

Twentieth Century Fox Consumer Products and the Role of Public Relations

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Bari L. Cohn

Question 1: Overview of Twentieth Century Fox

Professor Russell

8 May 2019

As one of the “Big Five” major film studios in America, Twentieth Century Fox is most well-known for its motion pictures and television series. In 1935, the Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation was formed by the merging of Twentieth Century Pictures and the Fox Film Corporation (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). William Fox, film producer and distributor, founded the Fox Film Corporation in 1915 after moving to Los Angeles, California. The corporation patented many key innovations such as the sound newsreel; however, due to a large amount of debt owed during the Great Depression, Fox was no longer able to keep his company in business. In 1933, Joseph Schenck and Darryl F. Zanuck founded Twentieth Century Pictures, and the company merged with the Fox Film Corporation two years later to form the Twentieth Century—Fox Film Corporation. In 1985, Rupert Murdoch, an international publisher, purchased the corporation. Murdoch combined the television and film companies under the umbrella corporation of Fox, Inc. The News Corporation conglomerate controlled Fox, Inc. until 2013, when it split into News Corporation, a publishing company, and Twenty-First Century Fox, a television and film company. Twenty-First Century Fox was in control of Twentieth Century Fox until 2017, when the Walt Disney Company acquired the entirety of Twentieth Century Fox and most of Twenty-First Century Fox. The \$71 billion deal closed on March 20, 2019 (Walt Disney Company).

Beginning in September 2016, Stacey Snider served as the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Twentieth Century Fox. However, after the Walt Disney Company purchased the corporation, it named Emma Watts, longtime production president, as the Vice Chairman and President of Production (Ellingson 2018). Watts reports to Walt Disney Studios Chairman Alan Horn. The top public relations practitioner is Hope Hicks, who serves as Executive Vice President

and Chief Communications (FOX CORP). Her responsibilities include serving as the chief spokesperson and the head of all communications initiatives.

For the purposes of my paper, I focused on the Consumer Products Division of Twentieth Century Fox. The top communications professional of this division is Craig Radow, Vice President of Global Marketing and Publicity. I spoke to Radow about his responsibilities and the function of public relations in this division. This corporation's mission is to entertain and move people through the creation and telling of stories on-screen (Fox Movies). The Consumer Products Division works with brands and agencies to establish and preserve licensed promotional partnerships (Fox Consumer Products Global). It works to generate excitement around properties and to maximize revenue. Examples of the division's major products include apparel, toys, and books based on television shows and films. This division has offices in every major country around the world, which remain in contact with one another to ensure their strategies are aligned. This division is unique in that it deals with both new and old properties in order to maximize profit. In 2009, Twentieth Century Fox released the film *Avatar*, which stands as the highest grossing movie in the world, generating \$2,787,965,087 worldwide to date (Box Office Mojo, 2019). The Consumer Products Division released over 125 licensed products, generating \$153 million in revenue.

I classify the Consumer Products Division as an open system since it is affected by both internal divisions and external systems. This organization uses a holistic approach in its decision-making, incorporating other division's needs in its strategy. Additionally, this division analyzes consumer feedback, subsequently altering its strategies in order to adapt to the needs of the public. The company must have a desire to improve to be considered an open system, which is shown through its commitment to consumer satisfaction. Lastly, this division seeks innovative solutions by trying new methods and techniques to reach new audiences and generate profit.

Bari L. Cohn
Question 2: Public Relations' Function
Professor Russell
8 May 2019

The public relations function of the Consumer Products Division of Twentieth Century Fox, in accordance with systems theory, receives information from the public to shift its means of production. In order to maximize profit, this division must engage with its environment. By analyzing the success of a campaign through sales, the organization is able to solve problems and alter forms of production to better suit the public's desires. Once the newly-modified initiatives are released, the company continues to use feedback from the consumer. Producing products is another way for people to engage with a film or television show they enjoy, or as a way to generate new viewers by sparking their interest through products. Additionally, the Consumer Product Division's role is to sell the program, meaning the television show or movie, in addition to the product. By selling the brand as a whole, the company generates more sales and increases awareness for the film or television show. The organization is able to see which initiatives are successful and analyze different audiences' responses. Additionally, the Consumer Products Division understands the needs of public and therefore provides the consumer with an additional viewing experience, in this case merchandise. Not only does the consumer benefit from his or her ability to engage with a certain television show or film, but the corporation benefits from consumers' excitement about new episodes and releases, etc. Furthermore, depending on the success of the television show or film, the Consumer Products Division is able to make more robust products in the future.

