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Enhancing Publicity and Promotion: Applying Gerard Hauser's Theory of Reticulate Public Spheres to Encourage Discourse for Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)

Stephanie Selker

ENHANCING PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION: APPLYING GERARD HAUSER'S THEORY OF RETICULATE PUBLIC SPHERES TO ENCOURAGE DISCOURSE FOR INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION (IMC)

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Stephanie M. Selker

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Stephanie M. Selker

Approved April 8, 2011

Kathleen Glenister Roberts, Ph.D.
Professor of Communication
(Dissertation Director)

Calvin L. Troup, Ph.D.
Professor of Communication
(Committee Member)

Janie Harden Fritz, Ph.D.
Professor of Communication
(Committee Member)

Christopher M. Duncan, Ph.D.
Dean, McAnulty Graduate
School of Liberal Arts

Ronald C. Arnett, Ph.D.
Chair, Dept. of Communication
& Rhetorical Studies

ABSTRACT

ENHANCING PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION: APPLYING GERARD HAUSER'S THEORY OF RETICULATE PUBLIC SPHERES TO ENCOURAGE DISCOURSE FOR INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION (IMC)

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Dissertation supervised by Dr. Kathleen Glenister Roberts

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), or the unification of advertising, public relations (PR) and marketing functions, is a widely utilized method for publicizing and promoting products and services in today's market. Although IMC has moved to the forefront by replacing traditional marketing methods, it remains unclear as to how it can be utilized to reengage public spheres and revive the reputations of marketing functions as a whole. This project applies Gerard Hauser's theory of reticulate public spheres to IMC in order to encourage discourse between marketing professionals and consumers. Hauser's model depends on members of insider and outsider communities to enhance their publicness by creating and maintaining constructive, inclusionary, and invitational discourses. Discourse-based IMC models can generate improved relationships between

marketing professionals and consumers by restoring trust and credibility for marketing functions through the use of authentic discourses that emerge from interaction.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Abstract iv

Acknowledgement vi

Chapter One: Advocating Constructive Approaches for IMC 1

Publicity and Promotion – An Analysis of PR & Advertising 8

PR Practice 9

Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee 11

Advertising Practice 18

IMC as an Answer? 21

Pitfalls of IMC Implementation 24

Applying Hauser 27

Chapter Two: Conspicuous Consumption – A Social Construct 31

Consumption and Materialism – The Practitioner 34

Consumption and Materialism – The Consumer 41

Repercussions of Consumption and Materialism 43

Applications to Hauser 46

Chapter Three: Publics are Amiss – The Rise of Individualism 49

IMC and Individualism 49

Collapsing Publics 52

Public Spheres 56

On the Extension of Active Public Spheres 61

Chapter Four: Technology and Entertainment – IMC Drivers 67

On the Uses of Technology..67

The Power of Technology...71

The Unbridled Reliance on Technology 77

On the Uses of Technology to Propel Engagement 80

Power to the Consumer 83

Technology for Peace, not War 86

Chapter Five: Enhancing IMC through Discourse...90

Creating Vernacular Discussions 91

Applying Vernacular Discussions to IMC 96

Chapter Six: Netflix – An Application Study 115

Background 115

Netflix's Discourse-Based Program 118

The Netflix Community as Legitimate Reticulate Public Space 122

Final Thoughts – Returning to Hauser 129

Bibliography 133

Chapter One – Advocating Constructive Approaches for IMC

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has quickly moved to the forefront of promotion and publicity. The discipline, which was once regarded strictly as an advertising function, has now progressed with the inclusion of both marketing operations and public relations (PR) initiatives (Kitchen and De Pelsmacker, 2004). These changes have been implemented to cater to both the interactive and global economies and marketplaces of the 21st century. In particular, the adoption of IMC has been enhanced via the invention of the World Wide Web and other electronic communication (e-commerce) channels.

While it is quickly moving to the forefront, the discipline and individual practices of IMC including public relations, advertising, and marketing have less than favorable reputations. Communication scholars from as early as the 1920s (Ellul, 1965; Ewen, 1998; Lippman, 1925; Postman, 1985 & 1992, etc.) claim that advertising, PR, and marketing functions have the power to influence and dominate public opinions. Today, major criticisms of IMC functions are that they lack ethical foundations (Mayhew, 1997; Olasky, 1987; Schudson, 1984; Twitchell, 1996 & 1999).

The majority of publics also tend to view IMC functions in a negative light (Grion, 2003). As the communication marketplace becomes more and more fragmented (in terms of increasing technology and the mass availability of channels), negative sentiments toward promotion and publicity continue to grow. IMC evolved as a discipline in the late 1980s and early 1990s in order to accommodate for the increased need to consolidate marketing functions in business (Schultz & Schultz, 2003). Prior to its evolution, companies were divided into solitary business functions, where each employee had separate job responsibilities. For instance, in the realm of marketing, a company may employ brand managers, account executives, copywriters, designers, PR representatives, and so on. Each person performed their job responsibilities as specialists, and often in isolation. IMC transformed traditional methods of marketing. Today, all functions of communication are performed under one major umbrella for promotion and are strategically coordinated to ensure consistency and effectiveness of messages (Schultz & Schultz, 2003).

Various communication scholars and practitioners define IMC. Gronstedt (2000) suggests that "integrated communications is the strategic management process of facilitating a desired meaning of the company and its brands by creating unity of effort at every point of contact with key customers and stakeholders for the purpose of building profitable relationships with them" (p. 8). Percy (1997) defines IMC as "the planning and execution of all the types of advertising and promotion selected for a brand, service, or company, in order to meet a common set of communication objectives, or more particularly, to support a single positioning" (p. 2). Finally, Schultz & Schultz (2003) use the metaphor of "one sight, one sound, one voice" to describe IMC (p. 23). Here, the whole of all marketing efforts are greater than the sum of their parts and messages are carefully orchestrated to ensure consistency prior to delivery. Not only are communication functions unified, but a company's overall mission statement and values are integrated into messages, as well. IMC involves tactical coordination by redefining the scope and goals of marketing communication and applying new technology to realize new channels for interaction, which melds financial and strategic integration to optimize success (Schultz & Schultz, 2003).

Though various definitions for IMC exist, special emphasis is placed on consistency and unification, or the constancy, stability, or regularity of messages, even when using diverse channels. For instance, although the copy (or written communication) may differ in an organization's direct marketing campaign when compared to its commercials, the overall look, feel, and mission of the organization's brand will be consistent. Moreover, IMC was developed in order to bring continuity to marketing functions to enhance positions in the competitive market.

Although IMC was created in the hopes of finding "one voice" for publicity and promotional discourse, a large disconnect still exists between practitioners and consumers when operating under the current IMC model (Schultz & Schultz, 2003, p. 23). Also, though many scholars have written on the negative aspects of IMC, only a handful of scholars have devoted themselves to providing consistent ethical frameworks to be applied to the discipline. Additionally, many practitioners have written "how-to" manuals focusing on tactics and methods to success, often leaving out a discussion of communication ethics entirely.

Therefore, the goal of this dissertation is to develop an enhanced framework for IMC. Because this dissertation will attempt to enhance two main functions of IMC (PR and advertising), the various criticisms of the practices must be addressed before remedies can be discussed. Ultimately, I plan to demonstrate that although these critical perspectives may be warranted, they are too limiting in scope and are therefore flawed. I then move to a discussion of why the adoption of an improved IMC platform is a critical step in the enhancement of both PR and advertising functions. Next, I introduce Gerard Hauser's theory of reticulate public spheres as an additive function to the IMC model in the hopes of encouraging discourse between marketing professionals (or practitioners) and consumers (or customers). Hauser's (1999) theory of "reticulate public spheres" refers to a network of publics that form together to discuss issues they have in common (p. 71).

This dissertation demonstrates how a melding of discourse-based IMC practices with Hauser's theories (particularly the theory of reticulate public spheres) can yield improved relationships between marketing professionals and their customers. An application study of Netflix, a highly successful Internet subscription service for movies and television, will demonstrate how such a model is thriving in the current competitive market. Ultimately, this dissertation demonstrates how Hauser's scholarship can inform an enhanced IMC model that is mutually beneficial to both practitioners of IMC and the publics they serve. Such a model depends on constructive, inclusionary, and invitational discourse, which is a way of enhancing relationships through positive and ongoing exchanges.

Yet, before a constructive model based on discourse can be discussed, it is imperative to address the criticisms of IMC and its main functions, PR and advertising. As previously mentioned, this dissertation will argue that the scholarly criticisms of PR and advertising are flawed. By deconstructing the fields of advertising and public relations, critical scholars do not leave much room for the redemption of IMC. And although these scholars do offer suggestions on how to "fix" the problem, deconstruction trumps the ability to offer insights that advocate the positive benefits of IMC models. Additionally, most of these texts fail to acknowledge that "societal ills" (such as conspicuous consumption, individualism, mindlessness, technology, etc.) are a result of both consumer and professional actions. For instance, most scholars blame the PR and/or advertising professional for societal pitfalls without recognizing that other factors (such as conspicuous consumption, individualism, and the oversaturation of technology – topics to be discussed later in their respective chapters) play a role in the shaping of society. I will address this fallacy later, as I argue that these factors are conditioned by both practitioner and consumer actions.

According to Crowley's rhetorical ethic (2006), "rhetors who posit unities that transcend temporal and local contexts are making bad arguments because the assertion of the noncontingent foundation shuts down the search for available alternatives" (p. 130). Therefore, critical scholars of IMC and its functions are rejecting the rules of civil rhetoric, as they are making claims that cannot be otherwise addressed or refuted. This is what differentiates the "deconstructive-eliminative approach" from "a constructive-revisionary one" (Slob, 2002, p. 1).

Furthermore, the premise that advertising and PR are harmful for society prevails in a deconstructionist model. Here, the professional communicator (as in the advertising, PR, or marketing professional) is the culprit. On the other hand, a constructive approach (although it may still recognize the shortcomings and pitfalls of a thought, idea, field, profession, etc.) will leave openings for revisions and/or alternatives. IMC is currently at a time of "experimentation and flexibility" (Witkoski, 2003, p. 7). This suggests that revisions and additive functions are welcomed in the discipline.

Therefore, it is essential for the future of IMC that scholars and practitioners search for more constructive approaches to analyzing and practicing publicity and promotion. One such model is offered in Northwestern University's annual *Journal of*

Integrated Marketing Communications (or *JIMC*). Now in its 20th year of publication (prior to 2005, the journal was published as *The Journal of Corporate Public Relations*), the *JIMC* offers one promising solution to the enhancement of IMC through scholarly advocacy for the practice. Work by Gronstedt (2000), Iacobucci & Calder (2002), Kitchen (2004), Percy (1997), Schultz & Schultz (2003), and Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn (1994) also advocates the constructive applications of IMC models for companies and organizations.

I plan to add to the conversations that support IMC. My main application will be inspired by Gerard Hauser's theory of reticulate public spheres. Although Hauser's theories are more concerned with the general lapse of interest and participation in political and social sectors, his thoughts can also be applied to IMC. This is because his model connects insider and outsider audiences, thus building authentic conversations that have the ability to curtail negative perceptions of IMC and advance it as a key business strategy for companies and organizations.

Hauser's theory of reticulate public spheres calls for messages constructed for public consumption to adhere to openness, attentiveness, and responsiveness (Hauser, 1999). Further, Hauser's model connects the practitioner to the consumer through a participatory democracy, where both parties contribute to public conversations. This type of discourse is essential for the future of IMC if the practice hopes to encourage discourse between practitioners and consumers. Citizens become much more informed when they participate in vernacular discussions with other members of publics (Hauser, 1999). Rhetorical criticism of public issues takes shape as members of publics address issues that are limiting in scope and as a result need to be challenged. Public spheres challenge claims based on prevailing “observations, thoughts, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes” (Hauser, 1999, p. 13). By contributing to the communication of public spheres, participants uncover alternative frames of reference from which to base their conclusions. References are not manufactured by those controlling the channels of communication, but rather through genuine vernacular discussions with others.

