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## Blogger Engagement Ethics: Dialogic Civility in a Digital Era

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The role of social media as a vital component in an effective public relations plan has expanded strategic communication into digital space. Despite the rapid advancements of public relations opportunities within social media such as the blogosphere, guidelines for a prudent entry into this often personalized online territory are difficult to locate. This article extends beyond individual relationships characteristic of public relations practitioner-blogger discourse and promotes a dialogic approach to blogger outreach ethics. It ends with several recommendations for public relations practitioners seeking to facilitate dialogic civility within their own blogger engagement efforts.

The role of social media as a vital component in an effective public relations plan has expanded strategic communication into digital space. Contemporary research indicates a growing confidence in consumer-generated media (CGM) as a viable means to complement traditional media channels in public relations efforts (Smith, 2011; Wright & Hinson, 2008). Additionally, agency and corporate professionals have espoused the benefits of online public relations strategies (Barone, 2010; Balwani, 2011; Cotton, 2011). What was once constrained as a practice of conforming news to media-gatekeeper agendas has transformed into a liberation of online content capable of immediate publication, endorsement, and reposting.

By harnessing the power of social networking, public relations practitioners seek to join communities of friends sharing information (Scott, 2010). Of these networks, the “blogosphere,” an environment of “easily publishable, personal web sites that serve as sources of commentary, opinion and uncensored, unfiltered sources of information on a variety of topics” (Edelman & Intellissek, 2005, p. 4; Rubel, 2008), is of greatest interest to the public relations practitioner due to its semblance of journalistic qualities offering detailed reporting and an inherent third-party credibility (Ries & Ries, 2002). Estimated to be growing at more than 100,000 blogs per day, the blogosphere provides innumerable opportunities for public relations practitioners seeking independent communication channels.

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Despite the rapid advancements of public relations opportunities within social networks, guidelines for a prudent entry into this often personalized online territory are difficult to locate. While an abundance of anecdotal experiences of public relations social networking are offered within popular literature, a source of ethics to guide this procedure is missing. Rather than establishing and universalizing a standard code of ethics implemented for public relations practitioners, the call for blogger engagement guidelines may be answered through a reflection of the practice and its implications for a dialogic encounter. Paralleling the relationship-building engagement program between public relations practitioner and blogger, this encounter is “fluctuating, unpredictable, multi-vocal process in which uncertainty infuses encounters between people and what they mean and become” (Wood, 2004, p. xvi). Extending beyond a simple relational exchange of information characteristic of a modern understanding of practitioner-blogger discourse, a dialogic approach to blogger outreach ethics may provide a rich template for anticipating the challenges in cultivating engagement programs seeking to protect and enhance the blogosphere.

### TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION ETHICS FOUNDATIONS

Communication ethics has informed a variety of contemporary communication professions with theoretical applications ranging from Aristotle to John Rawls. Sandra Dickson (1988) contends the “fast-paced technologically driven bottom-line industry” of journalism requires “moral philosophy” guidelines discovered in neither excess nor defect (p. 35); a proposition later refined by Cunningham (1999). According to Cunningham, the virtuous act is not something “middling” but rather developed from “reason-based behavior that is right in itself” (p. 5). Journalists are revered as “epistemically responsible” by envisioning what ought to be done from a position of sound character (p. 10).

Kantian influences over communication practices facilitate the development of professional codes such as the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), institutions attending to universal laws that are valid for every rational practitioner of the discipline. Practices such as the journalist’s declaration to “minimize harm” reflect a categorical imperative—an intrinsic end that is good in itself; a good apart from its relation to a further end (Yang, 2006, p. 112). A public relations practitioner abiding by the PRSA code of ethics accepts the duties of advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty, and fairness, all of which introduce a moral requirement to the practitioner (<http://www.prsa.org>).

