went out and did something. You can tell people were out there [on social media], but for them to actually go out and take action [to look at the organization’s social and digital media sites] - I know that the highest-level thing was just to [be able to] tell [that] people were out there [on social and digital media], but the ultimate goal is to have them follow and engage [with the organization], and the fact that people actually did
that makes me very happy and also surprises me because people don't always do that, especially with their company. So that really says something about what we are doing and about what employees think of this company, that they’re willing to go do that.

Another stated,

I'm pleasantly surprised by the reaction to the Social Media Fair…people really appreciated that. I heard comments the week after…people were coming up [to me saying] ‘that was really great.’ People were engaged when they were there…And that comes through in this [posttest survey] as well - that people, they appreciate it. And I think there's less of a concern about being out there [engaging with the company on social and digital media] than there was in the past.

Communicators thought some aspects of the intervention could have been handled differently, including intensifying efforts to spur employee participation in both the surveys as well as in the fair. One communicator stated, “I think that we can always do better – more people could have come [to the fair], more people could have responded to the survey – so we can always aim higher. It was successful but we can do more.” Another commented,

I wonder if in advance of the event, if we should have educated [employees] a little more [about our social and digital media] – [and] if that would have driven more traffic [to the fair and to the social and digital media sites]. I know we put out the one-pager [flyer desk-drop/email explaining our social and digital media sites before the Social Media Fair], but I just wonder if there was anything we could do on the front end [to encourage more employees to attend the fair and engage on social media].

What surprised communicators the most about the survey results was the extent to which employees actually took action to engage with the organization on social and digital media after the fair (see comments above). What surprised them the most about the fair was the extent of positive feedback they received anecdotally after the fair about both the fair itself and the organization’s social and digital media presence. One communicator commented, “They [employees] went out to the [social and digital media] pages and they realized we are doing good stuff. It’s more relevant [to them once they see the social and digital media posts].” Another
commented, “The kind of feedback that I’ve heard [has been]…‘What’s the next event for us to really engage with?’ It’s been nice [to hear positive feedback].”

As stated above, the mean scores for the social and digital media communicators for each of the five communications concepts in the pretest and posttest, respectively, were

* 4.39 and 4.80 for promoting communal relationships;
* 4.13 and 4.56 for demonstrating commitment;
* 4.17 and 4.35 for generating satisfaction;
* 4.06 and 4.33 for generating trust; and
* 4.06 and 3.93 for demonstrating control mutuality.

In terms of the individual communications concepts, the survey data and focus group results indicated that communicators believed the fair and the organization’s social and digital media posts contributed most significantly to promoting communal relationships. One communicator noted, “…the things we post on social media so often are [about] volunteerism and all the stuff we’re doing in the community...everybody thinks we’re impacting our community positively. So…we’re putting these messages out there and people are now seeing them and realizing that they are there, when they didn’t before.” Another noted, “…everyone believes that we promote communal relationships.” With regard to generating satisfaction and demonstrating commitment, one communicator connected the two, noting, “People see that we are committed to them as an organization and people are more satisfied.” In terms of controlling mutuality, one communicator stated, “I think that's great for employees to also see that…mutual positive relationships [are being displayed through our social and digital media posts].” For generating trust, the communicators expressed the belief that the perceived authenticity of the messages shared on social and digital media influenced trust. One commented, “It shows that
people see our posts as organic and not super-scripted and advertorial,” and another observed, “It also informs us for the future, to make sure we're continuing to be candid in our posts and not having them too scripted.” The focus group discussion with the communicators also resulted in some themes that I summarize in Table 4.13.

Table 4.13

*Top Themes from Focus Group with Communicators*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Mentions</th>
<th>Sample comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Increase employee attendance at and participation in the Social Media Fair and Email Intervention as a way to enhance the relationship with employees | 18 | • Wish more people attended fair.  
• Managers should be more direct in encouraging employee participation  
• Perks given out for attending the fair should be more focused on the individual  
• We have to do another fair and we have to keep encouraging people to attend  
• Attendance is the goal  
• Only 50% of the people really got the full awareness and information about all of our sites  
• In advance of the event, we should have educated a little more to drive more traffic  
• Managers should tell employees to go to the fair  
• We should use digital screens to promote the fair  
• We should do something to remind employees the day of the fair to attend  
• We should do an email blast saying “like and follow these pages” with the links to our social and digital media sites  
• It would be a good idea to do “save the date” calendar invitations to put the Social Media Fair on employees’ calendars  
• Awareness is key  
• People got a sense of who posts social and digital media for the organization  
• Employees wouldn’t have changed their habits and visited our sites after the intervention unless there was something they found out existed that they didn’t know existed before  
• People got face time with the communicators and the sites which was good |

Education employees received from the intervention was valuable in enhancing relationships with employees | 13 | • Awareness is key  
• People got a sense of who posts social and digital media for the organization  
• Employees wouldn’t have changed their habits and visited our sites after the intervention unless there was something they found out existed that they didn’t know existed before  
• People got face time with the communicators and the sites which was good |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase in employees’ use of social media to engage with the company after the Social Media Fair and Email Intervention was positive</th>
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<td>Social and digital media posts are viewed as being authentic/“organic” (i.e., natural and not scripted)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social and digital media posts promote communal relationships</td>
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The most dominant themes to emerge from the focus group session were around the intervention, especially

- the opportunity to increase employee attendance at and participation in the social media fair and flyer/email intervention as a way to enhance the relationship with employees (18 mentions),

- the value of the education the communicators received from the intervention in enhancing relationships with employees (13 mentions), and

- the increase in employees’ use of social media to engage with the company after the fair and the flyer/email (10 mentions).
**Increase employee attendance and participation.** While the communicators were very positive about the social media fair, they felt the 50% employee attendance rate could have been better. One communicator commented, “…Is that the norm? Are we an anomaly? Or maybe only 25% [attendance] would be the norm and we were at 50% so that’s really great. It’s just difficult to know.” Another commented, “I would have liked more people [to attend the fair]. But I think everybody who attended found great value.” A third noted, “Only 50% [of employees] really got full awareness and information about all of our [social and digital media] sites.”

**The value of educating employees through the intervention.** The communicators found value in educating employees about the organization’s social and digital media sites through the interventions. One noted that, “Awareness is key,” and another observed, “I think just having the [social media] posters [communicators] there…people got a sense of who was doing what [in terms of posting social and digital media messages, which] was really helpful.”

**Increase in employees’ use of social media to engage with the company.** The communicators were positive about the increase in employee engagement with the company through social and digital media after the intervention. One stated, “I’m pleasantly surprised by the reaction to the social media fair … The week after…people were coming up to me [saying] that it was really great. People were engaged when they were there…they were, like, “this is really great!” Another commented, “…the kind of feedback I’ve heard [has been]…‘What’s the next event for us to really engage with?’ It’s been nice.” Another noted, “We’re putting these messages out there and people are now seeing them and realizing that they are there, when they didn’t before.” Additional themes that surfaced in the focus group included
• the perception of the social and digital media posts as “organic,” i.e., natural and not scripted, and the perception of the posts as promoting communal relationships, which were both mentioned six times;

• the challenge of having too much content/too many sites (five mentions);

• the need to find a balance between informing and overwhelming employees with information (five mentions);

• the issues with employees’ access to social and digital media due to either restrictions on social media use or restricted access resulting from sites’ being blocked on employees’ computers (five mentions); and

• the opportunities to improve future interventions to enhance employees’ engagement with the organization’s social and digital media sites (five mentions).

Summary of Findings

With this research study, I intended to assess the impacts of social and digital media on organizational communications and organization-public relationship building from two perspectives: of the organization, as represented by its professional communicators, who post social and digital media messages on behalf of the organization, and the organization’s employees as a specific group of stakeholders. The findings indicated that the intervention to educate and inform employees about the organization’s social and digital media, consisting of a social media fair and a flyer and emails to employees, did not result in increased positive employee perceptions of the organization as a whole with regard to each of the five overarching communications concepts: generating trust, demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment, generating satisfaction, and promoting communal relationships. See Appendix K for a video of the social media fairs.
The intervention did result in a statistically significant increase in employee use of LinkedIn specifically to engage with the organization. However, while employees’ usage of LinkedIn specifically to engage with the organization increased significantly, the intervention did not result in improved participant perceptions of the organizations' social and digital media sites as they relate to the five communications concepts. However, when considered at \( p < .10 \) for exploratory research, the \( p \) of .063 for promoting communal relationships was significant with regard to employee perceptions of how the organizations' social and digital media foster this communications concept in the company.

Turning from the five communications concepts to investigating the 12 individual questions that composed those concepts and excluding the questions specifically naming the concepts, the means for three individual statements increased sufficiently to be statistically significant. For perceptions of the organization in general, the statement that increased significantly was “I am happy with this organization.” The statements that referred to perceptions based on the organization’s social and digital media were “Employees are happy with this organization” and “This organization actively works to serve others.”