A primary goal of Hauser’s project (1999) is “to uncover a rhetorical framework for critically understanding the way actually existing publics function and for reclaiming our awareness of their contribution to the course and quality of civil society” (p. 12). Because IMC speaks directly to citizens, it is important that publics are properly understood. One way to achieve this is to engage publics in actual public spheres where citizens are afforded the opportunity to speak openly and freely without the threat of being edited or ignored. Hauser’s work offers various starting points for engaging publics in such a fashion.

However, certain barriers to the reengagement of public spheres must be addressed before discussing how this move is possible. For IMC, this involves an analysis of public relations and advertising, conspicuous consumption, constructions of social reality, individualism, and technology, all of which stand in the way of rebuilding relationships with publics. Although many strides have been taken to reinsert public voices into promotional and publicity-driven discourses, the voices of consumers continue to be led by practitioners. “Now at a time when the discipline [of IMC] is still in a period of experimentation and flexibility, a re-focus on broad strategic issues, especially among practitioners, could take IMC to its next level and lead to even greater success in entirely new areas” (Witkoski, 2003, p. 12). Therefore, Hauser’s model of reticulate public spheres provides a promising solution toward the reinvigoration of discourse in IMC and will serve as the backdrop for my larger dissertation project.

To elaborate, this dissertation dissects the various barriers that stand in the way of authentic communication. This is done in the hopes of reestablishing reticulate public spheres for IMC that include both insider and outsider voices. Both parties must be involved for this type of model to thrive. By advocating a meeting of parties, publics may begin to trust IMC and its practitioners through active involvement. Marketers may also understand the benefits of building alliances with publics aside from traditional compliance-building techniques (which are conventionally monologic).

The remainder of Chapter One of this dissertation examines the histories of PR and advertising in order to better understand why the reputations of IMC functions are damaged. It then examines how IMC models have the ability to build discourse with consumers (which is a benefit that many companies and organizations have not yet realized). Next, the pitfalls of IMC implementation are discussed. Following, I begin to apply Hauser's theories to IMC in order to explain how marketers may reengage publics through vernacular discussions.

Publicity and Promotion – An Analysis of PR and Advertising

As previously suggested, practitioners and scholars have acknowledged a "need to expand" IMC practices (Witkoski, 2003, p. 9). Yet, one cannot suggest enhancements to IMC models before understanding the histories of two primary functions of the discipline – PR and advertising. To elaborate, historical PR and advertising methods and tactics have adversely affected public sentiments toward conventional practices. Research conducted by Ewen (1996 & 2001), Mayhew (1997), Olasky (1987), Schudson (1984), and Twitchell (1996 & 1999) has demonstrated that traditional methods of advertising and PR are no longer viable.

PR Practice

Various widespread views of contemporary public relations may suggest that the practice has improved since inception. Such views suggest that publics are better served through PR because practitioners are spending more time relating to publics in order to find common and relevant interests and ideas. One positive supposition is that PR practitioners are taking public opinions into account when making suggestions and/or claims (Gronstedt, 2000). However, additional research points to the pitfalls of PR. Negative criticisms insist that instead of listening to publics, the majority of today's PR professionals are manipulating, controlling, and silencing them. This contributes to why the reputation of public relations seems to be getting worse – not better (Olasky, 1987).

The current ethical code of conduct for public relations (via the Public Relations Society of America, or PRSA) calls on practitioners to refrain from lying and defaming. However, when perceived culpability is high, damage control inherently requires that PR practitioners not volunteer knowledgeable facts that may be true. For example, companies may be unwilling to divulge information about internal corporate scandals to publics at the risk of damaging their reputations. Ultimately, this may lead to disingenuous and secretive behavior. Guarded and cautious behaviors may serve an organization's interests, but do not serve to enlighten publics (Mayhew, 1997).

Another reason that publics deem PR unethical is because current methods of the practice seek to influence a large majority of publics, even when certain members of those publics are not necessarily relevant to the cause. Olasky (1987) coined this phenomenon “micro-public relations,” which attempts to universalize PR on a large scale while ignoring smaller interest groups (p. 141). Such practices contribute to the reasons why PR has often been linked with subterfuge and deception and its practitioners are often called hired slanderers or paid liars (Ewen, 1998).

The negative connotations of PR may be traced back to its earliest forms. The first PR practices consisted of volunteers that were concerned with local issues and outreach (Ewen, 1996). However, as PR moved from a volunteer activity to a profession, standards began to shift. Olasky (1987) claims that PR practitioners “began to relinquish the concepts of volunteerism and independence” and replaced them with corporate interests (p. 16). A new PR practice, press agentry, or the practice of achieving favorable coverage for clients in newspapers and other print outlets, began to increase (Cutlip, 1995). There was money to be made from the production of positive public perceptions and the minimization of public oppositions.

By the 17^{th} century, newspapers were introduced and ordinary people gained wider access to information and ideas. In response, governments and their leaders became more concerned with public opinions. From simple turn-of-the-century press agentry, the PR profession assembled an impressive arsenal of strategies and tactics that sought to influence and manipulate. In fact, manipulation began before the colonization of America, when propagandists realized that they could “manufacture public opinions with a pen” (Cutlip, 1995, p. 33).

Explorers, land settlers, and pioneers were some of the first groups to practice PR in attempts to drive settlers to America. PR played a major role in the American campaign for independence from Great Britain. This serves perhaps as the best early example of a comprehensive use of public relations techniques in our country. Furthermore, persuasive communication was at the heart of much of our social and political development (Ewen, 1996).

Cutlip (1995) explains that “many [settlers] came from Europe to the new lands as a result of exaggerated publicity” (p. 2). Publics were bombarded with pamphlets and leaflets promising a new wonderful world. But as settlers came to our new land, many realized that the messages were nothing but “colonial hype and inflammatory propaganda” (Cutlip, 1995, p. 21). The land was in poor shape, completely non-reflective of the glossy imagery and plush land described in the promotional materials that communication professionals were paid to produce.

In addition, it became the job of PR professionals to convince publics that corporate monopolies were positive in order to keep competition at bay, particularly in the railroad and utility industries. A lack of competition in these industries allowed for price fixing among big businesses. Monopoly propaganda suggested that smaller, less experienced companies would not be able to provide the quality and service that larger, established entities could offer. Although new competitors could offer similar services at a cheaper price, monopolists argued that the quality of such service would not be as efficient, therefore leaving customers disappointed and short-changed (Olasky, 1987).

Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee

One of the founders of the anti-competition principle was early PR-man Ivy Lee. Lee was diligent in his quest against competition arguing that it was “unChristian” by adding that “businessmen who emphasized competition did not love their neighbors but were only out to make a buck” (Olasky, 1987, pp. 48-49). For Lee, competition would create nothing but shoddy products resulting for hurried and cheapened labor. He argued that the power of big business belonged in the handful of experts that were actually up to the task – the monopolies themselves. Lee suggested that companies find a "czar," or a spokesperson that "publics would think is taking charge and personally cleaning up the mess" in the midst of crisis or chaos (Olasky, 1987, p. 55). Moreover, various historical circumstances and propaganda efforts contributed to the negative connotations of PR that persist to this day.

Another early PR-man was Edward Bernays. Often referred to as "the father of public relations," Bernays was a trailblazer of the field. However, his theories also created negative criticisms concerning PR practice. In Crystallizing Public Opinion (1923), Bernays defines the PR practitioner as the gatekeeper to knowledge. He describes members of society as being part of a sheep herd; the practitioner is the herdsman leading the way to popular thought and action. Bernays believed that knowledge and consciousness were led by propaganda which then was communicated and reinforced through channels of publicity and promotion.

Believing that he was intellectually superior to the layperson, Bernays concocted a manual entitled Propaganda (1928) in order to educate PR professionals on doing their jobs wisely. Fittingly, the first chapter of Bernays' manuscript is entitled "Organizing Chaos," which outlines a model where "wise men" lead publics to order and in return control the chaos of the masses. By following Bernays' model, these "wise men" could create the mechanisms that control public minds and foster acceptance for particular ideas or commodities. Furthermore, it would take specially trained rhetoricians to appeal to the masses in such a persuasive manner that they would not only listen to appeals, but would also accept them willingly and enthusiastically. It was the job of the rhetorician to craft messages that were extremely difficult to resist and to create a following that would strengthen popularity in ideas, products, and/or services.

Yet, these "wise men" were to remain anonymous, for (as Bernays notes in Chapter 3 of his manuscript entitled "The New Propagandists," and Chapter 4, entitled "The Psychology of Public Relations") it would be "disastrous" if publics were to discover that PR professionals were swaying opinions. Professionals were responsible for increasing interests and seeking approval but never through revealing their identities to publics or by taking direct credit for ideas and movements.

Bernays encouraged PR professionals to act as unseen puppet masters orchestrating with an "invisible hand" in order to create public desires. Like the sheepherder leading the herd to slaughter, Bernays was convinced that the PR professional could lead publics to action. As Olasky (1987) proclaims in a very fitting metaphor of Bernays' herd – PR practitioners that operate via the present/control model do so in order to "pull the wool over their [audience's] eyes" (p. 99).

In Chapter 4 of his manuscript, Bernays depicts a hypothetical scenario to explain how his model works for PR practice. Here, he explains how one may sell a piano through careful PR practice. As Bernays notes, the decision to purchase a piano does not often come lightly due to their high cost and need/leisure ratio; one does not normally perceive the addition of a piano to a household as a necessity, rather of leisure or enjoyment. Yet, through careful persuasion and rhetoric, the PR practitioner may convince the consumer that the piano is an absolute necessity. The practitioner can do this in such a fashion that the consumer believes that the decision was a personal one and not a guided manipulation. As Bernays explains, the buying process is reversed; PR changes the conversation from the salesman asking the consumer to "please purchase a piano" to the consumer telling the salesman "please sell me a piano."

One specific case study of Bernays' work occurred in 1928, when George Washington Hill, an eccentric businessman and president of the American Tobacco Company, hired Bernays to solve a problem – women refrained from smoking cigarettes in public. Hill recognized that changing public opinions could expand his market for Lucky Strike Cigarettes. Bernays consulted a psychoanalyst, Dr. A.A. Brill, who suggested that smoking in public (which men did openly) be linked to the freedom to vote, a right that women had just won. So, with the help of his wife, Doris Fleishman, Bernays convinced a group of former suffragettes to march down Fifth Avenue, carrying Lucky Strikes in the air as if they were "torches of freedom" as a gesture to demonstrate their equality with men. This example demonstrates how PR possesses the ability to change public habits and norms. Bernays was instrumental in crafting new social behaviors that would benefit his clients.

> The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of

> human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together in a smoothly functioning society (Bernays, 1928, p. 9).

As Ewen (1996) suggests, Bernays was a master of acting behind the scenes – “he envisioned PR as a potent social instrument that, in the hands of disciplined specialists, might be employed for significant purposes” (p. 163). These disciplined specialists were thought to be intellectually equipped to handle the theoretically inferior masses.

In a personal interview Ewen conducted with Bernays prior to his passing, the PR pioneer articulated an interesting fact about the average American citizen – that the average IQ runs about 100 (Ewen, 1996, p. 10). Clearly, this supported Bernays’ theories that PR specialists, through savvy intellect and a keen mind (and a much higher IQ), had the ability to control and dominate public action. Yet, publics possess a “predisposition” to being “detained,” helping to explain why Bernays’ theories added to the negative connotations of PR practice (Grion, 2003, p. 30).