Utilitarian approaches to communication ethics are understood through J. S. Mills’ evaluation of moral systems in light of their ability to increase net pleasure in the human race (Bartley, 2006). Framed as a form of consequentialism, Mill’s system of evaluation consists of identifying and pursuing the higher quality of pleasure for the greatest number of people (Saunders, 2010). In this regard, the greater pleasure is that which appeals to the higher faculties, a postulate identifiable in mass media activities such as agenda-setting and framing theories.

The expansive nature of communication channels moves beyond traditional media and into social media as a viable avenue of information dissemination. Along with this expansion is an ethical call for appropriate communicative action responsive to the rhetorical situation—communicator, receiver, and message—in a digital environment. While classic ethical paradigms may also be applied to new media, these unique tools maintain a capacity for additional ethical questions investigating philosophical, generational, and computer-mediated considerations.

## SOCIAL MEDIA ETHICS FOUNDATIONS

Research into social and digital media ethics is rapidly growing to accommodate for the popularity of online public relations practices. Recent scholarship addressing social media ethics has grounded blogging within Habermas's concept of the public sphere (Smith, 2011). Habermas contends that the public sphere involves "every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public" (Habermas, 1990, p. 92). According to Burkhart (2007), public relations practitioners may leverage Habermas's theory of the communicative act by cultivating relationships with bloggers and serving organizational interests through four foundational principles: intelligibility, truth, trustworthiness, and legitimacy (Burkhart, 2007, p. 249). Smith (2011) elucidates the four principles by suggesting if communication between public relations practitioner and blogger filters through each principle and achieves understanding, the practitioner may then become part of the social community through dialogue.

The four principles may represent an additional code or guideline followed by public relations practitioners as they embark on blogger outreach campaigns. Such a code would be consistent with the Institute of Public Relations 2007 study indicating a preference of public relations practitioners to rely on codes developed either in-house or from professional organizations for decision making (Bowen, 2005, p. 2). However, Peck and Matchett (2010) observe that not all public relations practitioners belong to institutions adhering to codes of ethics and questioned the source of ethics training for non-members. In fact, ethics training is identified as a major shortcoming for nearly 70% of those practitioners questioned in the 2007 study (Peck & Matchett). The deficit in public relations ethics training portends major challenges for practitioners facing multiple strategic decisions for their organization or client.

According to Martinson (2004), the challenges are compounded when the public relations profession is perceived as inherently unethical due to its advocacy of client interests, regardless of truth. The Commission on Public Relations Education (2006) recommends that a "consideration of ethics should pervade all content of public relations education" to combat this perception (as cited in Peck & Matchett, 2010, p. 2). The 2006 report suggests the development of short courses or mini-seminars to complement public relations curricula that may fail to provide adequate ethics training. Peck and Matchett further the conversation to address public relations practitioners' ethical training deficits by developing and testing an online training module drawing upon resources offered by the Center for Ethical Deliberation (p. 2). Results of initial surveys of module users indicated difficulty in navigation, but overall improved ethical decision making in the areas of disclosure of information, conflicts of interest, lying, and spinning information for a client or organization (Peck & Matchett).

Additional ethics research of the digital era centers around the millennial generation or Generation Y—individuals born after 1982 who have grown up with the Internet and first to pioneer social media technology (Curtin, Gallicano, & Matthews, 2011). Curtin et al. investigate the relationship between ethics and the organization-employee relationship to explore the perpetuation of stereotypes existing among millennials. Findings include that millennials "value transparency and clear ethical rules and expectations" and fare best with "those agencies that both walk the walk and talk the talk in terms of social responsibility" (p. 2).

The ongoing research into social media ethics continues to build a sturdy reference point for the codification of practices aligned to protect the value of a liberated public sphere and its digitally accessible nature. Insights gathered from professional, education, and academic studies are invaluable to raise awareness of the level and quality of ethics training and the

development of programs testing the decision making of contemporary and future public relations practitioners. Stemming from traditional communication ethics foundations, new media public relations initiatives are supported from ethics perspectives ranging from deontological, utilitarian, and virtue perspectives.