I asked the communicators who are responsible for the organization’s social and digital media posts to provide their perceptions of those communications in building relationships with employees in two ways: by completing the pretest and posttest surveys and by participating in a focus group interview session. Communicators registered higher mean scores on both the pretest and posttest surveys than the other employee respondents for all five communications concepts (generating trust, demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment, generating satisfaction, and promoting communal relationships). While the communicators’ mean scores
were higher than those for other employees, independent t tests indicated that the differences were not statistically significant.

The most dominant themes that emerged from the focus group session with the communicators focused on the intervention, especially

- the opportunity to increase employee attendance at and participation in the social media fair and email intervention to enhance the organization’s relationship with employees;
- the value of the education employees received from the intervention in enhancing their relationships with the organization; and
- the increase in employees’ use of social media to engage with the company after the social media fair and email intervention.

In Chapter V, I review and synthesize the study results and summarize the data within the context of the research questions, as well as within the context of the study’s implications for leadership. I propose actions for PR and communications leaders as they relate to social and digital media and organization-public relationships, and I discuss practical implications of the findings and suggestions for future research.
Chapter V: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

The Internet has changed the way organizations communicate with and build relationships with stakeholders including employees, customers, shareholders, regulators, government officials, and others; today, most of the communications between organizations and their publics occur online. Over the past several years, PR and communications leaders have seen a transformation in their profession due to the use of social and digital media. This shift to online relationship building via social and digital communications has consequently changed how communication leaders approach and evaluate their organizational communications. PR professionals now are seeking measures to determine whether their organizations’ online interactions to build relationships with their stakeholders are effective.

Social and digital media have altered communications between organizations and their publics, including employees, and have altered the way publics, including employees, communicate with organizations. Because of social and digital media, stakeholders can publicize interactions with organizations and amplify their voices in ways that were never available before; now, communications between an organization and a single stakeholder through social and digital media can significantly influence other stakeholders and can likewise significantly influence the organization. With this study, I investigated how an organization’s communications with one of its publics – its employees – might inform a better understanding of social and digital media communications dynamics to influence communications between organizations and broader stakeholder groups.

The purpose of this study was to assess the relationship between the employee stakeholders and the organization from two perspectives: that of the employees with whom the organization is communicating and that of the communications professionals who post social and
digital media messages on behalf of the organization (the communicators). The results of this study will lead to a better understanding of the effectiveness of social and digital media as a communications tool. The study also provides communications leaders with a theoretical framework for addressing the unique challenges presented by the role of social and digital media in the current organizational communications environment.

Researchers have not yet examined the effectiveness of social and digital media tools from the perspectives of the parties in organization-employee relationships. There is a need to evaluate the effects of these new tools on building relationships between stakeholders and an organization. I used four research questions to explore the communications effectiveness from the perspectives of the organization’s communicators and the other employee stakeholders:

RQ1: How do employees view this organization in general with respect to fostering five communications concepts before and after a social and digital media intervention?

RQ2: What social and digital media do employees use for any purpose as well as specifically to engage with the organization before and after the intervention?

RQ3: How do employees perceive the messages on the organization’s social and digital media sites with regard to fostering the five communications concepts before and after the intervention?

RQ4: How do the communicators, or public relations and communications professionals who are responsible for this organization’s social and digital media communications, perceive the effectiveness of those communications tools in fostering the five communications concepts before and after the intervention?
Employees’ Perceptions of How the Organization Fosters the Five Communications Concepts

The first research question assessed how employees viewed the organization in general based on any source of information, including personal experience with respect to fostering the five communications concepts: generating trust, demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment, generating satisfaction, and promoting communal relationships. I asked employees about their views both before and after exposure to the social and digital media fair and the email intervention to educate and inform employees about the organization’s social and digital media communications. I found no significant changes in employee views on the organization’s performance in the five communication concept areas after the intervention; the intervention did not improve employees’ positive perceptions of the organization’s fostering of the concepts. I believe this finding contributes new knowledge to the literature in assessing the effectiveness of organizations educating and informing employees with regard to improving employees’ perceptions of how their organizations foster the five communications concepts. The study findings indicated that a social and digital media fair and an email intervention combined with other personal experience with the organization may not be sufficiently effective for communications professionals who are seeking to enhance how their employee stakeholders view their organizations in terms of fostering the five communications concepts.

Social and Digital Media Use Among Employees

With the second research question, I assessed employees’ social and digital media usage both in general and specifically to engage with the organization and both before and after the intervention. With regard to usage in general and for any purpose, 89.5% and 93.8% of
participants in the Matched Pair sample, respectively, used social and digital media platforms before and after the intervention. However, this was not a statistically significant difference.

I also asked participants how often they used each of the individual social or digital media platforms in general and for any purpose; the specific platforms I asked about were Facebook; Twitter; LinkedIn; Instagram; Pinterest; and YouTube. Participants most frequently visited Facebook: 79.6% of the Matched Pair sample visited it at least once a week in the pretest and 78.5% in the posttest. The next highest platforms visited at least once a week were YouTube (60.5%, pretest; 57.9%, posttest) and Instagram (51.2%, pretest; 48.1%, posttest).

There were no significant differences for the percentage distributions for employees’ general use of any of the digital media platforms. My findings thus indicated that the social and digital media fair and email intervention were not effective on their own for communications professionals who are seeking to increase social and digital media usage in general among their employee stakeholders.

**Social and Digital Media Use to Specifically Engage With the Organization**

In terms of specific engagement with the organization, the percentage of participants who used these online platforms to engage with the organization increased from 40.3% before the intervention to 55.1% after. For respondents from the Matched Pair sample, the percentage who used these platforms to engage with the organization increased from 46.7% before the intervention to 58.7% after, and a chi square test with this sample showed that the difference was statistically significant: The social and digital media fair and the flyer/email intervention effectively increased employees’ use of the organization’s sites.

With regard to the individual platforms employees used specifically to engage with the organization, participants in the posttest most frequently visited LinkedIn (44.3%), Twitter
(31.7%), and Facebook (36.1%). I conducted a chi square test with the Matched Pair sample to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in the employees’ use of specific social media and digital media platforms to engage with the organization, and this increase was statistically significant only for LinkedIn, with $\chi^2 (1) = 10.134, p = .001$. The finding indicated that the fair and the flyer/email intervention successfully increased the use of the organization’s LinkedIn site.

This increased use to engage with the organization is consistent with the results of previous studies such as one finding that most companies report success from their use of social media (Bughin et al., 2011). Organizations in the 21st century communicate with their stakeholders using social and digital media channels, and the result from this study that participants most frequently visited Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram in general but most frequently visited LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook specifically to engage with the organization contributes new knowledge. The finding indicates the need for PR and communications leaders to be targeted and intentional with regard to the specific social media platforms used to reach each stakeholder audience. The implication here is that employees may view LinkedIn, as a professional work-related social media platform, as a more acceptable and appropriate platform for interacting with the organization that employs them. In terms of increasing employees’ usage of social and digital media specifically to engage with the organization, communications professionals should engage in educational and informational campaigns like the social and digital media fair and the flyer/email intervention.

**Employees’ Perceptions of the Organization’s Social and Digital Media Options**

The third research question assessed the effectiveness of the organization’s social and digital media communications from the employee stakeholder perspective. For the third research
question, I asked participants for their perceptions about with respect to each of the five communications concepts in the study:

- generating trust, i.e., increasing employees’ confidence that the organization is trustworthy;
- demonstrating control mutuality, i.e., demonstrating a coequal relationship between the organization and the employee;
- demonstrating commitment to employees, i.e., showing employees that they should spend their time and energy maintaining a relationship with the organization and demonstrating that the organization spends its resources to maintain a relationship with employees;
- generating satisfaction for the employee, i.e., making sure employees feel good about their relationships with the organization; and
- promoting communal relationships, i.e., community involvement/building relationships with the community.

Results indicated that employees viewed the organization’s social and digital media communications as being most effective in promoting communal relationships, with mean scores of 4.25 and 4.41 in the pretest and posttest, respectively. This was followed by generating trust (3.97 and 4.03, respectively); generating satisfaction (3.96 and 4.02); demonstrating commitment (3.91 and 3.98); and demonstrating control mutuality (3.75 and 3.85). These results supported earlier research findings that social and digital media allow organizations and groups to engage in and build relationships (McCorkindale et al., 2013; Reitz, 2012). It also supports earlier findings that social media have opened new pathways for organizations to engage in conversations with stakeholders, helping to build relationships (Lovejoy et al., 2012).
Employees were significantly less likely to answer survey questions related to social and digital media, implying that they viewed their online activities as private in nature and not something they wished to share with their employer. This study opens an avenue for exploring employees’ views on the nature of their social and digital media usage as either more private or more public and their willingness to share their online usage with their employer. Social and digital media sites range from allowing users to restrict the audience for their posts and activities to specific individuals, as is the case with Facebook, to making posts generally available to anyone on or outside of the platform, as is the case with Twitter. Consequently, employees may view their presence on the sites that restrict who can interact with them as more private in nature while viewing their presence on the sites where their posts are widely viewable as more public. That perception, in turn, may affect employees’ views about which sites they are willing or unwilling to engage on with their employer in order to maintain boundaries between their private and public/professional presences on social and digital media.