Nonetheless, Bernays continued to suggest ways that PR practitioners could control their audiences. One key method for controlling public action is to prevent them from forming into mobs. For Bernays, mob mentality proves extremely dangerous. When the mob thinks too much or harbors too much control, the ruling parties have the ability to be overthrown. Therefore, it is the job of specialists to pacify the mob, or make them feel as though they are being heard when in actuality they are not. PR then moves from a persuasive practice to a manipulative practice; persuasion is a reasoning process (there is more than one decision-maker) while manipulation is according to another’s terms (with no allowance for disagreement or feedback).

Despite Bernays' attempts at keeping publics at bay, skepticism of PR practices continued to grow. Appalled by the growing power and corruption associated with newly emergent big businesses and by increasing industrial strife, publics demanded the dismantling of the "soulless giants" who seemed to endanger democracy and the traditional American way of life (Marchand, 1998, p. 6). This threat to corporate freedom helped give birth to a host of public relations initiatives and tactics.

One main job responsibility of a PR professional is to act as a liaison by delivering news (both positive and negative) from the inside of companies and organizations to the outside to serve external publics. Because they act as spokespeople for organizations, PR professionals often bear the brunt of negative criticism and are often accused of spin doctoring (Ewen, 1996). This further exacerbates the negative connotations of the practice, even as it has changed and grown with time.

In his essay entitled "The New Managerial Rhetoric and the Old Criticism" (1988), Sproule explains how the 20th century brought fundamental changes in rhetorical influences and participatory democracies. These fundamental changes have shifted public relations and other communication practices (such as advertising) away from classical rhetoric in several ways. For instance, the new rhetoric practices "rhetorical determinism" by assuming that a charming message will achieve results (Sproule, 1988, p. 477). Current methods of rhetorical influence present prepackaged ideologies that attempt to persuade a large number of people through inflated propaganda.

Sproule outlines the new managerial rhetoric under seven categories:

1) The new managerial rhetoric provides conclusions – audiences are discouraged from coming to their own conclusions, as professional practitioners use flashy tactics to rush

publics to conformity. This is in contrast to the old form, where audiences were asked to reason (either within themselves or with groups in discursive practices) to decide the best possible outcomes.

2) The new managerial rhetoric practices self-contained slogans – practitioners are constantly inventing new slogans for products. These slogans are usually self-contained, meaning that they enhance the product to entice publics to buy, even if certain publics are not relevant to the brand. Consumers will make rushed decisions to buy products based on slick slogans without any direct response.

3) The new rhetoric showcases images rather than ideas – practitioners use the media as a vehicle to influence social action through imagery. Consumers are bombarded with a myriad of persuasive symbols via mass media, including newspapers, television, the Internet, etc. At times, these symbols are displayed with little or no explanation. Images create less resistant audiences, as they persuade consumers to accept images at face value.

4) The new managerial rhetoric stresses interpersonal attraction and identification – as exposure to mass media increases, so does the desire to act accordingly with personas and actors. Competence of character (ethos) and motive are replaced by identification. Instead of judging appeals though reasoning, audiences are asked to judge appeals through familiarity. This becomes problematic as various segments of publics accept weak/false claims simply because they are originating from likable and/or identifiable characters.

5) The new managerial rhetoric creates facts – practitioners are able to artificially produce staged events consistent with controlled ideologies. This is in contrast to classical practices, where orators built enthymeme from common knowledge.

Contemporary spindoctors are able to tailor facts to win attention for synthetic facts from uniform and/or uninterested publics.

6) The new managerial rhetoric is based on pure entertainment as persuasion – contemporary appeals are constructed without much substance or elaboration. Most of these appeals lack information by constructing ideologies through amusement rather than reason. Publics are bombarded with entertaining television spots and commercials, which are very effective in selling products even though they are not extremely effective in informing what these products are manufactured to do. This becomes problematic as publics are replacing product value and relevance with entertainment and spectacle.

7) The new managerial rhetoric segments audiences – new forms of persuasion are compartmentalizing audiences. Practitioners are using market research and data to target segments of publics rather than relying on the discursive practices of classical rhetoric. This practice reduces rational decision-making by publics and leaves them hurried and uninformed (1988, pp. 472-474).

The seven points of the new managerial rhetoric suggest that practitioners have taken shortcuts when it comes to the incorporation of public opinion. In fact, many promotional and publicity methods do not take public opinion into account even though they claim public interest (Ewen, 1996).

Advertising Practice

The history of PR helps to explain why the discipline is often confronted with distrust. The practice of advertising is also increasingly criticized in communication literature. For example, Ewen (2001) analyzes the history and criticism of advertising under societal, intellectual, and economic lenses. Ewen's work suggests that advertising has integrated itself so much into our lives that it drives American ideas of the self, the family, and of the good life. In his words, “life is shaped, depicted, communicated, and sold through advertising” (2001, p. 8).

Ewen (2001) explains that advertising has led to “commodity fetishism” – the overwhelming yearning or compulsion for commodities and mass consumption (p. 1). Furthermore, he foresees the mass media creating undemocratic societies by changing roles, truths, and expression, which ultimately leaves consumers ashamed and alienated. Ultimately, advertising was created to advance mass production and capital which replaces traditional values of utility and quality with an emphasis on consumption (Ewen, 2001, pp. 31-34).

Additional critiques of advertising explain why publics are reluctant to trust practitioners and why traditional modes of promotion are no longer viable. Marchand (1986) analyzes the two-decade span (1920-1940) that had profound influence on contemporary promotion. Here, Marchand claims that “ads were likely to shape or reinforce the same popular attitudes they sought to reflect” (1986, p. xx). As technology increased in terms of the availability of channels to carry promotional messages, so did the rhetorical persuasiveness of such messages. One of the largest shifts came with the “predominant attention to the consumer rather than the product” (Marchand, 1986, p. xxi). Instead of focusing on product functionality and use-value, promotional messages began catering to consumer’s wants, needs, and desires, making it a much more psychological process. Thus, emphasis was placed on winning over the consumer in order to sell products and services.

Marchand categorizes advertising professionals as “apostles of modernity” in order to explain their influence surrounding attitudes and trends in modernity and beyond (1986, p. 1). Professionals possessed the power to lead the way, in other words, to determine what the masses would buy and what products would be the most popular. Instrumental shifts resulted from objective uses of products and services to more subjective feelings. Purchase motivations were based more on status and social approval over functionality and necessity. “Scare copy” was introduced, offering the consumer “sympathetic advice on how to triumph over the impersonal judgments of the modern world” (Marchand, 1986, p. 14).

Between 1920 and 1940, the interweaving of commercial and news content began to take shape, whereby commercial messages were melded with news and entertainment copy in order to downplay the promotional content of messages (Marchand, 1986). Much of this took place on the radio in the forms of entertainment and variety shows. “If people liked a program, perhaps they would not resent advertising that preserved its continuity of setting, character, and mood” (Marchand, 1986, pp. 105-106). Nonetheless, as technology and the channels of mass media increased, so did the interweaving of commercial messages with news and entertainment content.

Further inquiries and criticisms explain the faltering reputation of advertising. For example, Twitchell (1996) claims that we are living in a society that is driven by “Adcult,” or a “culture that is carried on through the boom-box noise and strobe lights of consumerism” (p. 1). He explains how American culture has been influenced and (in many cases) driven by promotion. Twitchell compares today’s promotional outreach to that of a century ago – “in 1915 a person could go entire weeks without observing an ad.

The average adult today sees some three thousand every day" (1996, p. 2). Advertising, it seems, is inescapable, which some argue leads to overexposure and weakened defense mechanisms.

Cutlip (1994) and Mayhew (1997) share similar sentiments regarding the decline of ethics in advertising. Mayhew's The New Public: Professional Communication and the Means of Social Influence (1997) asserts that "[advertising] does not allow for ordinary processes of reaction and outcome, rather [it] adjusts messages to secure positive response" (p. 201). However, just as PR has positive traits, advertising too possesses positive qualities. Various methods of advertising have improved since their inception (i.e., non-profits).

IMC as an Answer?

As previously discussed, many companies and organizations have shifted to an IMC model in order to offer a more collaborative method for publicity and promotion. In addition, IMC has allowed for several criticisms of PR and advertising to be addressed. Two key elements of IMC that have helped remedy negative public perceptions of marketing functions include a more centralized focus on the diverse consumer (by researching public attitudes of brands and measuring purchasing decisions) and multi-channeled communication strategies. IMC recognizes that consumers have become much more sophisticated (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1994, p. x). As consumers become more sophisticated in terms of sharing information and providing honest product reviews (which circulate freely on the Internet), marketers must adapt to the increasing demands of consumers, such as increased accountability and the ability to open up discourse with publics. “The relationship between organization and customer (or constituent) as embodied by the message lies at the heart of IMC” (Witkoski, 2003, p. 7).

Another driving force behind the success of IMC has been contact management, or the ability of the marketer to select the most fitting time and channel (point) of contact. Here, “the conditions under which the communication will be delivered are as (or more) critical than determining the message content of the communication” (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1994, p. 57).

While IMC’s positive business benefits have the ability to cure fractured relationships with publics, current IMC efforts require a more in-depth application of customer data in order to enhance discourse between companies and organizations and prospects and customers. One term used to describe this is “customer-centric,” or measuring more closely the goals, motivations, and wishes of prospects and customers in order to integrate feedback (Schultz & Schultz, 2003, p. 50). Here, the customer (and not the company) is at the center of business, providing the resources and rewards for all parties involved. In fact, companies have demonstrated that the application of customer information has helped improve customer retention and loyalty. It has also helped to provide a competitive advantage and a maximization of allocated resources (Schultz & Schultz, 2003, p. 42).

Similarly, a shift has been made from targeting new prospects to targeting existing customers, what is often referred to as reinforcement. Perhaps a focus on “maintaining and growing business from current customers should be the primary marketing goal [of businesses], while acquiring new ones should be secondary”

(Iacobucci & Calder, 2002, p. 135). Today, it is more important to build brand loyalty for the long-haul rather than attempting to generate new business.

Electronic marketing is changing promotion and publicity. The newest media is primarily electronic media (e-commerce). This media provides practitioners with new avenues for reengaging publics (a topic to be addressed in detail in Chapter Four of this dissertation). One distinguishing factor between old and new media is the element and scope of interactivity. “Interactivity means that it is the receiver [the viewer, caller, etc.] who decides what to see and when to see it, or not, in other words to control the communications flow” (Kitchen & De Pelsmacker, 2004, p. 110). This gives the receiver an increased amount of control and ultimately helps to build trust and faith in products and services because it is the consumer (and not the marketer) who is in control.

Furthermore, in order to capitalize on IMC success, marketers must ask themselves several questions (Percy, 1997, p. 163):

1) Is the market receptive to my ideas?

2) Do my decision-making structures make IMC planning possible?

3) Are there incentives (disincentives) to IMC in my current marketing structure?

When asking these questions, marketers are much more likely to find pitfalls, problems, and barriers with their implementation. These roadblocks stem from several arenas, namely decision-making structures, manager’s perceptions of IMC, compensation considerations, and current marketing trends. It is important for marketers to recognize that these pitfalls exist so that they can be addressed and resolved. Ultimately, awareness and reengagement may be the most important steps in building effective and long-lasting programs in IMC.

One mantra that successful "customer century" businesses are following involves looking for "moments of truth" (Gronstedt, 2000). "Moments of truth" connect to the concept of verisimilitude in marketing, or the importance of not only appearing true to customers, but also being true to customers. In order to be successful, "moments of truth" must be encountered at every brand contact point. For instance, customers must experience truth when they first come in contact with a particular brand, to when the brand is reinforced through a myriad of advertising, to when a customer decides to purchase the particular brand, to when a customer experiences the brand after purchasing it. This helps make brands much more personal and interactive.