Each perspective maintains salient considerations for the multistream public relations practitioner and equips the practice with guidelines and codes sought after by the new generation of professionals who greatly value clarity of ethical expectations. However, clarity of ethical expectations is a troubling demand for individuals working within the business of cultivating relationships. As the primary feature of public relations, specifically blogger relations, relationship-building warrants a richer investigation from a dialogic perspective of communication ethics. Starting from a position of embedded agency within a particular organizational narrative, the public relations practitioner becomes aware of the blogosphere as a landscape of multiple voices sharing unique and biased stories, an environment unaccommodating to clear-cut ethical codes and guidelines.

## RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING AND ENGAGEMENT

Relationship-building within the field of public relations is a central theme pervasive throughout the field's scholarly and professional literature (Wright & Hinson, 2008; Waters, Tindall, & Morton, 2010). From introductory public relations textbooks to international communication discourse, relationship-building may be argued as the primary activity of all public relations practitioners serving the interests of a client, organization, or other entity. Specifically in the subset discipline of blogger relations, relationship-building is framed as the core function of a public relations practitioner.

Public relations professionals highlight blogger engagement strategies from e-mail outreach to active participation on the blog itself (Barone, 2010). Additional recommendations include personalizing relationships with bloggers and cultivating trust (Balwani, 2011). In fact, Yoon (2005) cites interpersonal relationships as responsible for the direction of organizational media relations efforts. Despite the prevalence of a relationship focus within media and blogger relations literature, few public relations sources centralize interpersonal communication dynamics as a necessary consideration when developing blogger engagement and outreach.

Prescriptive blogger engagement guidelines follow similar methods for a public relations practitioner to develop a relationship with the blogger and the social network community. First, practitioners are recommended to research and target blogs relevant to the news or content seeking to be shared (Barone, 2010; Payton, 2010). Second, practitioners are directed to familiarize themselves with the blog and its author, discovering themes, learning the style and language of the blog, and understanding the mind of the blogger (Barone, 2010; Balwani, 2011; Cotton, 2011). Finally, practitioners are instructed to contact the blogger and present the news or content seeking to be discussed on the blog (Balwani; Payton; Cotton).

In addition to the general guidelines, some sources of blogger outreach guidelines offer supplemental instructions to ensure a "win/win" experience (Barone, 2010, p. 1). Barone (2011) suggests utilizing social media applications such as Facebook and Twitter to strike up a conversation with a blogger about his or her content. Balwani (2011) recommends guest posting on a blog as well as gifting products, offering exclusive information, or incentivizing in

some way to convince bloggers that your information is relevant for coverage. Cotton (2011) echoes the idea of providing product samples to bloggers but reminds practitioners of the importance of honesty and full disclosure at all times. Should samples be offered to bloggers, Cotton requests that they acknowledge the gift on their blog for transparency. Weingart (2011) reminds practitioners to adhere to any outreach guidelines established by the author on the blog itself.

Recommendations to supplement the consensus-shaped blogger outreach strategy of target, research, and contact, provide multiple points of ethics investigation ancillary to a proposed dialogic theme. Given the increasingly social component of online public relations, a further merging of professional and personal (public and private) space concerns philosophers such as Hannah Arendt, who cautions against an unreflective consensus resulting from an undifferentiated public and private life (1959). A prominent voice against undue confidence in notions of progress, Arendt asks “is a given action the best decision in a particular historical moment?” (Arendt, as cited in Arnett, 1980, p. 67). Yet as the social media space is necessary for blogger engagement and outreach, Arendt’s question is contemplated within the context of contemporarily established public relations practices. Interpretations of this question may shift the orientation of blogger outreach ethics:

From: How might a public relations professional best enter into the private sphere of an independent blogger and his or her network for coverage of organizational interests?

To: What reflections are necessary to achieve a dialogic civility between professional practitioner and independent blogger to better the digital media environment?

This shift recasts public relations professionals as self/organizational-interested practitioners into media environment practitioners focused on the protection of the independent blogosphere. In doing so, the premise of the self as primary among public relations practitioners is supplanted with a narrative structure that may enhance blog content and ultimately formulate a richer media landscape. A closer inspection of the self as primary assumption may facilitate a greater understanding of this move.