There were no significant differences at $p < .05$ in any of the before-and-after responses for each of the five concepts in the employees’ perceptions of the organizations' social and digital media options: The results indicated that the intervention did not affect the participants’ perceptions of the organization’s social and digital media options with regard to each of the five overarching communications concepts (generating trust, demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment, generating satisfaction, and promoting communal relationships). At $p < .10$ for exploratory research, the $p$ of .063 for promoting communal relationships was the only result I could consider significant. This result contributed new knowledge to the literature regarding employees’ perceptions of their organizations’ use of social and digital media.
A possible explanation for both the high pretest score and the significant change to a still higher posttest promoting communal relationships score is that the study organization’s social and digital media posts primarily reflect activities in the community, such as employee volunteer efforts and grants to community nonprofit organizations. Employees who had been engaging with the organization online before the intervention were aware of the community-oriented content of many posts, and employees who started engaging with the organization online after the intervention became aware of the community-focused content of many posts. One potential avenue for further research is to measure the relative frequency of organizational social and digital media posts containing messages that support the individual communications concepts, e.g., what percentage of posts contain messages about generating trust, demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment, generating satisfaction, and promoting communal relationships. For example, communications professionals could monitor their posts for a discrete period of time and code the content of each post. Posts about the organization sending employees for training or providing employees and their family memberships with scholarships could be coded as generating trust, while posts about the organization making a large donation to a local nonprofit organization could be coded as promoting communal relationships. At the end of the designated time period, the communicators could calculate the percentages of posts that contained messages about the concepts, and this coding and counting could be followed by an internal survey to determine whether employees recalled the social and digital media messages in the same percentage breakdowns as the messages were shared. Such research could help communications professionals identify whether certain types of messages are more or less effective when shared through social and digital media and therefore more or less likely to help the organization build relationships with its publics.
For this study, I also assessed whether perceptions changed for the individual statements that were related to the overall scores for the five communications constructs for both the organization in general and specifically for the organization’s social and digital media. Of the 12 individual questions for assessing these employee perceptions, mean in the Matched Pair sample for three questions increased sufficiently to be statistically significant at $p < .10$ for exploratory research:

- “I am happy with this organization” in the questions about perceptions of the organization in general, with a mean score increase from 3.90 on the pretest to 3.98 in the posttest ($p = .086$);

- “Employees are happy with this organization” in the questions about perceptions of the five communications concepts based on the organization’s social and digital media, 3.97 to 4.11 ($p = .058$); and

- “This organization actively works to serve others” in the questions about perceptions based on the organization’s social and digital media, 4.37 to 4.55 ($p = .090$).

These results contributed new knowledge to the literature regarding communications effectiveness by showing that an organization’s social and digital media communications can have a positive impact on employees’ perceptions of the organization in general in terms of how the employee values his or her relationship with the organization and on how employees specifically view the organization’s online messaging in relation to their happiness with the organization and the organization’s efforts to work actively to serve others. PR professionals should enhance their usage of social and digital media communications as a tool specifically to communicate with employees, with the goal of enhancing employee engagement. In addition, communications professionals should partner with their human resource colleagues to
incorporate social and digital media communications into employee engagement surveys and should conduct outreach to community partners to ensure they are engaging with the organization through social and digital media and seeing messages about the organization’s service to the community.

**Perceptions of PR and Communication Professionals About Social and Digital Media**

The fourth research question investigated how the communicators perceived the impacts of social and digital media on employees’ relationships with the organization. I asked the communicators to provide their perceptions in two ways: first by completing the pretest and posttest surveys and second by participating in a focus group interview session.

**Survey results.** For the five concepts (generating trust, demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment, generating satisfaction, and promoting communal relationships), the communicators registered higher mean scores on the pretest and posttest surveys than those of the other employee respondents. However, independent t tests showed that these differences were not statistically significant at $p < .05$. This contributed new knowledge in the literature because it provided specific information about how professional communicators perceive the effectiveness of social and digital media compared with perceptions of other employees. This study provided evidence that the communicators and the other organization employees generally shared the same view of the effectiveness of the organization’s social and digital media communications with regard to generating trust, demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment, generating satisfaction, and promoting communal relationships. This awareness of the perceptions of the various parties reflects the view in the relationship management literature that organizations can provide building blocks for interactions between an organization and the publics served by that organization. Organizations can accomplish this by developing practices
that facilitate exchange, starting with awareness as the first condition of the organization-public relationship and progressing to dialogue (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999).

**Focus group results.** The communicator focus group session highlighted three major themes. First, communicators can more effectively enhance relationships with employees by driving the greatest possible attendance at interventions intended to educate and inform employees about the organization’s social and digital media. Second, interventions such as the social media fair and emails designed to educate and inform staff about an organization’s online communications can deliver valuable information and enhance the organization’s relationships with employees. Third, interventions such as the social media fair and informational emails can be effective in increasing employees’ use of social media to engage with a company. This finding supports the view in the relationship management literature that organizations can provide building blocks for relationships between the organization and the publics it serves by developing practices that facilitate exchange, starting with awareness as the first condition of the organization-public relationship and progressing to dialogue (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999).

**Discussion of the Research Study Results**

This research study intended to assess the impacts of social and digital media on organizational communications and organization-public relationship building from the standpoint of both one organization and its employees as a specific group of stakeholders. The study findings demonstrated that an intervention to educate and inform employees about the organization’s social and digital media, consisting of a social media fair and emails to employees, did not result in increased positive employee perceptions of the organization as a whole with regard to each of the five overarching communications concepts (generating trust, demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment, generating satisfaction, and
promoting communal relationships). The findings also showed that the intervention did not affect the participant perceptions of the organization with respect to the five communications concepts; the $p$ of 0.063 for promoting communal relationships was the only result that could be considered significant at $p < 0.10$ for exploratory research. In addition, mean scores for three individual questions that measured the communications concept variables increased sufficiently to be statistically significant:

- “I am happy with this organization” in the questions about perceptions of the organization in general;
- “Employees are happy with this organization” in the questions about perceptions of the five communications concepts based on the organization’s social and digital media; and
- “This organization actively works to serve others” in the questions about perceptions based on the organization’s social and digital media.

The intervention in this study resulted in one statistically significant increase in employee use of social and digital media specifically to engage with the organization, for LinkedIn. Finally, the study showed that communicators and other employees generally viewed the organization’s effectiveness at fostering the five communications concepts the same, as the higher mean scores for the communicators were not statistically significant. The most dominant themes to emerge from the focus group session with the communicators were:

- The intervention, especially the opportunity to increase employee attendance at and participation in the social media fair, and the email intervention were ways to enhance the organization’s relationship with employees;
- The education employees received from the intervention was valuable in enhancing relationships with employees; and
• The employees’ use of social media to engage with the company increased after the social media fair and the flyer/email intervention.

These results indicate that PR and communications leaders who are increasingly committing human capital and monetary resources to social and digital media communications should undertake intervention programs to educate and inform employees about their organizations’ online options; doing so will enable leaders to maximize the likelihood that employees will engage with those sites and will have enhanced perceptions of the organization’s social and digital media as a result.

Communications leaders also may choose to investigate utilizing LinkedIn as a primary channel to engage employee audiences, and they could also decide to measure how closely the perceptions of employees about the organization and its social and digital media align with the perceptions of the communicators who are responsible for posting content on the organizations’ behalf. Furthermore, PR and communications leaders should ensure that communicators are aware of how they perceive their organizations’ social and digital media and how their perceptions compare with those of employees who are on the receiving end of the organizations’ social media messages.

PR leaders can employ quantitative and qualitative assessments of social and digital media effectiveness for the purpose of building organization-public relationships with stakeholders, including employees. A quantitative approach would enable communicators to assess their online applications by measuring the growth in the size, interactivity, and engagement of the community over time as recommended by Culnan et al. (2010) as a result of interventions like the social media fair and email intervention I used in this study that were designed to educate, inform, and spur engagement with employees. A qualitative approach
would enable PR and communications leaders to explore in greater depth employee thoughts on the organization’s social and digital media initiatives, providing richer insights into the effectiveness of social and digital media as communications tools.

**Implications of the Study for PR and Communications Practice**

The fundamental goal of public relations is to build and then enhance ongoing or long-term relationships with an organization’s key constituencies; measuring relationships and communications effectiveness, including changes in what people think, feel, and do, are critical for PR and communications practitioners (Hon & Grunig, 1999). This study supported this fundamental goal in measuring the effort to enhance the relationship between the organization and its key constituency of employees; I also measured the employees’ actions toward the organization’s social and digital media sites before and after the planned intervention.