The positive business benefits discussed above help to explain why the adoption of an IMC model is critical, especially when compared to traditional advertising, PR, and marketing practices. However, various pitfalls of IMC implementation continue to exist. While IMC allows companies and organizations to offer consistent frameworks for their marketing programs, it has yet to suggest how it may also open up discourse with publics. This dissertation is concerned with developing a discourse model for IMC informed by Hauser and will be discussed below. But first, the pitfalls of IMC implementation must be uncovered.

Pitfalls of IMC Implementation

According to the *JIMC*, "IMC is a customer-centric, data-driven method of communicating with consumers. IMC – the management of all organized communications to build positive relationships with customers and other stakeholders – stresses marketing to the individual by understanding needs, motivations, attitudes and behaviors" (2002-2003 edition, p. 51). A fraction of this has been accomplished.

However, various IMC practices have yet to fully satisfy the need of opening up the lines of communication between consumers and practitioners. And although IMC has allowed PR and marketing professionals to enhance the credibility of their craft, barriers still exist for implementation. Additional strides need to be taken in order for IMC to function fully and to become inclusionary.

Witkoski (2003) posits that while companies and organizations understand the importance of IMC models, application is certainly not without flaws. To illustrate, Witkoski interviewed nine communication professionals to discuss the state of IMC. Through this, he noticed a pattern of six issues that had the ability to impact the future of IMC practice, which include:

1) IMC is widely accepted among professional communicators – companies and organizations are realizing that marketers are key components for success. Marketing is recognized as a necessary function because it allows companies and organizations to expand their brands through strategic planning and development.

2) There is no commonly agreed upon definition of IMC – each company and organization uses IMC differently, and therefore classify it differently. While one company may utilize sales promotion and advertising to market itself, others may utilize PR techniques and human interest campaigning to extend their brands. Therefore, while it is understood that IMC is a collaboration of advertising, marketing, and PR, each company and organization has its own distinct way of using it.

3) The practice of IMC can be a source of confusion – because definitions of IMC are fluid, practitioners may question which communication strategies should be employed in

their campaigns. This can be remedied through traditional trial and error or, as this dissertation argues, through reengaging public spheres.

4) Organizations often practice IMC successfully while lacking formal knowledge of the discipline – many practitioners have no formal training in IMC. Yet, it is important for those participating in the discipline to understand both the theoretical and practical implications of the practice.

5) Organizational barriers for IMC continue to exits – as suggested, despite IMC's ability to unify communication efforts, strong public cynicism for publicity and promotion continues to exist.

6) Evaluation, or measurement, remains the weakest aspects of IMC – too often, companies and organizations are focused on the short-term goals of IMC. They often do not look at long-term, durable goals that have the ability to last into the future. In order to be successful, marketers must focus on the longevity of their marketing programs and continue to tweak and refine their campaigns as society moves and grows. Proper evaluation can be realized by communicating with publics (Witkoski, 2003, pp. 7-12).

Witkoski's six barriers for IMC implementation suggest that it is imperative to open up the lines of communication with publics in order to trump existing barriers and to promote active discussions with audiences. An enhanced model for IMC based on this premise will be explored later in this dissertation. A primary focus will be concerned with enhancing communication and discourse with publics for IMC to reach its fullest potential.

Applying Hauser

IMC provides a solid starting point for reinvigorating marketing functions. It now needs to be coupled with a viable framework that addresses workable discourses between competing parties (in this case, practitioners and consumers). This is where Hauser's theory of reticulate public spheres fits into the conversation. Today, marketers have the unique opportunity to build conversations with consumers to truly understand their wants and needs and truly promote to their expectations and desires. For instance, "it [IMC] means eliciting a response, not just conducting a monologue" (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1994, p. xvii).

But open and inclusionary communication cannot exist unless both marketers and consumers are active. This dissertation will argue that such a model depends on both the marketer and the consumer to increase their levels of responsibility in order to revive public conversations. Hauser offers a constructive approach to creating such discourses. "The media have encouraged us to think of the public as an aggregate of public data" (Hauser, 1999, p. xi). Yet, Hauser dispels elitist mentality. He posits that publics should evolve in reticulate public spheres in order to build participatory public arenas. It is important to note when discussing Hauser that publics are not regarded as singular entities. On the contrary, there are a wide range of publics that may be engaged. This is an important distinction that will be addressed later in this dissertation when advocating participatory democracies and how they can be applied to IMC.

A participatory democracy, then, does not only carry the role of expression, but also the roles of "creating, regulating, and fine tuning public opinion through a process in which we cultivate and maintain a sense of ourselves in dialogue" (Hauser, 1999, p. xi).

Together, publics create “reticulate public spheres,” where participants engage in “webs of meaning and commitment that arise through discourse” (Hauser, 1999, p. xi). These webs of meaning are equipped with competing ideas and narratives that constitute developed public opinions. Conversations become more and more authentic as communication continues and meaning is mediated (rather than controlled – a distinction to be made later).

Hauser (1999) reminds publics that a true democracy “posits that broadly based participation in deliberative processes will lead to laws and policies that are more inclusive and more just than measures enacted by monarchs or powerful elites” (p. 5). He explains that we need to follow a system more accustomed to “rhetorical give and take,” or for “intelligent reflection leading to shared beliefs and opinions on matters affecting their [public] lives” (Hauser, 1999, p. 5). Further, Hauser’s system adheres to the rigorous examination of discourses. The plurality of discourses is the most important step; rhetorical exchanges are in constant states of flux. Discourse is constantly changing depending upon public opinions, its conditions, and public agendas.

Furthermore, by reclaiming “a contribution to the course and quality of civil society,” we can revitalize the democratic process (Hauser, 1999, p. 12). This dissertation argues that by becoming more involved in public conversations, citizens and professionals alike can better understand how public agendas and norms are shaped and actualized. This dissertation also argues that it is essential for IMC to adopt a more rhetorical approach for interaction in order to adhere to the moral and civil codes of democracy. As previously mentioned, this process can be realized through rhetorical interactions between practitioners and the publics that they wish to serve. This will allow mutually-emergent meaning to be born from vernacular discussions. The enhancement of IMC as proposed in this dissertation means putting a stop to the “disempowerment by institutional authority” (Hauser, 1999, p. 14).

Further, while much of Hauser’s work is devoted to political discourse, this dissertation will tie his framework to IMC because it is one discipline that can benefit from shared contact and interaction. Here, marketers will be responsible for:

1) Getting in touch with consumers to truly understand their thoughts, motivations, wants, and needs.

2) Responding to public demands by encouraging feedback and interaction.

3) Integrating public feedback into IMC discourses.

The consumer will also need to take on additional responsibilities, which will include:

1) Opening up conversations with marketers to voice questions and concerns.

2) Participating in “viral marketing,” where both positive and negative feedback is shared with consumers.

3) Reducing negative perceptions of marketers in order to decrease the perceived pitfalls of promotion and publicity; the only way that authentic discourse can occur is through new frames of reference.

“Exploring new and innovative methods of communication” is “one of the hallmarks” of IMC (Witkoski, 2003, p. 9). Moreover, I intend to argue that inclusionary methods for engaging publics (such as those outlined in Hauser) will bring positive benefits to IMC. Before such a model can be fully established, however, I must address the additional barriers that stand in the way of rebuilding discourse with publics. The next barrier is concerned with conspicuous consumption.

Chapter Two: Conspicuous Consumption – A Social Construct

Chapter Two of this dissertation is concerned with the roles marketing practitioners play in the shaping of materialism and how ideas and social norms are constructed through publicity and promotion. I intend to demonstrate that marketing's role in crafting conspicuous consumption and materialism may not be as great as previously anticipated.

The term conspicuous consumption was introduced by economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen (1899). Here, Veblen used conspicuous consumption to describe the behavioral characteristic of the newly rich, a class emerging in the 19th century as a result of the accumulation of wealth during the Second Industrial Revolution. In this context, the term was narrowed to include only the upper classes that used their enormous wealth to manifest social power, whether real or perceived. Instead of choosing items for their efficacy, well-to-do citizens selected items that were highly ornamental and thus socially astute. One became "reputable" when in the ownership of desirable and expensive commodities, which then made them socially acceptable and dominant over lower social groups (Veblen, 1899, p. 23).

Veblen addressed the effects of wealth on behavior, which he noted often led to "snobbery and pretentiousness," a behavior directly connected to "frivolous spending" (1899, p. xii). He argued that high spending was synonymous with social status; one could climb the social hierarchy merely through the accumulation of things. The upper classes substituted labor for leisure through a quest for higher social standing. Various critics of conspicuous consumption argue that it leads to grand scales of waste by replacing labor with leisure (Veblen, 1899; Pieper, 1998).

Conspicuous consumption was traditionally a reference for the upper classes only. Yet, with significant improvements of living standards and the emergence of the middle class in the 20th century, the term is now broadly applied to individuals and households with expendable incomes whose consumption patterns are prompted by the utility of goods to assert status rather than any intrinsic utility of such goods.

Conspicuous consumption has been hotly debated in literature (both dated and contemporary) in terms of usefulness and uselessness. While Veblen (1899) and Pieper (1998) point to the pitfalls of endless wealth, others argue that it will allow for a sort of trickle-down effect. For instance, Weber (1964) attempts to divorce the negative connotations associated with wealth. Here, he refers to wealth as a calling, or the ability to refrain from ornamentation or unnecessary riches that influence superficial status. Weber views the act of making money and the consumption of resources as a means to exchange. Ultimately, economic interests become synonymous with maintaining social interests. Smith shares a similar sentiment. In The Wealth of Nations (1776), Smith asserts that the strength of a nation is not determined by the amount of money that it makes, but rather by the collection of goods available for a society to consume.

New economic systems facilitated through conspicuous consumption and materialism caused promotion and publicity to increase in order to differentiate competing brands. For example, Percy (1997) explains that a focus on brand salience enables companies and organizations to maintain strong customer bases and differentiate themselves. Brand salience, or brand particularity or fondness, refers to the attachment customers feel when they come in contact with certain brands. Brand salience differs from brand awareness because the latter deals simply with brand recognition. For instance, a consumer may recognize a brand but not be particularly fond of it. Brand salience involves a customer taking a liking to particular products and services and continuing to utilize them.

Ewen (2001) and Twitchell (1999) point to marketing as a leading cause of conspicuous consumption, but for very different reasons. While Ewen blames practitioners for this epidemic, Twitchell points to the consumer. In Ewen's words, "life is shaped, depicted, communicated, and sold through advertising" (2001, p. 8). In his view, mass quantity and consumption have replaced the traditional values of utility and quality. Consumers are asked to view the world through a lens and act as spectators, who are then encouraged to make purchases by those controlling the message (or the marketer). One may argue that this type of system is highly propagandistic.

While most scholars place the blame for conspicuous consumption on advertising, marketing, and PR practitioners, Twitchell provides a fresh approach. He asserts that we (as consumers) are not mindlessly duped into performing these tasks (buying needless goods for status value, etc). On the contrary, we are completely aware of our actions. This offers an alternative to the scapegoat mentality that we ascribe to the marketing industry (i.e., "the advertisement made me do it") by showing that we (as consumers) actually participate willingly in the consumption process. For Twitchell, we buy and consume because we want to and more importantly because we can. Consumption and materialism can make us feel good. Twitchell terms this the "liberating role of consumption," with materialism being "one of our guilty pleasures" (1999, p. 6).