Within this organization, Radow's role as a public relations practitioner is to generate publicity for the brands which are popular in the consumer products space. The majority of the intellectual properties he works with include movies such as *Home Alone* and *Die Hard*, and television shows such as *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*. On a daily basis, Radow reaches out to

various press sources in order to reach as many different publics as possible. He must reach out to a many different press and media organizations due to the uncertainty of which sources will pick up and run the story. Another one of his main tasks is to ensure brands are well looked after in the consumer products space by maintaining positive relationships with the organizations. Radow is constantly developing public relations strategies and initiatives on the multiple properties he is working on at any given time. Another one of Radow's most imperative roles is in working and maintaining relationships with licensees. Licensees create the products which are sold in stores or directly to the consumer via platforms such as websites. Radow must time product launches with holidays and releases in order to determine the most effective retail strategy. Lastly, Radow must monitor competition and consumers' shopping habits. He must have a proficient understanding of where and how members of each demographic shop in order to anticipate trends and align the company's strategy.

I consider Craig Radow to be a communications manager because of the significant number of responsibilities his position requires. He must know which press sources are the most valuable to be in contact with for each specific product due to factors such as the target audience. Additionally, he must maintain strong relationships with the press to increase the chance of the source running his stories in the future. Another important component of his role as a communications manager is to understand how to interact with other heads of public relations within the corporation. This is important because each divisions' public relations team must align their efforts to ensure they are telling a unified and cohesive message. Moreover, divisions must work together to tell an even larger story in hopes of generating more profit. Timing is key in this industry, and it is imperative for the Consumer Products Division to have a proficient understanding of when and on which platforms to release a product. Additionally, I consider Radow to be a communications manager, rather than a

technician, because he must be proactive and innovative in order to maximize the profit for each specific brand. Twentieth Century Fox manages a large number of brands which target a wide variety of publics. Therefore, as a top communications professional in his division, Radow must understand which initiatives were successful and how they can be altered to save time and money in the future.

In addition to a myriad of responsibilities, his management role over others within his division qualifies him to be considered a communications manager. He is responsible for overseeing others' work in order to make sure it aligns with the mission and goals of the company in an efficient and thoughtful manner. Moreover, his duties as a top communications professional in his field require his availability at almost all hours of the day. Especially since the present-day news cycle runs 24 hours per day, he must constantly be monitoring what the media is saying about or relating to the corporation. Radow must be an expert in solving problems in the event that they arise unexpectedly, such as product recalls or negative responses from the public. Lastly, another factor which causes him to be considered a communications manager is that his income is significantly greater than that of a technician who most likely has less experience in the field. Radow is compensated for the complexities of his role through a larger salary than that of someone with fewer responsibilities.

Craig Radow grew up in Brooklyn, New York, and attended the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. Radow was a Television, Radio, Film Management major and graduated in May of 2000. After graduation, he worked as a production assistant for a costume designer for the film *Riding Cars with Boys* starring Drew Barrymore. Working on this production allowed him to come to the conclusion that the production was not for him. Due to an interest in both the entertainment industry and news world, Radow decided that entertainment public relations was the middle ground between both of his passions. Soon after, in January of 2001, he decided to move to Los Angeles, California in order to pursue a career in entertainment marketing.