Today, social and digital media are almost ubiquitous means of communications, offering unique and potentially beneficial opportunities for organizations and their stakeholders to develop and build relationships (Reitz, 2012; Smith, 2011). With 40 separate sites, the subject organization for this study uses social and digital media as a significant means of communications with its stakeholders, including employees. However, successful relationship building in social media requires organizations to actively work to build communities and to learn from their interactions with their stakeholders in these new channels (Culnan et al., 2010), as well as to develop new concepts, theories, frameworks, and activities for social media interactions with organizational stakeholders (Briones et al., 2010; Khang et al., 2012). I designed this study to generate exactly these types of insights from interactions with employee stakeholders in these new channels as a path to developing new concepts, theories, frameworks, and activities through which to engage with employees through social media in the future.
Success in this new paradigm requires communications strategies and programs that are aimed not just at traditional target audiences and segments but also at individuals to spur action and advocacy and that can be analyzed and measured to determine the extent to which individuals and targeted groups are acting and advocating on the organization’s behalf (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007).

With the framework I presented in this study, I examined how PR leaders can assess the effectiveness of social and digital media in organizational relationship building. This study delivers quantitative and qualitative data that provide greater insight into social media, as advocated by Khang et al. (2012). It also provides analysis of the effect of engaging in dialogue on stakeholders, as supported by Rybalko and Seltzer (2010). In summary, for this study I synthesized research on social media effectiveness and the role of communications in relationship building to deliver new knowledge in this field.

**Implications of Systems, Complexity, and Relational Leadership Theory for PR and Communications Practice**

Social and digital media today are widely used and widely accepted communications tools for organizational PR and communications professionals, and organizational communications has likewise increased the use of online channels to reach a wide range of audiences. PR/communications leaders seek to better understand the effects of social and digital media on building organization-public relationships and to better comprehend how these platforms affect the complex adaptive systems at work in organization-public relationships. Systems theory, complexity leadership theory, and relational leadership theory offer theoretical foundations for addressing these needs.
Systems theory. An organization and its stakeholders comprise a system in which relationships are established and cultivated through communications messages and communications channels used to interact and share information. Inside this system, interrelated subsystems operate in environments such as Reitz (2012) described wherein organizations, individuals, and the media can each be seen as a societal subsystem in which changes to one subsystem affect other subsystems and the overarching system as a whole, causing the system to adjust and adapt. Systems theory has implications for PR and communications leadership by helping to focus on the nonhierarchical interrelationships that are at work in social and digital media communications. Systems theory also can guide PR leaders in taking more holistic and democratic approaches to minimizing traditional top-down power dynamics in favor of more mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.

This study illuminated the success of using a social media fair and email intervention to demonstrate to employees how the organization is seeking to engage with them through democratic social media channels in which employees can interact as partners with the organization in building mutually beneficial relationships. Systems theory, in turn, supports PR and communications leaders and practitioners in pursuing opportunities to engage with stakeholders, including employees, as coequal parts of organizational subsystems that are in a continuous process of change and adaptation. As the organization and its employees cultivate their relationship through social media, professional communicators should use the process of interacting and sharing information to enhance the entire organizational system. They should share, study, and refine communications messages with the goal of continually generating and improving relationships to the benefit of the organization and its employees. A systems theory orientation to leading organizational communications through social and digital media can
promote adaptability that can strengthen the role of communications in building organization-public relationships with employees.

**Complexity leadership theory.** Within the nonhierarchical interrelationships that exist in social and digital media lie signs of what Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) described as a shift away from the top-down, bureaucratic, predictable, command-and-control view of leadership toward an emergent, evolving, interactive view of leadership that reflects a specific contextual and historical situation, i.e., the framework for complexity leadership theory (p. vii). The theory addresses the complexity that is fundamental to human interactions in general and that is intensified by the prevalence and speed of social and digital communications. As a result, complexity leadership theory has implications for PR and communications leaders who are change agents seeking to evolve organizational communications and organization-public relationships within the contexts of these new, open communication systems.

This study reflected the role of PR/communications leaders and professionals as change agents by my goal of investigating the complex relationships between the organization, its employees, and their social and digital media activities. Just as complexity theory takes an emergent, evolving, interactive view of leadership, social and digital media represent an emergent, evolving, interactive means of communications. Similarly, as complexity leadership theory reflects a specific contextual and historical situation, online communications reflect the context and situation in place at the time of the posts and the positionality and condition of both the poster and the individual on the receiving end of the post.

For example, an organization that treats its workers poorly is unlikely to effectively build relationships with employees through social and digital media posts that fail to reflect the employees’ lived experiences. Consequently, complexity theory is well suited for PR and
communications leaders who take an emergent, evolving, and interactive view of their roles even as they lead communications through these new channels. The theory thus aligns closely with the theoretical concept as well as with the practical application and practice of social and digital media communications; it supports PR/communications leaders and practitioners in using social and digital media and measuring their effectiveness in order to better understand the emergent and evolving relationships between organizations and their employees through online communications.

**Relational leadership theory.** As PR and communications leaders engage as change agents fostering nonhierarchical relationships between organizations and their publics through social and digital media, we are witnessing what Uhl-Bien (2006) described as the construction and production of change resulting from emergent coordination and evolving social order, i.e., the framework for relational leadership theory. Social and digital media represent a stark example of emergent coordination in that they offer platforms for organizations and their employees to connect, communicate, and coordinate in new ways every day, and these online communications create an ever-evolving social order with each interaction between the organization and its employees. This study offers insights into how employees and communicators perceive that evolving social order, in terms of both of their perceptions of the organization as a whole and their perceptions specifically of the organization’s social and digital media posts, both before after they are given the opportunity to understand more about the organization’s online presence and content.

PR and communications leaders can utilize relational leadership theory to guide them in cultivating the capacity to engage meaningfully and successfully, on an ongoing basis, with various organizational stakeholders including employees. This is especially important for these
leaders, who play a critical role as the bridge between the organization and its constituents including employees. The importance is highlighted by the call in relational leadership theory to foster nonhierarchichal relationships, which is a goal that closely reflects the social media environment, where all voices are equal. As such, relational leadership theory, like complexity leadership theory, has both theoretical and practical alignment with social and digital media communications. Relational leadership theory can also guide PR and communications leaders in developing flexibility in their thinking and in their actions to facilitate effective relationship building with stakeholders online; influence organizational relationship-building activities, measurements, and results; and assess the effectiveness of their social and digital communications over time. Furthermore, relational leadership theory has implications for professional communicators in taking an outcome-based view of organization-public relationships with individual stakeholders, as well as with stakeholders broadly in terms of the organization’s impact on the communities it serves and on society as a whole.

**Implications for Communications Theory**

Communications theory has long addressed the changes in communications as a result of technological advances and specifically as a result of the growth of social media. Internet and social media communications channels have developed and grown, extending the public’s access to information and driving the evolution of mass communications theory. With the growth of the Internet and social media, audience and message segmentation theory and practice have likewise advanced significantly; the numbers and types of stakeholders and interested parties have simultaneously multiplied and diffused; and the process of building and maintaining stakeholder relationships has been redefined.
Messaging and dialogic communication have been superseded by multilogic conversations across an ever-increasing number of online channels – channels that are becoming more and more central to organization-public communications. Relationship building with key constituencies via social media has become more critical even as the process via social media has become more complex. Indeed, relationship building has become a stepping stone to community building in the social media framework, wherein dialogue, transparency, trust, and mutual benefit lead to relationships that build community.

Yet at the intersection of stakeholders, social and digital media channels, and messaging/engagement effectiveness lies a void: There is no unifying theory of social media effectiveness in communicating and engaging with organizational stakeholders, and there is no widely accepted methodology for measuring whether interactions with stakeholders across multiple social and digital media channels are building relationships and community. This study highlighted the importance of developing theoretical constructs to inform PR and communications leaders in measuring the relationship-building effectiveness of communications and engagement with stakeholders through social and digital media.

**Implications for Leadership and Change**

Social and digital media represent the greatest change to the practice of communications in recent decades. With social and digital media, PR leaders and professionals are learning how to adapt to the new paradigm in building relationships with publics. The emergence of social and digital media has made it more complex and more difficult for professional communicators to organize communications, build relationships, and measure the effectiveness of their efforts. The results of this study showed that it is possible to organize social and digital media communications in a way that allows organizations to educate employees about the
organization’s online activities. I also demonstrated the effectiveness of utilizing an intervention to demonstrate to employees how the organization is acting to build relationships with stakeholders including employees. In addition, I measured the employees’ perceptions of the organization in general as well as the organization’s social and digital media communications specifically. Because of these efforts, this study points a way forward toward proactively engaging employees to build relationships with the organization through social and digital media. With social and digital media usage continuing to grow, and with younger generations increasingly utilizing these channels as their primary communications tools, organizations will have to engage employees effectively through these new media in order to communicate with them and cultivate the employee-employer relationship.