Despite the varying positions regarding the culprits of conspicuous consumption, it often gets associated with marketing. Therefore, it is an important concept to address when studying the roots of our contemporary consumer culture. Ultimately, I argue that both practitioners and consumers are responsible for today's consumption trends.

Consumption and Materialism – The Practitioner

The consumption era took flight in early modernity and continues to this day. Critics of advertising, PR, and marketing practices claim that practitioners were responsible for encouraging publics to purchase goods for ornamental value instead of for their utility. "Ad men" were synonymous with "consumption engineers" (Marchand, 1986, p. 25). Under this rubric, marketers were expected to entice consumers to purchase products that they did not necessarily need for survival.

For example, one of the first products to be marketed as a high-class item was the telephone. In order to change public perceptions and attitudes of the telephone as a basic tool for communication, marketers were employed to "transform the consumer image of the telephone from that of a necessity, to that of a convenience, even a luxury" (Marchand, 1986, p. 117). Calls to action were created in order to entice the consumer to purchase higher cost telephones that had additional functions or higher aesthetic values over pure use-values. In addition, "the modern consumer was critical of the price and quality of things purchased as necessities, but liberally purchased whatever contributed to comfort and convenience" (Marchand, 1986, p. 118). One may argue that this type of behavior was a direct result of consumption marketing and engineering.

Thus, style and convenience became the new wave of modernity and a driving force of conspicuous consumption. An increase in consumption marketing was met with an increase in consumer demand for quality and a diverse selection of products. One result of high demand can be demonstrated by the wide variety of colors choices that began to emerge, particularly in products meant for the home and body. Products that were traditionally produced in plain white were now being offered in various hues, not to increase the use-value, but rather to cater to the higher class citizens that emerged from this epoch. Several examples include bath towels, robes, and even “tinted toilet seats” (Marchand, 1986, p. 126). Styles that were marketed as having a higher matter of taste (as well as a much higher price tag) were a driving force of increased consumption, especially with women.

Design began to overtake copy in advertisements around early modernity. Traditional space for copywriting was replaced by art, pictures, and photographs. “Pictures were easier to understand than copy. They inspired belief and aroused less psychological resistance” (Marchand, 1986, p. 154). This placed additional emphasis on aesthetics over use-values, as consumers were not looking at advertisements to learn about the functionality of products, but rather viewing them to get a sense of their class, value, and beauty.

A major fixation of the modern consumption era enforced through marketing was cleanliness and taking care of the human body. Many of these appeals were gender-specific and aimed at the female demographic. “Having clean skin is a modern concern – instilled, aided, and abetted by companies in the nineteenth century that were producing surpluses of an everyday product, namely soap” (Twitchell, 1996, p. 142). This has since grown to monumental proportions with companies producing a myriad of products and services that promote beauty, cleanliness, and prestige.

Cleanliness became synonymous with taking care of the self, which was a new social expectation. “At the beginning of the 20th century most people cleaned the skin of their entire body only once a week” (Twitchell, 1996, p. 142). Today, personal “hygiene” is both a personal and social priority (Twitchell, 1996, p. 144). The only practical way to attend to personal hygiene is to purchase, utilize, and consume the products on the market that keep the body feeling, looking, and smelling clean. The introduction of cosmetics changed the way women presented themselves to the world. “Face painting, once reserved for prostitutes (painted ladies) became an acceptable routine in presenting the self for the day” (Twitchell, 1996, p. 147). Makeup not only became acceptable, but quickly became normative; women were expected not to leave the home without doing themselves up.

There are various thoughts and opinions surrounding personal hygiene and cosmetic products. Some argue (feminists, for instance) that they promote vanity and take away from natural beauty, while others argue (social psychologists, for instance) that they promote self-confidence and as a result promote social well-being and social acceptance. Despite these varying opinions, the use of such products propelled consumption and materialism. The promotion, distribution, and wide use of these products have since skyrocketed.

Appeals to the body and their connection to social worth continue to play a large role in marketing. For example, Ewen (2001) argues that American businesses are overwhelmingly responsible for our consumption epidemic, noting that needs are often “exploited,” which creates an “inner compulsion” to spend, even when the spending is not rational or warranted (p. 8). This trend evolved rapidly after the Industrial Revolution, as products were mass produced for wide-spread consumption. Additionally, mass consumption and more efficient production machinery allowed for the manufacturing of leisure products (Pieper, 1998).

Leisure products (such as in today's market include high-tech gadgets and toys) are differentiated from other products in terms of use-value and account for the overwhelming majority of impulse purchases. "The utilitarian value of a product or the traditional notion of mechanical quality were no longer enough sufficient inducements to move merchandise" (Ewen, 2001, p. 34). Thus, the utilitarian function of products was quickly replaced by the social prestige it provoked. More and more people (upper and lower classes, alike) were afforded the opportunity to indulge in various luxuries as mass production increased supply and demand for commodities. As a result, conspicuous consumption was no longer exclusive to the upper classes.

Consumption trends increased as marketers realized that consumers were filling emotional voids with material objects (Pieper, 1998). Advertising and PR rhetoric soon followed suit, creating ideal scenarios as they placed leisure products at the center of their stories. "Rhetoric is a major source of influence in shaping the world we inhabit" (Hauser, 2002, p. 60). Furthermore, advertising and PR practitioners recognize the power that they possessed to control and often times create wants and desires, which is often strongly implanted and reinforced in messages.

Today, both verbal and nonverbal messages play a role in shaping persuasive appeals. By creating scripts that speak of the wonders of a commodity and evoking powerful imagery that speaks for itself, marketers have the ability to encourage impulse purchases that lead to conspicuous consumption and materialism. "Rhetorical communication [such as communication employed in marketing] attempts to coordinate social action" (Hauser, 2002, p. 3). In short, rhetorical communication attempts to bring others to action. Such action can be minimal or on a larger scale depending on the rhetorical pull of the message and/or how well it resonates with audiences. A minimal coordination of action would occur by simply asking an audience to consider a message. A larger scale coordination of action would entice audiences to adopt the ideas presented in the communication. Rhetorical communication can be used to maintain, challenge, or even change perceptions, thoughts, and ideas.

Marketing attempts to move audiences to action through rhetorical communication. PR messages are concerned with building positive perceptions of brands, while advertising messages are meant to entice and move audiences to action. An infinite number of examples of rhetorical marketing communication exist in today's competitive market. Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn refer to this as "target buying incentive" or "TBI" (1994, p. 71). Here, marketers determine the elements that give their products and services competitive edge over competitors. As more and more products and services are introduced to the market, it becomes increasingly important to enhance marketing communication in order to differentiate brands. If properly managed, the TBI has the ability to entice consumers to select one brand over another (perhaps it is faster, bigger, longer, leaner, and so on).

Moreover, marketing messages attempt to coordinate social action through rhetorical exchanges. Rhetoric may be used to maintain a strong customer base. It may also be used to challenge prevailing public opinions, such as those associated with competitors. Finally, marketing communication may attempt to change audience's perceptions by asking them to adopt new ideas and patterns of behaviors (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1994).

Marchand (1986) compares the marketing professional to an archeologist to explain how advertising, marketing, and PR construct social realities and norms in order to persuade consumers to purchase products:

> Whereas archeologists must deduce the probable social uses of the artifacts they unearth, and then interpret from them the economic and social structures of the society, advertisements provide us with ample guidelines to the social functions (or at least the suggested uses) of various products (p. 165).

However, representations as depicted in advertisements are often difficult to achieve under real-life circumstances. As Marchand explains, advertising scenarios are typically "aimed at depicting settings at least a step up from the social circumstances of the reader" (1986, p. 166). Therefore, advertisements are often misrepresentations of reality, causing the audience to long for products and services that are not necessarily affordable.

Many of the persuasive appeals in marketing are enhanced through the use of parables, or the "attempt to draw practical moral lessons from the incidents of everyday life" (Marchand, 1986, pp. 206-207). Here, marketers create various social scenarios to showcase their brands. For instance, the parable of the "First Impression" surveys marketing's ability to create desirable products and services that are acceptable in social circumstances and (as a result) award consumers with the ability to fit in with high society (Marchand, 1986, p. 209). These messages are based on acceptable norms as dictated by society, thus building upon the social impacts of appeals. "Advertising parables of the First Impression stressed the narrowness of the line that separated those who succeeded from those who failed" (Marchand, 1986, p. 210). By following the latest trends and keeping up appearances, the consumers had a greater chance of being accepted by their peers, a concept that is referred to today as lifestyle branding.

A consumer participates in lifestyle branding by "purchasing and using particular products" that will associate them with particular social groups (Jung & Merlin, 2004, p. 40). Social perceptions are lived out and actualized through lifestyle branding. One brand category that utilizes lifestyle branding to differentiate brands is the automotive market. For example, consumers that wish to be associated with the higher classes may purchase from a luxury line of automobiles, such as vehicles manufactured by Mercedes-Benz or Lexus. Those wishing to ascribe to the environmentally-friendly (or green) movement may opt for a hybrid vehicle, such as the Toyota Prius.

As lifestyle branding becomes a widely used marketing practice, opposition toward it grows (Jung & Merlin, 2004). Opponents may argue that lifestyle branding causes consumers to become more materialistic in nature. They may also argue that a focus on the accumulation of products and services leads to a greater division of the classes and social envy. Ultimately, opponents claim that "people – not brands – should be responsible for defining the self" (Jung & Merlin, 2004, p. 43). However, what critics fail to acknowledge is that impulses are not based on marketing appeals, alone. Social constructions of reality are also formulated by consumers who (perhaps) play an equal (or greater) role in driving conspicuous consumption and materialism.

Consumption and Materialism – The Consumer

While “the power of elites to shape and even distort public discussion and public policy is difficult to deny” (Hauser, 1999, p. 39), I argue that the engineering of consumption was not driven by the marketer alone. In fact, many scholars (such as Twitchell, 1996 & 1999) and specialists (such as Schultz, 2003) posit that it was the consumer and not the marketer that placed a high demand on consumption and materialism. “Propaganda for a comprehensive attitude favoring extravagance and self-indulgence arose more from the cumulative effects of thousands of individual appeals than from any concerted effort to promote consumerisms” (Marchand, 1986, pp. 159-160). Therefore, consumers played an active role in the engineering of consumption, a trend that continues to this day. Although marketers do have the ability to create new attitudes and change perceptions, consumers must also claim responsibility.

For Twitchell, “we are many things, but what we are not are victims of capitalism” (1999, p. 27). Twitchell believes that publics are simply too sophisticated to call themselves victims. Although the steady pull of marketing remains, publics acquire goods and services on their own accord. To assert individual responsibility, Twitchell compares modern marketing to that of a magic show; “it works only if the audience participates. If you turn aside and refuse to look, then there is no show, no magic, no meaning” (1999, p. 56). Publics influence purchases just as much (and often times, more) as marketers. In short, both parties play an active role in shaping consumption and materialism.

Sociologist Michael Schudson agrees with Twitchell. In his 1984 inquiry Advertising, the Uneasy Profession: Its Dubious Impact on American Society, Schudson argues that advertising, while it has the ability to reinforce trends and promote materialism, is not the sole cause of our consumption-based culture. Advertising and other forms of marketing should simply be viewed as contributing factors, not as the main culprits. In some fashions, marketing functions have been given too much credit. It [advertising] does not possess "magical influence," it is instead a "codefendant" (Schudson, 1984, p. 235). There are additional factors that influence purchasing patterns, such as social pressures (attaining goods that are common in particular reference groups and fields) and a personal desire to accumulate things (for building self-esteem, etc.), which for Schudson could be one of the strongest motivators of all. "They [consumers] value appearance over substance and easy disposal over maintenance" (Schudson, 1984, p. 8). One example of a consumption pattern popular with consumers is the use of disposable diapers over reusable cloth diapers. An overwhelming majority chooses convenience over sustainability by choosing disposable diapers even though cloth diapers can be recycled and are better for the environment.