Radow took a position within the publicity department of Universal Television Studios Home Entertainment. Radow found that this job gave him a lot of publicity and event experience because DVDs became “the centerpiece of entertainment” during his time working in the Home Entertainment division. He worked at Universal for seven years, and near the end of his time at the company he began working on television and DVD releases. He considers his experience in this division of the company as a good segue to his first position at Twentieth Century Fox in the 20th Television department. Radow served as the Director of Media Relations from 2007 until 2011, and Executive Director of Media Relations from 2011 until 2015. Currently, Radow serves as the Vice President of Global Marketing and Publicity for the Consumer Products division of Twentieth Century Fox.

When first entering the public relations field, Radow enrolled in the University of California Los Angeles Extension program which offers a variety of certificate and specialization programs. Additionally, Radow was involved in the Entertainment Publicist Society which introduced him to a large number of professionals within the field. Especially since he did not study public relations during his time at the Newhouse School, he found taking classes and being a member of a professional organization to be valuable experiences. Aside from his professional life, a few years ago, while living in the Studio City neighborhood of Los Angeles, he served as a part its neighborhood council. His neighborhood elected him to serve on the council, where he served for two and a half years. His main topic of concern was centered around public safety. Radow claims his background in public relations and marketing were major contributing factors to getting elected and his work on the council. He found this experience to be valuable due to the networking opportunities it offered.

Radow enjoys public relations because he finds it interesting to work on so many different projects. Additionally, he enjoys the fact that working in this field consistently brings about new opportunities and experiences. Radow is always challenging himself to top his last public relations or

marketing campaign. Despite working in this field for many years, he still finds excitement in opening a magazine, newspaper or online outlet to read about a product or campaign he developed.

Radow believes public relations is a great and important skill, and the need for good public relations practitioners is not going away anytime soon. As a public relations professional, he believes it is especially important to have strong writing and communication skills, and an ability to convey ideas succinctly. Radow's advice for a student pursuing a career in public relations to add a dual skill to their degree. Due to the decline of newspapers and magazines, an imperative aspect of this industry because they generate publicity for organizations, he feels it is important to have a secondary skill as well. While there are new online outlets and places to pitch stories, an additional skill puts you ahead of the curve as a public relations professional entering the field.

A dominant coalition is a group of people who have the power to make choices which affect strategy in order to uphold an organization's missions. I would consider Radow to be a member of the dominant coalition since his role allows him to both establish direction and impact structure within the Consumer Products Division of Twentieth Century Fox. When releasing information to the public, he has the ability to shape his message in a way that best aligns with the mission of the company and portrays it in a positive light in the eyes of society.

A member of the dominant coalition is able to take on a leadership role and find innovative ways to contribute to the company's success. Radow has the power to work with other divisions to generate profit for the entire corporation. He greatly impacts the division's strategy by working with other divisions to create initiatives he sees as beneficial for the success of the company. One example of this in Radow's work is creating a section for Mother's Day on the Fox Consumer Products website. This is a clever strategy since it takes into account what consumers are interested in purchasing this time of year. If a user searches "Mother's Day gifts" on the Internet, the website for consumer products

comes up as a search result. Products include mugs and t-shirts with references from various television shows that have to do with mothers, or are popular among the demographic of middle-age women. This is a creative way to sell merchandise and drive new consumers to the company's website.

Bari L. Cohn
Question 3: Defining Public Relations
Professor Russell
8 May 2019

Rex Harlow, public relations pioneer and educator, defines public relations as the distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between an organization and its publics.

The Consumer Products Division of Twentieth Century Fox establishes and maintains mutual lines of communication by ensuring all divisions are communicating a unified message to their publics. This means throughout the corporation, information about a property must be cohesive. For example, Twentieth Century Fox released the children's movie *Trolls* in 2016 which was rated G, meaning the material is suitable for general audiences. Therefore, the Consumer Products Division targeted the merchandise to children, including children's t-shirts and toy sets. This merchandise is a successful way of generating publicity because parents who are shopping for their children, who may or may not have heard of the film prior, are exposed to the property. This is imperative to the success of the property because if the target audiences differed between the divisions, it would not be as successful of a campaign overall.