Simultaneously, organizations will need to refine the ways in which they engage with employees through social and digital media and enhance their ability to have fast and meaningful interactions that result in mutually beneficial outcomes. In a recent example, online furniture giant Wayfair was being buffeted with criticism as a result of their $200,000 furniture sale to BCFS, a private contractor that operates controversial border camps housing immigrant children who have been separated from their parents; hundreds of Wayfair employees staged a walkout on June 26, 2019, after utilizing social media to rally public support for their protest. Their employee protest received widespread coverage on traditional and social media and put significant pressure on the company to take a stand. Bhattarai (2019) said “The Wayfair protest has become an inflection point in how consumers and employees interact with major corporations.” Going forward, PR and communications professionals will need to anticipate and plan for more employee activism as part of the organization-public relationship that they cultivate with their employees.
Systems theory offers a framework for PR and communications leaders to understand the patterns of interrelationships as they relate to organizational relationships with employees related to social and digital media communications. Relational leadership theory provides a framework for leaders in PR and communications to consider the role of social and digital media as a social influence tool and as a series of social interactions through which emergent coordination, e.g., evolving social order, and change, e.g., new approaches, values, attitudes, behaviors, ideologies, are constructed and produced (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 654). Complexity leadership theory presents a framework for PR and communications leaders to reflect relationship complexity tenets within their oversight of the strategic communications between organizations and their employee stakeholders, who are so critical to organizational effectiveness.

Limitations

This study included various limitations in design, implementation, and analysis. In terms of design, the pretest/posttest design has certain limitations: One was the potential for differences in the pretest and posttest groups; for example, perceptions about social and digital media in general as well as specifically related to the organization could have differed between the two groups. Another limitation in the pretest/posttest design was that it may have influenced the participants’ behavior by alerting them to the study hypothesis. In addition, there was no control group in this study, so I could not determine any causal relationships. The fact that I conducted the study in an employer setting also might have limited employees in sharing their honest opinions.

The focus group design also had limitations. Similar to the surveys, I conducted the focus group in an employer setting with employees, so participants in the focus group also might
not have expressed their true opinions. Furthermore, the participants might not have described their experiences comprehensively.

There were also limitations in participation and scheduling. Obtaining approval and planning the surveys and the interventions took longer than expected; by the time permission had been granted, there was a limited window in which to collect the data. There was also a short time between obtaining the results and holding the focus group session, limiting the ability of focus group members to absorb results. The analysis was also limited by the differences in responses before and after the intervention: There were more responses before and significantly fewer after; the sample sizes in the pretest, posttest, Matched Pair sample, and focus group also presented limitations.

Researcher bias also could have limited the study. I am an executive in the organization where I conducted the study: I designed the study; I recruited participants; I implemented the intervention; and I collected the data; without an independent person collecting data, I may have influenced the results, either consciously or unconsciously. In addition, participants knew that the same person conducting the research would also analyze the data; thus, they may have responded in such a way as to meet my perceived goals given my position in the organization. This could have been particularly the case during the focus group interview, where all participants had a direct or dotted line reporting relationship to me; if they had any negative feedback, they might not have felt comfortable disclosing it directly to me.

The variables also limited the study. It is possible that any positive outcomes were attributable to other factors that I did not include in the study; for example, factors I did not incorporate included reasons employees used social and digital media and whether they viewed their online activity as appropriate to share with their employer. Additionally, uncontrolled
variables were a study limitation; I attempted to remain neutral, but I also directed the questions and discussion topics in the study. This potentially confounding factor, combined with the lack of a control group and a small sample, makes it impossible to determine the direct causes of any positive effects.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings from this study warrant future research to further explore social and digital media as a tool for enhancing the relationships between organizations and their stakeholders, especially employees. Should this study be replicated, I recommend the following changes. One, I suggest that surveys be shortened and fielded over a longer period of time to increase the likelihood that participants can finish them. Similarly, I recommend that the email portion of the intervention be conducted over a longer period to avoid inundating employees with emails in a short time frame; increasing the length of time for the study could result in better survey completion rates and more intervention emails. It also could allow more time for enhanced “get-out-the-attendance” efforts to increase the percentage of employees who attend the social media fair portion of the intervention. Other options are to increase the total number of intervention sessions from one in each location to two or more, providing more opportunities for employees to receive the intervention, and scheduling the fairs for early and late in the workday rather than just in the middle of the day to allow more options for employees to attend.

Because this project was a mixed-methods study, I found it challenging to conduct statistical as well as narrative analyses among participants; replicating this study may include a non-intervention control group to isolate the variables and assess causality. I also found it difficult to draw definitive quantitative conclusions from the small samples, especially for the posttest. In addition, having incomplete data from several participants may have affected the
outcomes; if a similar study were to be conducted in the future, I recommend that a larger sample size be gathered, especially for the posttest. However, without an estimate of the magnitude of an expected effect, it is difficult to predict the sample size required to show such an effect, so I can recommend no specific sample size. Using a larger sample could also allow for attrition and more detailed statistical analyses, such as examining correlations between age factors and intervention participation.

I received approval to conduct this intervention at two separate offices, one in California and one in Minnesota. The layout of the first intervention site in California was suboptimal because all the communicators who were conducting the fair were from a different office and were not able to manage the room setup on site until they arrived from out of town on the morning of the intervention. As a result, the California site had to be quickly reset at the last minute in order to allow employees to flow through the intervention in a stepwise and meaningful fashion.

With this experience, I held a planning session prior to the intervention in Minnesota to ensure the optimal fair experience for employees. As a result of the differences in planning, however, the social media fair might not have been as engaging for the California participants as it was for those in Minnesota, and this could have interfered with the intervention’s ability to affect behavior. I recommend that social media fairs as interventions be thoroughly planned far in advance and conducted in a lively, well-architected atmosphere that engages attendees.

**Study Replication and Future Research**

Because of the sensitive nature of working with employee participants, I recommend that a researcher with training in behavioral studies conduct future research; employee participants may be vulnerable when sharing perceptions in and about their workplaces, so researchers must
take care to do no harm, real or perceived. Trained researchers may be better positioned to ensure that all parties, including employees as well as the organization, are protected throughout the research process. They also may be better able to navigate the internal approvals and overcome internal concerns that can arise when conducting research in a corporate environment.

Conclusion

Previous research showed increases in organizations using social and digital media to communicate with their stakeholders and the general public. However, the perceptions of PR and communications leaders in an organization and the perceptions of employees in that same organization about the effectiveness of the organization’s social and digital media communications to the employees, were unknown. I hypothesized that employees would perceive social and digital media as having positive impacts on an organization’s relationship with its employees, from the perspectives of both employees in general and communicators in particular.

Results from this study showed that most employees used social and digital media platforms and had positive perceptions about the organization’s social and digital media options before and after the social and digital media intervention. They also had positive perceptions about the organization’s use of social and digital media with respect to generating trust, demonstrating control mutuality, demonstrating commitment, generating satisfaction, and promoting communal relationships, five overarching concepts in communications. Communicators registered higher mean scores on both the pretest and posttest surveys than did the other employee respondents for all of the five communications constructs; however, the scores were not statistically significant, so communications professionals and other employees viewed the organization’s social and digital media effectiveness generally the same.
The study demonstrated that a social media fair and flyer/email intervention to inform and educate employees about the organization’s social and digital media communications resulted in a statistically significant increase in employee use of social and digital media specifically to engage with the organization. The study also showed that of the social and digital media platforms investigated, the increase in frequency of use specifically to engage with the organization was statistically significant only for LinkedIn. In addition, the results indicated that the intervention did not result in an increased positive perception of how employees viewed the organization as a whole with regard to each of the five communications concepts and also did not result in improved participant perceptions with regard to the organization’s social and digital media options as they relate to the five concepts.

However, with regard to perceptions of the organization’s social and digital media options, the p of .063 for promoting communal relationships was the only result that could be considered significant at $p < .10$ for exploratory research. The means for three individual questions increased sufficiently to be statistically significant: “I am happy with this organization” in the questions about perceptions of the organization in general, which reflected demonstrating commitment, and “Employees are happy with this organization,” which indicated generating satisfaction, and “This organization actively works to serve others,” reflecting promoting communal relationships, both under the questions about perceptions of the organization’s social and digital media.

Communicators who participated in the focus group noted opportunities to enhance the intervention, especially to increase employee attendance at and participation in the social media fair as well as completion of the surveys as a way to enhance the organization’s relationship with employees. They also noted the value of the education employees received from the intervention
in enhancing their relationships with their employer and the increase in employees’ use of social media to engage with the company after the intervention.