In addition to Marchand, Twitchell, and Schudson, Berger and Luckmann (1966) posit that social processes are *a priori* to individual experiences. Human beings are social products – they come to understand things as they are communicated through the symbolism of the world. Action is driven by the social, not the individual psyche. Therefore, normative behaviors are learned as a result of social interactions with others.

In Influence: Science and Practice (2001), Robert C. Cialdini depicts a case scenario for learned social behaviors. Here, he demonstrates how "canned laughter," or pre-placed laughter, on television sitcoms and other production sets is socially-influenced. Canned laughter sends an audible cue to home audience that something is humorous and in turn makes the home audience more inclined to laugh. “We view a behavior as correct in a given situation to the degree that we see others performing it” (Cialdini, 2001, p. 100). Canned laughter is just one example of how we mimic or follow social patterns of behavior. As a rule, we have the tendency to do what others are doing. We follow social cues in environments, especially when they are new or foreign to us.

Furthermore, the claim that advertising created conspicuous consumption on its own is fallacious. The desire to consume is innate in all human beings and existed prior to the introduction of marketing.

> The idea that advertising creates artificial desires rests on the profound ignorance of human nature, on the hazy feeling that there existed some halcyon era of noble savages with purely natural needs, on romantic claptrap first promulgated by Rousseau and kept alive in institutions well isolated by the marketplace (Twitchell, 1996, p. 12).

Certainly, marketing can induce frivolous spending, but social and individual pressures prove to be just as powerful.

Repercussions of Consumption and Materialism

A primary reason that publics consume is to fill a void or to evoke happiness (Pieper, 1998). Yet, recent studies have demonstrated that the accumulation of resources and goods (especially goods with no real use-value) does not necessarily lead to contentment. For instance, Tim Kasser’s The High Price of Materialism (2002) suggests that the quest for material dominance leads to a greater unhappiness. Kasser finds that despite the popular misconception that we feel good about our materialistic conquests, we actually add more pressure and anxiety to our lives because we allow materials to dominate our thinking. As our obsession with material possessions grows, we become enslaved by things. While money may be the key to accumulating things, one simply cannot buy peace of mind. And for Kasser, things will not give us that.

No matter how affluent or financially stable a person may be, “a strong focus on materialistic pursuits not only distracts people from experiences conducive to psychological growth and health, but signals a fundamental alienation from what is truly meaningful” (Kasser, 2002, p. 3). “Truly meaningful” values differ from person to person, but typically include religion, spirituality, family, and/or community. On the contrary, we are led to believe that money will buy us happiness and increase our personal well-being. As a result, Kasser’s ideas are put to the test.

“Almost all of us place at least some importance on possessions, money, and image, but materialism takes hold of the center of some people’s value systems” (Kasser, 2002, p. 26). Materialistic conquests influence social actions and buying patterns. Various factors that influence materialistic buying patterns may include insecurity, fragile self-worth, and poor relationships. We are taught that possessions can provide a buffer for anxieties and unfulfilled needs. And while material objects may provide instant gratification (such as the positive reinforcement a consumers experiences when they first purchase a product), they do nothing to promote a healthy longevity or sense of well-being (Kasser, 2002). Typically, the joy received by instant gratification is short-lived. Consumers enter the never-ending cycle of acquiring more and more things to reach full satisfaction, which is never wholly achieved. This often leads to feelings of disenchantment, disillusionment, and discontentment.

Despite the fact that consumers have difficulty finding true happiness from material possessions, goods and services continue to be acquired and consumers continue to blame marketers for prompting impulse purchases. Schor's (1998) investigates this trend. Here, Schor explains why Americans are compelled to spend, even when such spending is not rational or necessary. Much of the explanation involves emulation, where middle-class consumers purchase high-class products to create the illusion that they are wealthier than they actually are. As previously examined, material possessions define individuals and place them in certain social categories. Schor calls this "competitive acquisition," a byproduct of "keeping up with the Joneses" (1998, p. 3). As standards of living and personal maintenances amplify, the stakes increase. Desires are misinterpreted as needs and more and more goods are accumulated. Yet, unbridled acquisition of goods can lead to repossession, foreclosure, and even bankruptcy (Schor, 1998).

Seemingly, "the Joneses" are getting more and more difficult to keep up with. As previously mentioned, our desire to spend is driven predominately by social impulses although we tend to blame marketing. We look to our reference groups for purchasing advice in order to decide which goods and services are the most desirable. Although consumers may not want to possess the same exact goods as their peers (for instance, the same exact handbag) to avoid copying, they typically want to possess goods that are in the same (or higher) material category. Symbolism drives perception and consumers make sure that brands are highly visible, especially when they are costly. Ultimately, "our interactions with others are almost always mediated through things" (Schor, 1998, p. 103).

Applications to Hauser

Naturally (as with any social construct) there are exceptions to unrestrained materialism and consumption. Schor labels this a movement of "downshifters," which is a voluntary move that seeks out the more simple life through "more time, less stress, and more balance in life" (1998, p. 114). However, downshifting can only be met by sacrificing various immediate comforts (usually materialistic comforts).

A promising method for voicing concerns about conspicuous consumption and materialism, then, is "civic reengagement," a theory that ties back to the goal of this dissertation because it mirrors Hauser's vision for a return to reticulate public spheres (Schor, 1998, p. 166). Once reengaged, we are concerned not only with ourselves, but also with our communities. This kind of encouragement gives birth to a concern for others, which can provide a starting point for communication.

Hauser is an active proponent of civic reengagement. He calls upon rhetoric's civic function, which includes relationships between public discourses and judgments. Social cooperation constitutes social reality. Both knowledge and power are shaped through discourse. This is why it is increasingly important to create responsive and active communities that are vocal and participatory. In a participatory democracy, both the specialist (for IMC, the practitioner) and the layperson (for IMC, the consumer) are involved in discourse.

Hauser (2002) discusses "public's theory" to explain how publics use rhetorical communication to express their opinions on salient issues and how such communication influences social patterns and events (p. 83). Rhetoric is used as a means to solving exigencies (or problems) that crop up in public spheres (Hauser, 2002). Public's theory relies on a multitude of public spheres coming together to discuss significant societal issues that need to be addressed (such as those examined in this chapter). A public is “a construct we employ to discuss those individuals who are actively weighing and shaping the course of society” (Hauser, 1999, p. 74). In order to be part of a public, then, participants must be interested, active, and engaged. Genuine public concerns can be realized and mediated through discourse as it evolves in public spheres. The arbitration that evolves from public discourses will not always unfold smoothly, however.

Rhetorical discourse typically begins at points of discontinuity, which has the ability to alter thought and action. Audiences become active rather than passive and begin to question authority. Through inquiry, “an enlightened rhetoric leads us to a world of hope, decency, and mutual respect” (Hauser, 2002, pp. 12-13). Yet, this type of rhetoric can only function if there is mutual participation from all interested parties in public arenas. But unfortunately, publics often lack the conditions necessary for active participation and the mutual tolerance that allows for the creation of permeable boundaries among members in public spheres. Individualism (the third barrier to be discussed in this dissertation, which will take place in the next chapter) may also stand in the way of reengagement.

Mayhew (1997) notes a “new public,” emerging after 1988 as a response to elitist control (p. 189). For Mayhew, today’s citizens are complacent, uninterested, and disengaged. One pitfall of the “new public” is that its members are willing to accept rhetorical appeals at face-value without challenge. “When we accept advice or take suggestions, or adopt the opinions of others, without verifying for ourselves [or for others] that what we are told is sound, we have been influenced” (Mayhew, 1997, p. 96).

Ultimately, the “new public” asks fewer questions, allowing those controlling the channels of communication to provide fewer answers. As a result, publics become more and more isolated and individualistic.

Therefore, “materialistic values are indeed associated with a number of problems concerning connections to other people” (Kasser, 2002, p. 62). Highly materialistic individuals tend to be much more narcissistic than their counterparts (Lasch, 1979). Objectification leads to alienation and a loss of social experiences and connectedness (a direct result of individualism), which adds an additional barrier to reconnecting publics. Individualism disrupts the process of rebuilding discourse communities through reticulate public spheres. This is why it must be addressed as a pitfall for marketers and active members of publics alike, as they may find difficulty connecting with others.

Chapter Three: Publics are Amiss – The Rise of Individualism

Killingsworth (2005) suggests that “individualism is an illusion [where] capitalistic society depends upon people thinking they are free and individualistic when in fact they are driven by consumerism and other ideologies that benefit by their failure to form into collectives” (p. 119). The problems stem from marketing appeals, which depict the individual as being the most important, as well as with individuals, who tend to become more and more self-absorbed and focused on the self before others in contemporary society (Lasch, 1979). Chapter Three of this dissertation addresses this trend.

While various scholars (Ellul, 1964 & 1965; Ewen, 1996 & 2001; Mayhew, 1997) discuss how marketing plays a role in shaping individualism, other views (Bellah, 1985; MacIntyre, 1984 & 1989; Putnam, 1995) insist that publics have become uninterested on their own accord. Further, this chapter suggests how Hauser’s theory of reticulate public spheres can thwart individualistic tendencies in order to revive conversations between practitioners and consumers.

IMC and Individualism

Consumers have been left disenchanted by the power of elitists to control and manipulate the mass channels of communication (Mayhew, 1997). This has led to a decline in social participation and contributed to the ongoing individualism epidemic. Traditionally, scholars have argued that marketers have discourage vernacular voices (especially if they contain negative feedback) in order to keep their appeals central and free from criticism (Cutlip, 1994 & 1995; Ewen, 1996, 2001; Marchand, 1986). Today, publics have an easier time participating in public spheres to share their thoughts and opinions on public issues (especially through electronic communication, to be discussed in Chapter Four). However, various factors persist that prevent these voices from speaking out – one of which is individualism. First, I will address the notion that marketing and other forms of “propaganda” have encouraged individualism (Ellul, 1965).

Media critic and philosopher Lippmann (1925) explains that we have been left disenchanted and disillusioned by notions of democracy. We do not (as outsiders) think for ourselves, but instead are required to build alliances with governing insiders who use propaganda and stereotypes to discourage us from thinking and acting on our own. Insiders (members of the media, government, advertising and PR practitioners, etc.) promote and enforce individualism and selfishness.

Lippmann asserts that the average person is nothing but a “phantom” and has (as a result) become uninterested due to the pre-packaged ideologies contained in mediated messages (1925, p. 77). The will of the people, as presupposed by democratic standards, is no longer taken into consideration. Instead, we follow a prescriptive (and not descriptive) pattern set by elitists. This becomes problematic, as public opinions are becoming mere spectator sports directed by aligned (and not truly opinionated) action that supports insider causes.

Both Ellul (1965) and Mayhew (1997) consider the social implications of marketing messages on publics. More specifically, Ellul believes that propaganda destroys democracy by threatening to abolish common opinion (or opinion made by the layperson) through elitist control (which ultimately leads to a lapse in public voices and conversations). As Hauser explains “in a democracy the people reign while the elitists rule” (Hauser, 2002, p. 26).

While Ellul does admit that propaganda can be used to both protect and coerce, his true sentiments are disclosed as he compares propaganda to a "weapon" – even if it is used for protection, it still possesses significantly harmful properties which cannot be ignored (1965, p. 10). This leads to conformity and takes away personal freedoms. Ellul terms this "crowd mania," or the desire for new possessions and technological advancement on behalf of the crowd (1965, pp. 6-9). Crowd mania is exacerbated by propaganda and promotion, which leads to individualistic tendencies and a vanishing of public voices.