## THE PRIMACY OF SELF AND RELATIONSHIPS

Contemporary literature surrounding blogger outreach ethics and public relations practices at large prioritizes relationship-building and trust development as a central theme in the profession (Balwani, 2011; Barone, 2011; Cotton, 2010; Weingart, 2011). The public relations name itself signifies its key activity, relating to the public(s) and is founded on Carl Rogers’s principle of the self as informed by narrative remnants selected to develop a structure for one’s life (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Founded in a time of institutional decline such as the Vietnam War, Watergate, and a general loss of trust in public discourse among authority figures, Rogers’s privileging of the self over traditions and narratives served a therapeutic culture of prioritizing self-esteem and affirmation (Arnett & Arneson). Acknowledgement of self-trust eclipsed institutional stories as salient factors of human identity, leading practices respondent to the self to contemporary methods of counseling, human resources, public relations, and marketing.

The move from institutional stories to a selection of narrative remnants in the cultivation of the self is not criticized but rather viewed as a necessary occurrence given the historical moment of “institutional corruption” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 89). Indeed, distrust of the status quo left human actors with nowhere else to turn but toward the self, catalyzing the founding of the Association of Humanistic Psychology in 1961 that encompassed a “third force” approach, that is, “choice and development of human possibilities guides interaction with the other” (Arnett & Arneson, p. 87). Associations such as these further facilitated an inward movement toward the self, leading to continued scholarship regarding concepts such as the significance of acknowledgement, individualism, and dialogue (Anderson, 1984; Arnett, 1980; Hyde, 2005; Stewart, 1995).

Given this orientation, Arnett and Arneson (1999) conclude that Rogers’s approach to dialogue places the quality of relationship over the content of a message. The degree of relational quality is the metric of interpersonal effectiveness, which the authors suggest requires empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard (p. 98). These characteristics reflect an understanding of a “good self,” which “seeks connection, relationship—not domination of another” (p. 99). Finally, Carl Rogers and Barry Stevens (1967) promote the “client perception” as a final ingredient in acts of caring. Arnett and Arneson (1999) expound upon client perception by stating that “if a person is grateful that caring action is directed toward him or her, the relationship is likely to be enriched” (p. 99).

While relationship-centric communication is central to public relations practices, the potential of individualism emerging from an inattentive self acting within a relational context presents challenges to the contemporary practitioner. Edward Sampson (1985) contends that American culture is notorious for individualism that “identifies sharp boundaries between what is self and what is not self, locates control of a person, and excludes other people from the region we call self” (Sampson, cited in Anderson, Cissna, & Arnett, 1994, p. 18). This sense of individualism is a product of culture and naturally occurs within communicative practices. To combat such a level of “self-contained individualism,” Sampson champions an “ensembled individualism” that he suggest may be more conducive to an effective dialogue (Sampson, 1985; cited in Anderson, Cissna & Arnett, 1994, p. 18). According to Sampson, ensembled individualism is “characterized by (a) more fluid boundaries between self and other; (b) thinking of control as residing in a field of forces that includes but extends beyond the self; and (c) including other persons within the self.” (Sampson et al. 18). The authors assert that “such a self, whose interests include others, might be more capable of engaging in dialogue than would solely self-interested representatives of American individualism” (19).

### BLOGGER OUTREACH: FROM DISASSEMBLED SELF TO ENSEMBLED INDIVIDUALISM

Prescriptive approaches to blogger outreach and engagement are representative of an individual self forging relationship with independent bloggers comprising the digital blogosphere. The foundation of these relationships is grounded in the self—public relations practitioners’ self-service to landing coverage of organizational information under the guise of sharing blogworthy content and the blogger’s self-service to independent publishing. A sense of disassembled self pervades the public relations practitioner focused on serving the interests of the organizational blogger outreach agenda, while the independent blogger also maintains a disassembled self as he

or she is focused on instantaneous publication to inform or entertain the blog's audiences. Rather than serving the health of the online digital environment, relationship-directed blogger outreach reinforces the disassembled self as a *modus operandi* of contemporary blogger engagement programs. Equally troubling, the disassembled self of relationship-driven blogger engagement programs may shift attention away from service to the public good and toward narrow objectives of cultivating media contacts, securing exclusive coverage deals, and bargaining advertising equivalencies for valuable keywords and themes.