PR and communications leaders can use the results of this study to conduct effective social and digital media campaigns to engage their employees; they could also hold more programs to increase employee awareness about organizations’ social and digital media. Finally, PR and communications leaders could ensure that employees regularly receive updates about their organizations’ social and digital media postings and efforts to engage online with stakeholders including employees.

In today’s environment, PR and communications leaders need to understand how to communicate effectively with our audiences using these online channels. Our ability to successfully build relationships with individual stakeholders requires us to assess a rich variety of social and digital media channels and use these tools strategically with specific audience segments. PR and communications leaders should use the results of this study to successfully engage and work together with stakeholders in ways that enhance the organization-public relationship and benefits all parties in the relationship.
References


Appendix
Appendix A: Employee Recruitment Emails for Pretest Survey and Social Media Fair

Intervention

EMAIL 1

SOCIAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA EFFECTIVENESS WITH EMPLOYEES

To all Minneapolis employees:

Please join us for a Social Media Fair in the Canteen on Tuesday, February 26, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. CT.

A lot is happening on our social media accounts across the organization and we’d like to invite you to learn more and become part of the conversation.

At our Social Media Fair on Tuesday, you will learn about the many accounts we operate across several social media platforms and how to engage with us on those sites! You also will learn how to develop and enhance your social media presence on LinkedIn.

In addition, there will be a photo booth, cookies and a #ECMCGroupie T-shirt!

Employees will receive 15 minutes of paid time to attend the fair. Please work with your manager to arrange your time at the event. Managers, please work together to ensure proper coverage throughout the event.

Before the fair, you’re asked to complete a survey about your social media use as well as your familiarity and interaction with the social media communications of ECMC Group and its affiliates. The survey will enable us to better understand your thoughts about our social media communications and is part of a PhD research study by Iris Cumberbatch. Please click the “Begin Survey” link below to access this short survey. The survey is completely voluntary and not required to attend the social media fair.

If you have questions, please contact Iris at iris@ecmcgroup.com.

We look forward to seeing you at the Social Media Fair!

EMAIL 2

ECMC GROUP SOCIAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA EFFECTIVENESS WITH EMPLOYEES - SURVEY #1

To all Minneapolis employees:

We are looking forward to seeing you at the Social Media Fair in the Canteen on Tuesday, February 26, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. CT.

Before the fair, you’re asked to complete a survey about your social media use as well as your familiarity and interaction with the social media communications of ECMC Group and its affiliates. The survey will enable us to better understand your thoughts about our social media communications and is part of a PhD research study by Iris Cumberbatch. Please click the “Begin Survey” link below to access this short survey. The survey is completely voluntary and not required to attend the social media fair.

A lot is happening on our social media accounts across the organization and we’d like to invite you to learn more and become part of the conversation. At our Social Media Fair on Monday, you will learn about the many accounts we operate across several social media platforms and how to engage with us on those sites! You also will learn how to develop and enhance your social media presence on LinkedIn.

In addition, there will be a photo booth, cookies and a #ECMCGroupie T-shirt!

Employees will receive 15 minutes of paid time to attend the fair. Please work with your manager to arrange your time at the event. Managers, please work together to ensure proper coverage throughout the event.

If you have questions, please contact Iris at iris@ecmcgroup.com.

See you at the Social Media Fair!
EMAIL 3

ECMC GROUP SOCIAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA EFFECTIVENESS WITH EMPLOYEES - SURVEY #1

To all ECMC Group employees:

A lot is happening on our ECMC Group social media accounts across the organization and we'd like to invite you to learn more and become part of the conversation.

Below is information about the many accounts we operate across several social media platforms. Please engage with us on those that interest you.

You're invited to complete a survey about your social media use as well as your familiarity and interaction with the social media communications of ECMC Group and its affiliates. The survey will enable us to better understand your thoughts about our social media communications and is part of a PhD research study by [Redacted].

Please visit the "Survey Now" link below to access this short survey. The survey is completely voluntary.

If you have questions, please contact [Redacted].
Appendix B: Social Media Fair Desk Drop

ECMC GROUP
SOCIAL MEDIA FAIR

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 26
11:00 A.M. – 2:00 P.M.

ECMC Group is on social media! Please join us in the 15th floor Canteen to learn more about our social media pages and how you can engage with us.

Learn about social media  Create or enhance your profile  Have a cookie  Get a free t-shirt  Take a pic in the photo booth

*Employees will receive 15 minutes of paid time to attend the social media fair.*
ECMC GROUP
SOCIAL MEDIA

TWITTER
@ecmcgroup
@ecmcfab
@ECMCSolutions
@AlexandriaTCP
@ColoradoTCP
@ConnecticutTCP
@MinnesotaTCP
@NorCalTCP
@OregonTCP
@TCPRichmond
@ScholarsECMC
@ECMCFoundation
@ZenithEdGroup
@altierus

FACEBOOK
ECMC Scholars
Financial Awareness Basics (FAB)
Solutions at ECMC
The College Place Alexandria
The College Place Colorado
The College Place Connecticut
The College Place Minnesota
The College Place Northern California
The College Place Oregon
The College Place Richmond
ECMC Foundation
Altius Career College
Altius Career College (Houston)
Altius Career College (Norcross)
Altius Career College (Tampa)

LINKEDIN
ECMC Group
ECMC
Solutions at ECMC
ECMC Foundation
Zenith Education Group
Altius Career College

YOUTUBE
ECMC Group
ECMC Foundation
Altius Career College

INSTAGRAM
Altius

ECMC Group
Appendix C: Pretest Survey

Welcome to the survey of "SOCIAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA EFFECTIVENESS WITH EMPLOYEES"

Do ECMC Group's social and digital media communications effectively share our values and news? This survey asks about your social and digital media usage related to ECMC Group. Please share your thoughts. Answering these questions is your choice; you do not have to take this survey; and you can stop at any time. There are minimal, if any, risks in taking the survey. Your responses will be confidential and will be combined with other employee responses into a report on the effectiveness of social and digital media as a communications tool. Study results will be published to our intranet when complete.

This study is part of the Antioch University PhD dissertation of Iris Cumberbatch, and has been approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. You also will be asked to attend the Social Media Fair and you will receive informational emails about our social and digital media. You will receive another survey in a few weeks to get your feedback on the social media fair and informational emails. If you have questions at any time about the survey or the study, you may contact Dr. Lisa Kreeger, Chair of the Antioch University IRB.

By submitting this survey, you confirm that you have read and understood the survey introduction and agree to participate in the research study.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey!

Sincerely,

Iris Cumberbatch
Section 1. General Perceptions of ECMC Group

1. Thinking about ECMC Group and/or any of its affiliate companies, how strongly do you disagree or agree with each of the following statements about this organization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. This organization cares about employees like me.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. This organization does what it says it will do.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. This organization listens to the opinions of employees like me.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. This organization and I agree on what we can expect from each other.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. This organization is committed to employees like me.</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. This organization wants to maintain a relationship with employees like me</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. I value my relationship with this organization.</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>h. I am happy with this organization.</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. This organization and I benefit from the relationship we have with each other</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship this organization has established with employees like me</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. This organization actively works to serve others.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. This organization is very concerned about the welfare of people.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Section 1. General Perceptions of ECMC Group (Continued)

* 2. Overall, how strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following about ECMC Group and its affiliates in each of the following areas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generates Trust (i.e., increases employees’ confidence that the organization is trustworthy)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates Control Mutuality (i.e., shows employees they are equal partners in the relationship with the organization)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates Commitment (i.e., shows employees that they should spend their time and energy maintaining a relationship with the organization and demonstrates that the organization spends its resources to maintain a relationship with employees)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generates Satisfaction (i.e., makes sure employees feel good about their relationship with the organization)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Promotes Communal Relationships (i.e., shows that the organization cares about employees and the community, and that employees care about the organization and the community)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Please share any additional thoughts you have about ECMC Group related to these five areas.
Section 2. Social and Digital Media Use

* 4. Do you ever, for any reason, use or look at any of the social and digital media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, etc.?  
○ Yes  
○ No

Section 2. Social and Digital Media Use (Continued)

* 5. How often do you use each of the social and digital media platforms below?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Use Multiple Times a Day</th>
<th>Use at Least Once a Day</th>
<th>Use at Least Once a Week</th>
<th>Use at Least Once a Month</th>
<th>Use less than once per Month</th>
<th>Never Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
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<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify below)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 6. How long have you used social and digital media?  
○ Less than 5 years  
○ 5-10 years  
○ More than 10 years
**Section 3. Using ECMC Group Social and Digital Media Sites**

* 7. Do you ever use or visit any social and digital media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, etc. to visit an ECMC Group or affiliate company site?