As Marchand (1986) demonstrates, modernity gave way to a society that was focused on "an increasingly desperate personal struggle for survival and success" (p. 285). Today, PR and advertising tend to position the individual as primary. Marketing messages contain metaphors of winning and losing with a focus on competition (Schor, 1998). Through these messages, consumers tend to visualize themselves ahead of the crowd.

As previously mentioned, critics argue that marketing's ultimate parables finesse problems created by the scale of the crowd, modern society, and its threats to individualism and personal mastery. For example, products and services are marketed in such a fashion that they promise each individual a place "out front" (Marchand, 1986, p. 362). Perhaps this is "why the label has moved from inside the collar to outside the shirt" (Twitchell, 1999, p. 159). Yet, by focusing so intently on the self, concern for the other disappears and society becomes more and more isolated, fragmented, and non-participatory (Lasch, 1979).

van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2007), remind publics of what can occur when there is a lapse in participatory discourse:

> A party, whose strategic proceedings allow its commitments to a reasonable exchange of argumentative moves to be overruled by the aim of persuading the opponent, may victimize the other party. Then the strategic maneuvering has got derailed, and is condemnable for being fallacious. All derailments of strategic maneuvering are fallacious" (p. 61).

Yet, "derailments" (or critiques) of "strategic maneuvering" (or systematically-distorted communication) become even more common when public issues are no longer discussed by actual members of publics. And as noted above, critics argue that decisions are shaped by elitists and maintained through a lack of challenge. A critical eye is necessary to challenge the inconsistencies often facilitated through powered communication. However, such a critical eye is hard to discover because many of today's publics have disappeared from collective spheres, often on their own accord.

Collapsing Publics

As previously discussed, various scholars and critics of disappearing public spheres blame individualistic thoughts and actions on those controlling and disseminating communication (or the elitists). To reiterate, these critics are concerned that a lapse in vernacular voices causes publics to collapse thereby limiting active public arenas. However, research suggests that publics have become personally uninterested, themselves (Lasch, 1979; Lewis, 1943; MacIntyre, 1984 & 1989). Many factors contribute to the demise of participation. One major theme is self-absorbency.

Lewis penned <u>The Abolition of Man</u> (1943) to describe the lapse in participation. Here, he asserts that we have become “men without chests,” through a loss of courage and honor, which were traditional universal values (1943, p. 72). As a result, we live in an increasingly individualistic and uncivil world – one filled with emotivism, pessimism, and self-fulfillment. In this individualistic age, the self is privileged over the other. One key driver of individualism is emotivism. Emotivism is specifically defined as, “the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, attitudes, or feelings” (Menuge, 2000, p. 26). Preferences that cater to the self lead to increased individualism in our contemporary age. In addition, “emotivism presupposes the authority of each person to establish personal criteria for choice” (Hauser, 1999, p. 38).

Watt (1996) claims that “when the word individualism came to England in the 1830s, it was dyslogistic – it carried an invidious or a hostile sense” (p. 238). Later, however, as Western societies graduated and aged, notions of community, utilitarianism, and individualism began to change. “People in earlier eras formed their awareness of personal and group interests in shared problems through active participation in the rhetorical culture of open discussion and debate” (Hauser, 1999, p. 5). Critics argue, however, that citizens of Western cultures place emphasis on themselves without much concern for others in their communities.

Perhaps today’s basic family and social frameworks have suffered from emotivistic and individualistic trends. It seems that we have lost ourselves in the hustle and bustle of our daily lives and as a result treat our private lives as our sanctuary. We no longer feel as though we have time for our neighbors and are participating less in public engagements. Putnam's (1995) describes this cultural tendency. He provides the example of declining bowling leagues to demonstrate that public activities are struggling for members. There are many factors that contributed to this decline. For Putnam, the main drivers for the lack of participation include the introduction of more women into the labor force, issues of mobility, demographic transformations (increased divorce rates, etc.), and technological leisure (1995, pp. 74-75). Putnam's final reason concerning technological leisure will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Hauser (2002) expresses his thoughts concerning individualism – "without arguments that force us to consider contradictory views and impulses, we would lack consciousness of a self. Consciousness of our contradictory impulses and potential resolution on the basis of arguments tell the self who it is and where it stands" (p. 65). Therefore, as MacIntyre (1984) explains, men and women suffer from a lapse of discourse. This leaves them at the mercy of emotivism. As discussed above, emotivism presupposes that each individual is free to do what feels good at the time. Emotivism places all value decisions, including ethical judgments, as subjective reports of feelings. By doing so, individuals often "struggle between authoritarian discourse and internally persuasive discourse" (Hauser, 1999, p. 8). Ultimately, the chief historical reason for the rise of emotivism is to be found in the failure of modernity to provide rational justifications for the objectivity of value statements (MacIntyre, 1984).

In addition, Taylor (1989) argues that community members have become "disengaged subjects" where individual purposes are found within and not through the larger order of which they [are] part (1989, pp. 192-193). Today, individuals are not bound to universal authority. As a result, society became an instrument, rather than a matrix, for individuals. We “use” it instead of being embedded in it and being guided by it (Taylor, 1989, p. 196). The individualistic ideal has become our practice, part of our universe of discourse, and collective unconscious, as a whole. Bellah et al. (1985) explains how the classic myth of the rugged American individualist can elucidate our modern psychotherapeutic culture and how it has the tendency to privilege individuals over collectives. For instance, the “cowboy” is an isolated and anti-social, yet respected cultural figure in the West (Bellah, et al., 1985, p. 145).

As a result of individualism, we are plagued by something Lasch (1979) terms “cultural narcissism” (pp. 210-211). Narcissism may be defined as the concept of self-admiration and self-centeredness, where a person is obsessed by his/her appearance, achievements, abilities, and/or possessions. Lasch explains that narcissists privilege self-centered values over communal concerns. They willing put themselves first and are the “same individuals who break marriages easily, readily use friends, and then discard them” (Lasch, 1979, p. 112). Narcissists cater to individualistic concerns by allowing personal egos to take precedent over communal and cultural values.

Further, Lasch’s critique demonstrates how extreme individualism and unlimited self-indulgences are placed at the center of the culture of narcissism. In Lasch’s words, the narcissist is “superficially relaxed and tolerant; he finds little use for dogmas of racial and ethnic purity but at the same time forfeits the security of group loyalties and regards everyone as a rival for the favors conferred by a paternalistic state” (1979, p. 27). This leads to a culture of competitive individualists.

Public Spheres

Hauser (1999, 2001, 2002, 2004 & 2007) has much to discuss on the topic of individualism and how it is impacting social harmony. Today, we are a “society of strangers” (1999, p. 40). One of the largest problems is that individuals have lost trust in their abilities to participate in public spheres. “We seem to have lost faith in our publics’ ability to exercise competent judgment” (Hauser, 1999, p. 279). Because of this, publics are reduced to instruments. This leaves them vulnerable to accept the persuasive appeals of elitists.

Hauser’s theories stem from critiques of Habermas’ (1962) definition of public spheres. Habermas ponders whether a democracy led by the people is truly possible. His mission is to stymie unbridled manipulation through the power of public spheres, where middle classes have the ability to gather together to discuss pertinent public issues. The only requirement for participating in public spaces is literacy.

To warrant his critique, Hauser provides Habermas’ definition of public sphere in <u>Vernacular Voices</u>:

> By the “public sphere” we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is granted to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. They then behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the

> guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions – about matters of general interest. In a large public body this kind of communication requires specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it. Today newspapers and magazines, radio and TV are the media of the public sphere. We speak of the public sphere in contrast, for instance, to the literary one, when public discussion deals with objects connected to the activity of the state. Although state activity is so to speak the executor of the political public sphere, it is not a part of it ... Only when the exercise of political control is effectively subordinated to the democratic demand that information can be accessible to the public, does the political public sphere win an institutional influence over the government through the instrument of law-making bodies (1999, pp. 43-44).

While Habermas' definition of public spheres provides a viable framework for the discussion of public issues in a legitimate forum, Hauser critiques Habermas' idea of public spheres on the basis on limitation. The main concern that Hauser has with Habermas, then, is that he places too much emphasis on collectively, especially when confronted with deliberative issues. Habermas' public sphere is limiting because he refused to acknowledge that anti-conformist groups, such as German skinheads, had a right to participate in public discussions. To elaborate, Habermas challenged the belief that skinheads were an accurate representation of German counter-culture. Yet, as Hauser argues, skinheads, although violent in their efforts, did represent a "silent minority" and

Habermas' "attempts to discount their claim to speak public opinion" contradicts his idea of "accessible" public spheres (Hauser, 1999, pp. 6-11).

Failure to respond to voices of dissention does not yield all-inclusionary public spheres. Therefore, Habermas' model places too much emphasis on "competence and rational validity" (Hauser, 1999, p. 39). For Hauser, publics cannot exclude others from participating in public arenas on the basis of difference. Publics also cannot exclude others simply by the threat of confronting difference, even if such difference appears irrational. Hauser argues, then, that Habermas' public sphere was rather exclusionary and intolerant. And while Habermas returned the medium of deliberative speech to political relations, his idea of public spheres remained a "bourgeois public space" (Hauser, 1999, p. 44).

Therefore, Hauser redefines public spheres as "discursive spaces in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment about them. It is the locus of emergence for rhetorically salient meanings" (1999, p. 61). In redefining reticulate public spheres, Hauser explains that they are weblike, or having open interstices that resembling a web (1999, pp. 60-72). What results is a larger association of strangers that become comrades through continued deliberation. This patterns works best when "boundaries are maximally permeable, not only permitting, but welcoming border crossing by interests and actors from other arenas" (Hauser, 1999, p. 72). The conversation continues not on the basis on familiarity, but on the basis of finding common ground.

Hauser (1999) outlines his rhetorical model of public spheres:

1) Public spheres are discursive – conclusions are met through reasoning rather than intuition;

2) Public spheres follow a rhetorical model where critical norms are derived from actual discursive practices – discussions take place that relate back to real-world examples and inferences;

3) Public spheres maintain a rhetorical focus that emphasize indeterminate bracketing of discursive exchanges – a multiplicity of voices and opinions are needed in order to evaluate meaning, and;

4) Public spheres encompass rhetorical models that value communication that is conducive to the formation of shared judgments – participants possess common interests that allow them to dissect the strengths and weaknesses of conclusions so that the best outcomes can be reached (pp. 61-64).

In addition to the rhetorical functions of public spheres, Hauser (1999) discusses five norms that have applicability to reticulate public arenas:

1) Permeable boundaries – both like-minded and incompatible actors participate in public spheres. Parties may possess varying opinions, but are not denied access on the basis of disagreement. Dissention is welcomed in order to uncover all possible alternatives.

2) Activity – public spheres are active. They continually discuss salient issues in attempts to constitute shared realities. This process is additive and ongoing.

3) Contextualized language – public spheres adhere to vernacular discussions, or discussions that utilize non-specialist language so that all parties in rhetorical transactions can understand meaning and have their say. This is in opposition to the technical

language often employed by media outlets (to be discussed in the next chapter concerning technology).

4) Believable appearance – notions of believability prove especially important when new members are participating in public spheres. Participants must be approachable and genuine.

5) Tolerance – acceptance of varying viewpoints and opinions are key components to public spheres. In short, opposition and tension are welcomed in public spheres (pp. 77-80).

The five norms of public spheres “offer encouragement toward the achievement of a common mind rather than advancement of vested interest” (Hauser, 1999, p. 80).