Support for the self-centric approach to blogger engagement is apparent within scholarly investigations of communication ethics. Habermas (1990) suggests that our choices to act are based in our interests, which naturally supports public relations practitioners' decisions to prioritize their clients' objectives. Additionally, Gadamer (1975) contends that interlocutors engage from a perspective of biased ground, that is, a prejudice that exists as part of the communicative agent. In accordance to these philosophies, the self is embedded within narrative and bias before engagement with the other occurs. Framed within the context of public relations practitioner and blogger, a dialogue is enmeshed within interests of both parties and cannot be considered *tabula rasa* given the roles each agent serves within the encounter. Practically speaking, public relations practitioners pitching bloggers stories without disclosure of their role as client representatives not only engage in unethical practices but also assume an effacing naiveté. While independent bloggers may not uncover the specifics of a public relations practitioner's client interest, the perception of being pitched a story relates directly to a practice within the blogger-outreach narrative and therefore of service to a bias—the interest in the blog as a medium to transmit organizational information for third-party endorsement.

Avoiding the pitfall of a disassembled self as a public relations practitioner requires an expanded view of the blogosphere as a space of mutual participation. Rather than cordoning off interest agendas, initiatives should be developed to protect the digital media environment as a valuable community-driven source of information. Toward this end, public relations practitioners and independent bloggers establish fluidity and flexibility of their roles that are influenced by the features of the blogosphere, including independence, liberated content, feedback, and instantaneous communication. These concerted efforts reflect an ensembled individualism espoused by Sampson (1985) and dilute a self-centric notion of contemporary blogger outreach.

### COMMUNICATIVE ACTION: BLOGGER OUTREACH

Returning to the work of Habermas (1990), which grounds Burkhart's (2007) approach to a communicative blogger dialogue, interactions are known as "communicative when the participants coordinate their plans of action consensually, with the agreement reached at any point being evaluated in terms of the intersubjective recognition of validity claims" (p. 58). Following Burkhart's guidelines, public relations practitioners performing blogger outreach with a sense of intelligibility, truthfulness, trustworthiness, and legitimacy are perceptually engaging in communicative action, implying an ethical approach to blogger outreach. However, Habermas is careful to distinguish between communicative action and strategic action, which he claims occurs when "one actor seeks to influence the behavior of another by means of the threat of sanctions or the prospect of gratification in order to cause the interaction to continue as the first actor desires" (p. 58).



The ubiquity of strategy and strategic planning within public relations practices may easily enable one to conclude that blogger relations is just another tactic with an end goal of securing positive publicity from an independent blog. However, Habermas ensures that the means to this end are examined; do public relations practitioners serve the good of the blogosphere, or do they serve only their clients' interests? Burkhart's astute observation of the need for public relations practitioners to engage in communicative action has produced a viable set of interpersonal attributes characteristic of the communicative, that is, ethical, public relations practitioner—intelligibility, truth, trustworthiness, and legitimacy (Burkhart, cited in Smith, 2008, p. 2). Despite the capacity for a public relations practitioner to demonstrate each of these interpersonal attributes within a blogger outreach scenario, the attributes are a function of the self, and not of the protection of the blogosphere, which is presented above as an ensembled individualism. Indeed, a public relations practitioner, despite exhibiting the four interpersonal characteristics espoused by Burkhart, may embrace a relationship with a blogger for the "prospect of gratification," which Habermas indicates falls within the realm of strategic action (Habermas, 1990, p. 58). Rather, communicative action is achieved through *Bindungseffekt*, an illocutionary binding/bonding effect between both parties that is rationally motivating from offers made in the speech acts (Habermas, 1990, p. 58). It is the coordination and consensual planning between the public relations practitioner and the blogger that enables communicative action, which serves neither self individually but the good of the blogosphere.