In order to create an effective public relations campaign, the organization and its publics must have a clear understanding of one another's wants and desires. If Twentieth Century Fox Consumer Products understands the behaviors of its publics, it can create successful and effective campaigns which allow its audience to interact with its property in multiple forms. For example, this month, the Consumer Products Division created an initiative called "Alien Day," based on its 1979 film *Alien*. Different licensees sold their products to consumers who were

enthusiastic about the film. Since the organization has an understanding of the publics' desires, it can create campaigns to generate profit by getting fans excited about the content.

Acceptance is a necessary function of public relations because it allows the organization to build and strengthen its reputation. If an organization gathers responses from its publics, it is able to measure the success of its campaigns or initiatives. Additionally, if the press and media are eager to report about the efforts of the public relations teams, an organization can assume the public reject the campaign. For example, if multiple press sources were to not pick up stories about a certain consumer products fan holiday for a film, it can likely be assumed that the public found this initiative to have missed the mark. While this may be frustrating, the organization must accept the public's view in order to comprehend how to improve in the future.

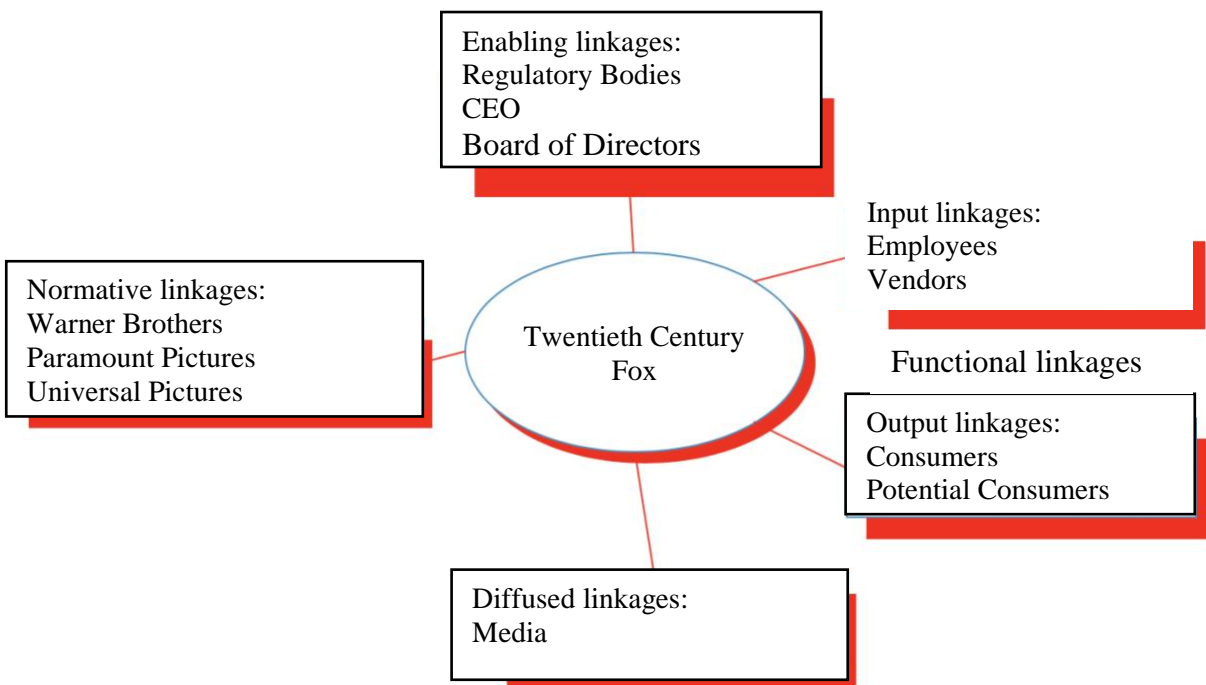
Additionally, from the perspective of the public, it is important to give feedback to make a company aware of whether or not you benefitted or accepted their campaign. Accepting one another is the first step for an organization and its publics to assist one another.

By cooperating with one another, an organization and its publics are able to find mutually beneficial ways to interact. For example, fans of the television series *Bob's Burgers* are likely to be teenagers or adults, a demographic which tends to be active on social media. Thus, Fox is able to generate publicity for the series by creating opportunities for fans to receive merchandise.