  - [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

**Section 3. Using ECMC Group Social and Digital Media Sites (Continued)**

* 8. How often do you visit an ECMC Group or affiliate company site on each of the social and digital media platforms below?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Multiple Times a Day</th>
<th>At Least Once a Day</th>
<th>At Least Once a Week</th>
<th>At Least Once a Month</th>
<th>Less than once per Month</th>
<th>Never Visit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
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<td>LinkedIn</td>
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<td>Instagram</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
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<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please describe below)</td>
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<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please specify)
Section 4. Perceptions of Social and Digital Media at ECMC Group

9. Thinking about the messages you’ve seen on ECMC Group’s social and digital media platforms how strongly do you disagree or agree with each of the following statements? ECMC Group social and digital media messages show that...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>...this organization cares about employees like me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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**Section 4. Perceptions of Social and Digital Media at ECMC Group (Continued)**

* 10. Overall, how strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following **about the messages you've seen on ECMC Group's social and digital media platforms**?

<table>
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<th>Generates Trust (i.e., increases employees' confidence that the organization is trustworthy)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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11. Please share any additional thoughts you have about ECMC Group related to these five areas.
Section 5: Demographics

* 12. What is your job role?
   - Individual Contributor/does not manage others
   - Supervisor/Manager
   - Director/Officer

* 13. How long have you been employed with ECMC Group?
   - Less than 5 years
   - 5-10 years
   - Over 10 years

* 14. What is your age?
   - Under 30
   - 30-44
   - 45-59
   - 60+

* 15. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!
Appendix D: Social Media Fair Informational Flyer Handout

JOIN THE CONVERSATION
Did you know ECMC Group has 30 social media sites across the enterprise? We are engaging with the individuals and organizations we serve via these sites and invite you to join the conversation.

Engage with us by subscribing to our pages, following us and liking the content we post. Also, share photos of ECMC Group volunteer events and other memorable moments. Use the hashtag #ECMCGroupie so we can follow along. (Please remember, when taking photos inside of our buildings, make sure no photos of personally identifiable information or unlocked computer screens are included.)

WHAT IS A HASHTAG?
A hashtag is a label for content on social media sites. Hashtags are often used for events and trending topics. Companies also often have their own hashtag, for example, #ECMCScholarshipTips. You can create a hashtag and include it with your social media by simply adding #YOURTEXTHERE. This will label your post, allowing others to click on it and see mentions with the same hashtag.

TIPS FOR USING HASHTAGS
- Make sure you have the correct event/topic’s hashtag and make sure it is spelled correctly.
- If you’re hosting an event, create a hashtag and share with employees to help promote it on social media. (Libby Brunstuen in Corporate Affairs is happy to help with this.)
- Keep hashtags short and sweet—hashtags that are too long are easily misspelled and use valuable space in your message.

Examples of hashtag use:
- Can’t wait for the ECMC Group Social Media Fair #ECMCGroupie.
- Loving my new #ECMCGroupie T-shirt I got at work today!

WHO MANAGES ECMC GROUP’S ACCOUNTS?
Corporate Affairs is responsible for social media across the enterprise. Each social media account has a dedicated employee responsible for posting social media content to its page. These employees have gone through multiple social media trainings and are frequently updated with ECMC Group happenings.

ECMC GROUP ACCOUNTS
TWITTER
@ecmcscholarship
@ecmcdisability
@ecmcCounseling
@ConnectecTIP
@MinneapolisTIP
@ChicagoTIP
@ECMCgroupie
@ECMCRichmond
@ScholarECMC
@ECMCFoundation
@ECMCGroup
@ECMCinfo

FACEBOOK
ECMC Scholars
Financial Awareness Basic (FAB) Solutions at ECMC
The College Place Alexandria
The College Place Colorado
The College Place Connecticut
The College Place Minnesota
The College Place Northern California
The College Place Oregon
The College Place Richmond
ECMC Foundation
African American College
African American College (Houston)
African American College (Norcross)
African American College (Tampa)

LINKEDIN
ECMC Group
ECMC
Excellence at ECMC
ECMC Foundation
Health Education Group
African American College

YOUTUBE
ECMC Group
ECMC Foundation

INSTAGRAM
African
Appendix E: Social Media Fair Tee Shirt Giveaway
Appendix F: Educational Emails Used as Part of Intervention

To all Minneapolis employees:

Thanks to everyone who attended the Social Media Fair on Tuesday. We hope you learned about our organization’s social media and you will engage with us on those sites. In case you missed it, below are a few social media posts from the last couple of days. Remember to follow us and like our posts.

Also, to everyone who took the social media survey, please look for a follow-up survey in a few weeks. And please visit our inside ECMC intranet for pictures from the photo booth and the social media fair. If you have any questions, please contact [redacted] at

To all Minneapolis employees:

We hope you’ve taken time to engage with ECMC Group on our social media sites. In case you missed it, below are a few social media posts from the last few days. Remember to follow and like our social

Also, to everyone who took the social media survey, please look for a follow-up survey in a few weeks. If you have any questions, please contact [redacted] at
Appendix G: Employee Recruitment Email for Posttest Survey

SOCIAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA EFFECTIVENESS WITH EMPLOYEES - SURVEY #2

To all ECMC Group employees:

Thank you for participating in our first social and digital media survey.

Now that you have had an opportunity to engage with ECMC Group’s social media accounts, we’d like to get your feedback.

Please complete this follow-up survey to let us know your thoughts about our social media. This study is part of a PhD research study by Iris Cumberbatch. Please click the “Begin Survey” link below to access this short survey. The survey is completely voluntary.

If you have questions, please contact Iris at [redacted].
Appendix H: Posttest Survey

Welcome to the follow-up survey of "SOCIAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA EFFECTIVENESS WITH EMPLOYEES"

This survey is a follow-up to our first social and digital media survey, and to our recent social media fair and informational emails about ECMC Group’s social media communications. Please share your thoughts. Answering these questions is your choice; you do not have to take this survey; and you can stop at any time. There are minimal, if any, risks in taking the survey. Your responses will be confidential and will be combined with other employee responses into a report on the effectiveness of social and digital media as a communications tool. Study results will be published on our Inside ECMC intranet when complete.

This study is part of the Antioch University PhD dissertation of Iris Cumberbatch, and has been approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. If you have questions at any time about the survey or the study, you may contact Dr. Lisa Kreeger, Chair of the Antioch University IRB, at

By submitting this survey, you confirm that you have read and understood the survey introduction and agree to participate in the research study.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey!

Sincerely,

Iris Cumberbatch
Section 1: ECMC Group Social and Digital Media Fair and Emails

1. Did you attend an ECMC Group Social Media Fair?
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

2. Do you remember receiving emails recently giving you information about ECMC Group's social and digital media sites?
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

3. Have you engaged with ECMC Group's social and/or digital media as a result of the social media fair or the informational emails?
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

4. Please share any additional thoughts you have about ECMC Group's social and digital media relating to the social media fair or the informational emails.
Section 2. General Perceptions of ECMC Group

* 5. Thinking about ECMC Group and/or any of its affiliate companies, how strongly do you disagree or agree with each of the following statements about this organization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>This organization cares about employees like me.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>g.</td>
<td>I value my relationship with this organization.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Section 2. General Perceptions of ECMC Group (Continued)

6. Overall, how strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following about ECMC Group and its affiliates in each of the following areas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
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7. Please share any additional thoughts you have about ECMC Group related to these five areas.
Section 3. Social and Digital Media Use

8. Do you ever, for any reason, use or look at any of the social and digital media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, etc.?  
   - Yes  
   - No

Section 3. Social and Digital Media Use (Continued)

9. How often do you use each of the social and digital media platforms below?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Use Multiple Times a Day</th>
<th>Use at Least Once a Day</th>
<th>Use at Least Once a Week</th>
<th>Use at Least Once a Month</th>
<th>Use less than once per Month</th>
<th>Never Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify below)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

10. How long have you used social and digital media?

   - Less than 5 years  
   - 5-10 years  
   - More than 10 years
Section 4. Using ECMC Group Social and Digital Media Sites

* 11. Do you ever use or visit any social and digital media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, etc. to visit an ECMC Group or affiliate company site?
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

Section 4. Using ECMC Group Social and Digital Media Sites (Continued)

* 12. How often do you visit an ECMC Group or affiliate company site on each of the social and digital media platforms below?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Multiple Times a Day</th>
<th>At Least Once a Day</th>
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Other (please specify)
Section 5. Perceptions of Social and Digital Media at ECMC Group

* 13. Thinking about the messages you've seen on ECMC Group's social and digital media platforms, how strongly do you disagree or agree with each of the following statements? **ECMC Group social and digital media messages show that...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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Section 5. Perceptions of Social and Digital Media at ECMC Group (Continued)

* 14. Overall, how strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following about the messages you’ve seen on ECMC Group’s social and digital media platforms?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generates Trust (i.e., increases employees’ confidence that the organization is trustworthy)</th>
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</table>

15. Please share any additional thoughts you have about ECMC Group related to these five areas.
Section 6: Demographics

* 16. What is your job role?
   ○ Individual Contributor/does not manage others
   ○ Supervisor/Manager
   ○ Director/Officer

* 17. How long have you been employed with ECMC Group?
   ○ Less than 5 years
   ○ 5-10 years
   ○ Over 10 years

* 18. What is your age?
   ○ Under 30
   ○ 30-44
   ○ 45-59
   ○ 60+

* 19. What is your gender?
   ○ Female
   ○ Male

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!
Appendix I: Interview Protocol for Focus Group with Communications Professionals

SOCIAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA EFFECTIVENESS WITH EMPLOYEES

Introduction – FOCUS GROUP

Thank you for agreeing to share your perspectives on ECMC Group’s social and digital media communications in this focus group meeting. You will be asked questions about your perceptions of social and digital media as it relates to ECMC Group. This is an opportunity for you to share your thoughts about ECMC Group’s social and digital media communications. This focus group session will last approximately two hours. Answering these questions is your choice. Your participation is voluntary and you can stop at any time. There are minimal, if any, risks in participating in this focus group. The data in this study will be published. However, your responses will be combined with other responses and will remain anonymous and confidential. Individual responses will not be shared. This session will be recorded and transcribed in order to be analyzed for themes in the responses.