### THE BETWEEN AS DIALOGIC SPACE

Coordination and consensual planning does not occur within the individual self but rather between selves, which according to Martin Buber (1970) provides a space for dialogue. Arnett (2004) suggests that "the between is Buber's alternative to ideological camps, guiding Buber's existential message about dialogue" (p. 79). Rather than imposing messages onto an interlocutor, dialogue maintains an invitational quality between communicators enabling an "emergent reciprocity" (Arnett, p. 79). Within these exchanges, a sphere of co-construction of meaning occurs, facilitating a platform for dialogic communication.

Applied to a public relations blogger outreach program, the between exists as the blogosphere, which offers a source of content co-informed by both public relations practitioner and blogger. This coordinated and consensually planned web space provides opportunities for information relevant to the blogger, blog audience, and public relations practitioner. Maintaining this perspective retains the communicative, and not strictly strategic, act of blogger outreach that moves beyond influence of one actor over the other and toward a mutual benefit. Facilitated by linguistic processes guided by "claims to truth, claims to rightness, and claims to truthfulness," the blogosphere as the between space for dialogue is positioned favorably for an ethic of dialogic blogger outreach (Habermas, 1990, p. 58).

### BLOGGER OUTREACH ETHIC OF OTHERNESS

Emmanuel Levinas (1969) offers a derivative notion of the Self through his understanding of a primordial responsibility to the Other. Through this obligation, Levinas eclipses a sense of

individualism and conceptualizes an ethic based in responsiveness to the Other's call. Deetz and Simpson (2004) expound upon the influence of the Other within dialogic encounters that may result in the production of new meanings. Clarifying their position, the authors suggest "otherness may be present either in the concrete person standing there or in the way his or her understanding reopens the things of our world to redetermination" (Deetz & Simpson, p. 145). As the basis for philosophical hermeneutics popularized by Gadamer, the transformative power of a dialogic encounter in this perspective leads to an exploration of difference and negotiation of meaning that may otherwise be static from individualist perspectives.

Perceived within a dyad between public relations practitioner and blogger, a dialogic ethic reveals that the public relations practitioner's identity is tied to the encounter with the blogger. The public relations practitioner cannot satisfy the roles and functions of a public relations practitioner without dialogue with bloggers. Likewise, a blogger seeking to author content relevant to the theme of her blog and serve the interests of her audience cannot effectively do so without dialogue with public relations practitioners. These practitioners provide the relevant content that can enhance the blogger's web blog and better serve the blog's audience interests. The mutual reliance on the Other for the development of an identity—public relations practitioner and the attentive blogger—facilitates a dialogic ethic present within the blogger outreach strategy.

However, a dialogic ethic of Otherness is not concerned with the formation and solidification of self identities but rather with inviting communication. Arnett (2004) notes that "Levinas tells us to forego focus on the color of the Other's eyes, or we risk missing the face of the Other" (p. 88). This powerful observation reminds communicators to avoid perception and instead focus on the "primordial call to ethics or responsibility for the Other" (Arnett, p. 88). With the formation of the Self only possible as an attentive response to the Other, a dialogic ethic begins not with the individual, but with the biased metaphorical ground upon which the communicator stands. Whether this ground is composed of client publicity interests or thematic content relevance, a call for responsibility between public relations practitioner and blogger exists in the blogosphere that ultimately shapes the identity of both actors. It is within this dialogic space of the between that guides blogosphere participants toward an ethic of civility.