Users must use a certain hashtag, in this case #BobsBurgers, in order to be eligible to enter the contest. The consumer benefits by receiving merchandise for no cost, their only requirement is to use a hashtag or post a photo on their account. On the other hand, the corporation benefits due to generated free publicity. When an individual uses a hashtag or re-posts content on social media, the reach of the company's initiative is expanded. As a result of cooperation between the organization and the publics, they are able to engage in behavior that benefits both parties.

Bari L. Cohn
 Question 5: Key Linkages
 Professor Russell
 8 May 2019

According to James Grunig, a public relations theorist, identifying the linkages of an organization allows one to understand how an organization and its key publics are linked, and subsequently impact one another.



Enabling linkages are a key factor in allowing an organization to function. Individuals, groups, and organizations may be considered enabling linkages, as long as they provide the authority or control to allow an organization to succeed in the long-run. These stakeholders have influence on the organization since they usually help it create its strategies. Moreover, since enabling linkages take an interest in an organization, they generally provide funding which is imperative to the organization's existence. The enabling linkages for Twentieth Century Fox consist of regulatory bodies, which govern the organization and ensure it is operating ethically. For example, without governing bodies overseeing the business deal, the Walt Disney Company would not have been able to purchase

Twentieth Century Fox. Additionally, the corporation would not be able to function without its Chief Executive Officer and Board of Directors. These individuals make decisions which are crucial to the success of the corporation. Additionally, they govern the entirety of the corporation and give feedback on how it is able to improve.

Functional linkages show the relationship between the individuals who allow an organization to operate, and the individuals who are directly impacted by its functions. They are classified as either input or output linkages. Input linkages allow a company to run from an internal perspective and are imperative for the success of the company. At Twentieth Century Fox, employees are necessary in order to ensure all work is completed. Additionally, without vendors such as Walmart, the corporation would not have a platform to sell their goods and services to the public. Output linkages are individuals who use or consume a product or good from an organization. For this corporation, the consumers are the output linkages since they purchase its products. Twentieth Century Fox would not survive without output linkages because no one would purchase its products and therefore the corporation would not make any profit.

Normative linkages describe the relationship between similar organizations. These relationships are imperative to the success of a company because an organization must be aware of its competitors' actions in order to create its strategies. Moreover, organizations are able to make changes to their strategy by viewing success of other companies. For example, Twentieth Century Fox must have prior knowledge of when Universal Pictures is releasing its films. This is necessary so that the studio does not release a film on the same date, since this will contribute to a loss of sales for the corporation.

Bari L. Cohn

Question 6: Corporate Social Responsibility

Professor Russell

8 May 2019

It is important for organizations to be responsive to their publics to attract consumers and drive business. By communicating effectively, an organization is likely to establish and maintain relationships with its publics. Therefore, the organization develops an in-depth understanding of consumer's expectations. Over time, remaining engaged with its publics allows an organization to earn the consumer's trust, which translates to brand loyalty and increased revenue. Additionally, when it attempts to improve the quality of life for stakeholders, an organization improves its image, increasing the likelihood of people purchasing its products. This is because a consumer feels more inclined to support an organization who shares its values.

Social responsibility improves how an organization is viewed in the eyes of the public, bringing additional benefits other than solely increased revenue. By implementing its social responsibility function, a corporation is inevitably generating publicity through word of mouth. Moreover, if an organization acts in a manner that benefits the wellbeing of its stakeholders, the media may cover the story, generating further and more wide-spread publicity. For example, companies who operate in an environmentally friendly manner may receive tax discounts from the government. Additionally, individuals and cities are more likely to welcome an organization into their area if they are aware of, and agree with, an organization's practices. Another aspect of social responsibility is employee relations. Maintaining positive relationships with employees not only results in an increase in demand to work at a particular organization, but it generates a positive work environment in which employees are enthusiastic about their work.