This study of the effectiveness of social and digital media communications with employees is part of Iris Cumberbatch’s final project as a student in the Antioch University PhD Program. The study has been approved by the Antioch University Institutional Review Board. If you have questions at any time about the survey or the study, you may contact Dr. Lisa Kreeger, Chair of the Institutional Review Board at Antioch University. By participating in this focus group, you confirm that you have read and understood the introduction and agree to participate in the research study. You will be sent a link to the published survey results when they are completed this summer.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Iris Cumberbatch

icumberbatch@ecmc.org

************************************************************************

Thinking about the survey results, please answer the following questions:

1. How would you rate the success of the social and digital media fair in terms of educating employees about the organization’s social and digital media communications? Why?

2. What were the most positive aspects of the social media fair in terms of educating employees about the organization’s social and digital media communications and why?
3. What aspects of the social media fair could have been handled differently in order to be more effective in terms of educating employees about the organization’s social and digital media communications and why?

4. What surprised you the most about the survey results?

5. What surprised you the most about the social media fair?

6. How would you rate the social media fair in terms of demonstrating to employees that the organization’s social and digital media communications include messages about Trust (i.e., that they should have confidence in the organization’s reliability and integrity)?

7. How would you rate the social media fair in terms of demonstrating to employees that the organization’s social and digital media communications include messages about Control Mutuality (i.e., that there is shared control and influence in the relationship between the employee and the organization)?

8. How would you rate the social media fair in terms of demonstrating to employees that the organization’s social and digital media communications include messages about Commitment (i.e., that the relationship between the employee and the organization is worth spending energy to maintain and promote)?

9. How would you rate the social media fair in terms of demonstrating to employees that the organization’s social and digital media communications include messages about Satisfaction (i.e., positive feelings about the relationship)?

10. How would you rate the social media fair in terms of demonstrating to employees that the organization’s social and digital media communications include messages about Communal Relationships (i.e., mutual concern for each other)?
11. What other thoughts do you have about how we can engage employees in interacting with
the organization through social and digital media in order to build relationships with
them?

Thank you for your participation in this focus group!
Appendix J: ECMC Group Study Approval Letter

111 S Washington Ave.
Suite #1400
Minneapolis, MN 55401

January 8, 2019

Lisa Kreeger
IRB Chair
Antioch University
900 Dayton Street
Yellow Springs, OH 45387

Dear Ms. Kreeger,

Please note that Ms. Iris Cumberbatch, Antioch University Graduate Student in the PhD in Leadership and Change Program, has the permission of ECMC Group to conduct research at all of our facilities and with our remote employees for her study, "Exploring the Effectiveness of Social and Digital Media Communications on Organization-Public Relationship Building with Employes."

Ms. Cumberbatch will contact employees via email to invite them to participate in a pre test and post test survey using Survey Monkey, with an intervention event and activities between the two surveys, approximately nine employees who conduct social and digital media communications on behalf of our organization also will be invited via email to participate in a structured interview via focus group meeting. Ms. Cumberbatch plans to have the pre test distributed by the end of February 2019, the interventions completed by the end of February 2019, and the post test and focus group meeting completed by the end of March 2019. Our information technology office will provide employee email addresses for use in her research; employee email addresses will be assigned unique identifiers to maintain the confidentiality of respondents. Ms. Cumberbatch's on-site research activities will be finished by April 30, 2019.

Employees will be allowed time from their work duties to complete the surveys and attend the intervention activities. Ms. Cumberbatch has also agreed to provide to my office a copy of the Antioch University IRB-
(Page 2 of 2)

approved, stamped consent document before she recruits participants, and
will also provide a copy of any aggregate results.

If there are any questions, please contact my office.

Signed

ECMC Group
Appendix K: Social Media Fair Video
Appendix L: Pew Research Permissions

Hi Iris,

Thank you for reaching out. You do not need express permission for this, so feel free to use with proper attribution to Pew Research Center. You can review our use policy here: [www.pewresearch.org/usepolicy](http://www.pewresearch.org/usepolicy).

Best,

Pew Research Center
TO: PEW RESEARCH (info@pewresearch.org)

RE: PERMISSION TO USE PEW RESEARCH IN DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

I am completing my doctoral dissertation in the Antioch University PhD in Leadership and Change Program. My dissertation is titled “Exploring the Effectiveness of Social and Digital Media Communications on Organization-Public Relationship Building with Employees” and I am seeking permission to utilize Pew Research in my dissertation.

Among the sites, databases, and other places in which my dissertation will appear are:

a. Proquest Dissertations and Theses Database - Proquest is a Print on Demand Publisher: http://www.proquest.com/products-services/pqdt.html
b. OhioLink Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center - OhioLink ETD Center is an open access archive: https://etd.ohiolink.edu/
c. AURORA - Antioch University Repository and Archive - AURORA is an open access archive: http://aura.antioch.edu/

Below are copies of the Pew Research content as it will appear in my dissertation.

Please respond with your permission letter granting permission for usage as stated above.

Thank you for your consideration.
Appendix M: Edelman Permissions

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Get Outlook for iOS

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From: [Redacted]@edelman.com
To: [Redacted]
Subject: RE: Permission to Cite Edelman Trust Barometer

Date: Saturday, September 28, 2019 9:52:20 AM

Iris,

No in this case we don’t need to.

Best,

[Redacted]

Account Executive
250 Hudson St. | New York, NY 10013

[Redacted]

www.edelman.com

---

From: Iris Cumberbatch
To: [Redacted]
Subject: Re: Permission to Cite Edelman Trust Barometer

Email Originated Externally

Hi,

Will you be sending a permission letter?
TO: DANIEL J. EDELMAN HOLDINGS (compliance@dje Holdings.com)

RE: PERMISSION TO USE EDELMAN RESEARCH IN DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

I am completing my doctoral dissertation in the Antioch University PhD in Leadership and Change Program. My dissertation is titled “Exploring the Effectiveness of Social and Digital Media Communications on Organization-Public Relationship Building with Employees” and I am seeking permission to utilize Edelman Research in my dissertation.

Among the sites, databases, and other places in which my dissertation will appear are:

a. Proquest Dissertations and Theses Database - Proquest is a Print on Demand Publisher: http://www.proquest.com/products-services/pqdi.html
b. OhioLink Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center - OhioLink ETD Center is an open access archive: https://etd.ohiolink.edu/
c. AURA - Antioch University Repository and Archive - AURA is an open access archive: http://aura.antioch.edu/

Below are copies of the Edelman Research content as it will appear in my dissertation.


Employees More Believable Than CEOs
Percent who believe that employees are more believable than CEOs

[Bar chart showing percentages]

Please respond with your permission letter granting permission for usage as stated above.

Thank you for your consideration.
Appendix N: ECMC Group Permissions

111 S Washington Ave.
Suite #1400
Minneapolis, MN 55401

October 1, 2019

Dr. Mitch Kusy
Antioch University
900 Dayton Street
Yellow Springs, OH 45387

Dear Dr. Kusy,

Please note that Ms. Iris Cumberbatch, Antioch University Graduate Student in the PhD in Leadership and Change Program, has the permission of ECMC Group to utilize all materials related to her research at all of our facilities and with our remote employees for publication in her dissertation, “Exploring the Effectiveness of Social and Digital Media Communications on Organization-Public Relationship Building with Employees.”

Those materials include, but are not limited to, surveys, questionnaires, interviews, emails, flyers, desk drops, tee shirts, handouts, images, photos, audio and video recordings, social media posts, and other written and electronic/digital content produced and/or distributed in conjunction with her study.

If there are any questions, please contact my office.

Signed,

ECMC Group