## TOWARD DIALOGIC CIVILITY IN THE BLOGOSPHERE

Arnett and Arneson (1999) suggest "dialogic civility works to keep conversation going that seeks to enrich a life lived meaningful through others—persons, institutions, places of work, and long-term friendships" (p. 288). Seeking to protect the communicative environment, dialogic civility calls for "public respect as we work to co-constitutively discover the minimal communication background assumptions necessary . . . to shape together the communicative terrain of the twenty-first century" (Arnett & Arneson, p. 277). The communicative terrain of 21st century public relations practitioners continues to develop online. Recognizing the value of the blogosphere, public relations practitioners enter the domain of independent bloggers, professional and amateur alike, for an opportunity to share content that is relevant to the blog's audience while simultaneously serving a client interest.

Several conclusions can be drawn from understanding dialogic civility as applied to the blogosphere, ultimately shaping dialogic ethics between a public relations practitioner and

blogger. First, what is primary is not the public relations practitioner, her client or the blogger, but the blogosphere itself. This invitational “between” space differentiates itself from traditional media outlets supported by subscriptions or institutional advertising and champions a true independence pervasive in the content shared with blogosphere audiences. By shifting the focus away from individual media roles and to the protection of the communicative terrain, that is, blogosphere, an ethic of dialogic civility between public relations practitioner and blogger may begin to emerge.

Second, the individual media roles of public relations practitioner and blogger may be framed as components in an ensembled individualism, characterized by Sampson as embracing fluid roles, thinking of control existing in a field of forces, and including others within the self. Although difficult to conceptualize in a traditional media relations program, ensembled individualism within the blogosphere may naturally emerge when the communicative terrain, and not personalized agendas, is the priority. The invitational quality of the blogosphere among participants may suspend particular media functions and result in mutual reciprocity for the goal of creating better content.

Third, a dialogic civility may exist between public relations practitioner and blogger through communicative, not strategic, action as noted by Habermas. Encompassing the core of ensembled individualism while facilitating productivity, communicative action stresses coordination and consensual planning, leading to content shared between public relations practitioner and blogger that enhances the quality of the blogosphere for its audience. While contemporary public relations blogger outreach strategy may seek to place content on an independent blog, it is the collaborative and coordinated nature between public relations practitioner and blogger that can result in communicative action based on an initial strategy, and not strategic action based on an advantageous relationship.

### DIALOGIC ETHICS: BLOGGER ENGAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Achieving and sustaining dialogic civility between public relations practitioner and blogger can be an ongoing challenge in a time of self-serving organizational agendas and bottom-line objectives. However, given the importance of understanding the between as a crucial element for effective blogger outreach, public relations practitioners may subscribe to an ethics built on the protection of the blogosphere. In turn, bloggers may respond favorably to the ideas offered by public relations practitioners as means to enhance blogosphere content for the good of all who participate within it—bloggers, audiences, public relations practitioners, and the public at large. Three recommendations that facilitate dialogic blogger engagement ethics may include:

1. Recognizing the Other [blogger] as necessary to the public relations practitioner identity. Without the blogger, there would be no outlet to disseminate organizational content or a third-party endorsement critical to media relations success.
2. Learning the narrative upon which the Other [blogger] stands; the narrative bias is central in formulating the scope of the blog and may be accessed through biographical pages, previous blog entries, audience analyses or conversations with the blogger herself. During

the learning phase, public relations practitioners should not be concerned with pitching organizational information, but understanding the theme and purpose of the blog.

3. Ensuring the organizational content pitched to the blogger is relevant to the audience and represents characteristics espoused by the blogosphere, that is, transparency, feedback potential, and thematic salience to discussion threads. Unlike traditional media outlets, the blogosphere comprises a web of thoughts and ideas that may either embrace or reject public relations practitioner information depending on its fitness to current online conversation trends.

Public relations practitioners who keep in mind these reflections while developing a blogger engagement program can formulate a dialogic civility ethic based in the protection of the independent blogosphere. While interpersonal attributes such as intelligibility, trust, and legitimacy poise individuals for successful relationships, an ensembled individualism shaped by the Other and communicating in the between attends to the unique qualities of the blogosphere. It is this dialogic civility that will enhance blogosphere content and better serve public relations practitioners and bloggers alike.

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