One specific example of corporate social responsibility is the Twentieth Century Fox Consumer Product Division's creation of Buffy Slay Day. This event, which occurs on March 10th of every year, is based off of the television drama series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Since the series is about vampires, the Fox Consumer Products Division created a connection between the show and a blood donation; additionally, this event created an opportunity for participants to receive free merchandise. The Consumer Products Division teamed up with the American Red Cross, a nonprofit humanitarian organization, to organize blood and platelet drives across the country in cities such as Nashville, Tennessee (Loveday, 2019). The flagship site for blood and platelet donations was at the Torrance Red Cross Blood Donation center in Torrance, California, just minutes from the location of the fictional Sunnydale High, which was filmed at Torrance High School. In exchange for their goodwill, participants received *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* merchandise such as action figures and a novel.

Another example of the Consumer Products Division's implementation of its corporate social responsibility function is its partnership with BoxLunch. BoxLunch, a retailer which offers licensed and non-licensed merchandise, donates a meal to the Feeding America Organization for every ten dollars of products sold. The Consumer Products Division sold the company the rights to merchandise such as toys, pillows, and t-shirts. Not only are they increasing revenue by selling merchandise on different platforms, therefore reaching different consumers, but Fox Consumer Products is participating in an act of corporate social responsibility by ensuring the earned money goes to a good cause.

The Consumer Products Division of Twentieth Century Fox emphasizes the importance of performing its corporate social responsibility function in order to both generate revenue and give back to the community. The organization is able to use creative and relative ways to perform its

corporate social responsibility function in relation to its properties. By doing so, Twentieth Century Fox is able to promote its products in a meaningful and charitable way manner. Additionally, participating in philanthropic events expands the reach of the organization and its products to different publics. According to Radow, an organization's corporate social responsibility function has always been important, but even more so now because having a social outlook is increasingly important to today's generation. He finds that acts of corporate social responsibility must be woven into campaigns and strategies in order to maximize profit and a consumer's loyalty to the brand.

Bari L. Cohn

Question 9: Role of Social Media

Professor Russell

8 May 2019

Within the Twentieth Century Fox corporation, each division and property have their own social media handles. In terms of management, there is a designated division of the studio that oversees the accounts. However, other divisions have access to the accounts in order to create content for purposes specific to their division such as information about product releases. For example, when there is a home entertainment release coming out about the television *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the Home Entertainment Division will post something on the account. Each division in the corporation works together to promote one another's goals.



The official social media accounts for the Twentieth Century Fox Consumer Products Division are under the handle @SwagByFox on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. The marketing team manages the Instagram and Twitter accounts, and Facebook page, which have 27,700 and 5,399 followers, and 5,200 likes, respectively. The Instagram account posts a few times per week, and its content includes contests, giveaways, trivia, and information regarding new products and sales. In addition to promoting its own content, the division's Twitter account re-posts content from the public which creates an engaging and user-friendly experience. The Facebook page, which posts the least likely out of the three accounts, posts content mainly about giveaways and allows users to leave reviews about the company.

While the social media accounts are strong in terms of content creation, I believe that the account's engagement with its publics could be improved. The social media pages require that users tag their friends or repost content in order to be eligible to win giveaways or contests. By doing so, the content reaches an expanded audience, subsequently generating publicity for the division and its products. Additionally, for the consumer, this is a simple way to win free or discounted merchandise. I found the posts on each account to be creative and fresh, utilizing different types of content in new and interesting ways. Furthermore, the content on the account is relevant to the user by timing posts with holidays, days of the week, etc. For example, the @SwagByFox Instagram account posted a picture for the 2000's reality television show, *The Simple Life*, with the hashtag #FlashbackFriday, a common reference on social media. One way I feel the division's social media presence can improve is by other divisions of the organization promoting the account. If the other social media accounts beneath the Twentieth Century Fox umbrella endorse @SwagByFox on social media, through tagging the account in their photos or encouraging others to follow it, the account would generate more

followers and impressions per post. Moreover, the division should require licensees to promote the Consumer Products Division's accounts when advertising the merchandise.

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