It is important to note that Hauser’s rhetorical discursive model is not consensus-based, rather it follows a pattern of “relational instability” (Hauser, 1999, p. 63). Deliberation is constantly challenged and conversations remain in a state of flux. In fact, the ultimate goal of rhetorical models will never be consensus, but rather openness, inclusion, and the encouragement of discourse. This offers a “more complex and continuous process of public conversation that provides a backdrop of rhetorical resources of creative use by public advocates” (Hauser, 1999, p. 65).

Although a revised version of public spheres exists in Hauser, a healthy democracy that welcomes public opinion cannot flourish in a heavily narcissistic age. As articulated, egocentrism, or the tendency to have a selfish, limited, and confined outlook on policies and processes over the concern for the greater good, adds to the dilemma. Clearly, something must be done to reverse the damage. This holds especially true when attempting to encourage discourse between IMC practitioners and their audiences, as this dissertation sets out to do (a model for the specific applications for IMC will be discussed later in Chapter Five following with an application study in Chapter Six).

On the Extension of Active Public Spheres

Hauser (1999) explains that we should not read the inability for some members of publics to participate as "possible disinterest, rejection, or mute acceptance" (Hauser, 1999, p. 35). Today, publics are still active, however much of what is considered to be popular opinion is created and reinforced in the mass media, something Hauser terms as "mass societies" (1999, p.77). He compares/contrasts the activity levels of mass societies to participatory publics – "mass societies tend to treat audiences as passive; they are asked to purchase and to applaud. Publics, on the other hand, are presumed to have a guiding interest for which they have the potential to become active; they are asked their opinions" (1999, p. 77).

As previously discussed, public spheres need to be revitalized to rehabilitate public conversations to trump individualistic tendencies. Hauser reminds us that everyone has the right to participate in the deliberative process in a civic democracy. This means sharing opinions, thoughts, and expectations about public issues and having a say in how communication gets shaped and actualized, which involves mutual trust and respect for all participants. This sets up a different type of individualism; people are free to remain who they are, but must also acknowledge difference from others. As Hauser reminds us, "the concept of individual subjects whose primary identification is not with the community and whose primary motivation does not grow from a sense of duty for country before quest for self-integration is a recent social phenomenon" (2002, p. 10).

This can only be remedied through the engagement of others (a process that will applied to IMC in the fifth chapter of this dissertation).

"Rhetoric is a process by which we attempt to overcome the apparent given status of an objective situation and the multiplicity of individual perspectives to constitute a shared meaning and a sense of shared power to do something about it" (Hauser, 2002, p. 49). Moreover, positive change can only occur in open and participatory public spheres. Here, people from various backgrounds come together to discuss salient issues in order to come to the best conclusions. The degree of multiple perspectives enables citizens to discuss issues of relevance in order to suggest actions that will best benefit the whole. Individual thoughts may be asserted, but must be evaluated and often reconsidered when alternative suggestions are made.

Further, a renewed spark in the interests of the rhetorical applications of antiquity to our contemporary moment is prevalent. "Our commitment to resolving public issues through open deliberation continues to be informed by Athenian democracy and its value of citizen participation" (Hauser, 1999, p. 40). This suggests a trend of breaking free from the influential chains of modernity. One of the strongest applications is deeply embedded in Aristotle. "Aristotle taught that rhetoric was a productive art; it was a mode of thinking that produced something concrete" (Hauser, 2002, p. 18).

In Book 1, Chapter 9 of his On Rhetoric, Aristotle elaborates on the four subdivisions of communal rhetoric:

1) Justice and Courage – a good citizen must protect his fellow citizens and be willing to rise together against power/opposing forces. One must always be loyal to his/her neighbors and operate under a communal system to advance the greater good of the *polis*.

2) Self-control – a good citizen will always have the liberty of choice. However, this choice should be practiced modestly and with humility. One must act selflessly by helping others.

3) Magnificence – a good citizen must go above and beyond the call of duty to assist others in need with empathy and respect.

4) Gentleness, Prudence, and Wisdom – a good citizen must be wise enough to understand the benefits of incorporating the other into thought and action. Ultimately, communal responsibilities should always be precedent to individual concerns (Kennedy trans., pp. 79-81).

Aristotle's rhetorical theories prove highly applicable when uncovering alternatives to the individualism epidemic in the hopes of rebuilding public spheres. To elaborate, Aristotle recognized that rhetoric is always functioning in the realm of probabilities, not certainties. His rhetorical reasoning is directed toward finding the most fitting actions through the "discovery of the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle, Kennedy trans., p. 2). Aristotle insists that public opinions should be driven by the collective and not by individuals. Hauser's model of reticulate public spheres is informed by Aristotle in that it too is fluid, dynamic, and emergent. As Hauser (2002) explains, "the experience of the Greeks is not far removed from our own" (p. 24).

Equipping members of society with a proper rhetorical capacity enables publics to combat "tricks that may be used against them," or crooked appeals to reason (Farrell, 1993, p. 28). Aristotle's normative codes drive societies toward excellence, which is met through mutual deliberation, inclusion, and the goodwill of others, much like Hauser's project. Both projects promote openness of expression as opposed to power and authority.

This reminds rhetors that they must keep their counterparts (or audiences) in mind when communicating, a function that will prove essential when formulating a discourse model for IMC based on Hauser's reticulate public spheres.

"As the quality of civic life increases, citizenly virtue increases – people gain a higher sense of justice and civic virtue. As people behave with a greater sense of justice and civic virtue, the quality of life in the city increases" (Hauser, 2002, pp. 26-27). By focusing on societal guidelines and a multitude of participation (vs. the participation of a select few), both Aristotle and Hauser offer solutions to curtailing the disenchantment often felt by those who are excluded. Resulting are renewed communities that privilege collective advancements propelled by diversity.

Today, ideas operate in a constant state of flux. No axiomatic truth exists in rhetorical exchanges. Uncertainty and a move toward probability (in place of Truth) are what drive democratic discourses. As previously discussed, this type of discourse can only be carried out through an active *polis*, or what could be termed today as active public spheres.

Active public spheres must be persistent and vocal in order to test prevailing opinions and claims made about human existence (this includes claims made in IMC). For example, IMC programs may incorporate Corporate Social Responsibility (or CSR) models. "Models of CSR began to emerge, with most claiming that business and society are intricately woven and that businesses had a responsibility to respond to societal needs and pressures" (Clark, 2000, p. 366). Because IMC helps to express the voices of companies and organizations, it is its job to navigate the discourse of public spheres and incorporate them appropriately. Marketing personnel are responsible for managing and monitoring corporate reputations and public opinions respectively, which often leads to a fine balancing act that can prove difficult. And today, “customers are not as responsive as they [marketing practitioners] had predicted” (Grion, 2003, p. 29). Therefore, it is the job of practitioners to engage customers and prospects in order to build buzz about brands, products, and services. If approached effectively, practitioners serve as fitting liaisons for bringing together insider and outsider voices.

CSR models help companies and organizations to demonstrate integrity. Upshaw (2009) suggests that integrity is a key business function for IMC – “integrity is not just an ideal; it is a discipline that is rapidly becoming a key driver of brand choice, especially within the framework of IMC” (p. 12). Integrity should not be passed off as a buzzword. Instead, it should be a driving force of IMC practice. Marketers that exhibit veracity often have an easier time establishing trust with their customers (Upshaw, 2009). Therefore, it is important that marketers refrain from the use of spin, or the process of twisting messages that may be untruthful so that they appear authentic.

However, just as companies and organizations must practice CSR and integrity for healthy and ethical business practices, citizens too must adopt their own forms of social responsibility to build participatory democracies, where voices are both created and maintained. Reticulate public spheres rely upon civic participation to mediate public issues where there is “no truth to be discovered” (Hauser, 2002, p. 25). Probabilities emerge through discourse as mediated in public arenas. In short, public voices serve to stimulate change and create an intervening force in public affairs.

Ultimately, revised inclusionary publics should propel a greater commitment to the advancement of the community in order to offer several solutions to contemporary plagues, such as ethnocentrism, narcissism, discrimination, and individualism. "Participating in public decision making is the basic right and duty that we share as citizens of a free society" (Hauser, 2002, p. 75).

As Hauser explains (1999) – "average citizens" are not "detached from deliberation, rather they "do not possess the resources (technical, institutional, or financial) to make themselves heard" (pp. 25-26). Furthermore, an additional barrier stands in the way of rebuilding reticulate public spheres for IMC – that barrier is technology. IMC uses technology to channel messages. However, its uses may further complicate the rebuilding of public spheres because mediated channels often add increased noise and distractions that may lead to oversaturation and preoccupation. Entertainment is frequently used in IMC, which has the ability to disrupt public agendas. These trends must be addressed before an enhanced model as informed by Hauser can be applied to IMC. Chapter Four investigates this further.

Chapter Four: Technology and Entertainment – IMC Drivers

A close relationship exists between technology, entertainment, and IMC functions (Bernstein, 2001; Magnani, 2006; Misloski, 2005). As mass media and the channels of technology continue to grow, so does the ability for practitioners to market ideas via these channels. As a result, “marketers must improve their understanding of total integration, evolve mediums of contact, and use the technology that created the communication barriers to overcome the communication barriers” (Magnani, 2006, p. 12). One of the largest issues occurs when public opinions are measured by technology and other channels (for example, market research) and then passed off as true opinion (McAllister, 2004; Postman, 1992). Practitioners have the ability to frame questions and control responses, which becomes increasingly problematic as accuracy is distorted and primary judgment is replaced with marketing considerations (Mayhew, 1997). As a result, authentic public voices often get filtered in the process. Hauser (1999 & 2002) explains the problems that may occur when public opinions become technicized.

On the Uses of Technology

Bernays (1923 & 1928) was an early proponent of the uses of technology and entertainment in marketing appeals. For him, the more imagery that publicity and promotional messages contained, the better. Armed with persuasive tools, the practitioner came readily equipped to mold public agendas in attempts to sell products and services. Bernays believed that while technology allowed practitioners to consistently channel messages in order to reach consumers, entertainment made them even more enticing by putting consumers in positive moods so that they were more likely to make purchases.

Appeals became more colorful as technology was enhanced, increasing the persuasiveness of marketing messages (Marchand, 1986).

Scholars began to criticize the uses of technology and entertainment in marketing messages, claiming that a focus on aesthetics clouds moral judgment (Marchand, 1986; Mayhew, 1997). As consumers became more and more entangled in the beauty and amusement of appeals, they tended to move away from what was truly meaningful, such as the true use-values of products and services (Twitchell, 1999). Ellul (1964 & 1965) was a major proponent of the anti-technology movement, claiming that it replaced authentic public opinions with machines and drove publics further into solidarity. He claimed that all human activity was becoming technicized.

Further, Ellul (1964) insisted that if not stopped, technology would overthrow humanity and take over all facets of our lives, thus reducing everything (even human beings) to slaves of the machine. More specifically, the technique-driven mentality that machines impose on human beings leads to an erosion of moral values, which leaves us distracted, nervous, and anxious (Ellul, 1964).

In the new age of machinery, truth is nothing but an abstraction. The only religious or moral code that we are left to worship is technology itself, which Ellul claims is our new god. The technological god privileges nothing but progress, which proves deadly to society because it focuses solely on materialism and egoism and leads to social decay by disrupting the natural order of life. “[Technology] destroys the natural world and does not allow it to restore itself” (Ellul, 1964, p. 79). One may dispute Ellul’s claims by arguing that technology is positive for societies because it makes them more progressive. However, Ellul insists that technological progress makes “humanity more primitive" by making decisions for us (1964, p. 316). In short, these scholars argue that we are enslaved by technology.

Additionally, Ellul (1965) argues that technological innovation has exacerbated the control that elitists have over publics and social groups, causing an abandonment of democracy. Technology provides additional avenues for elitists to infiltrate public spheres in order to distribute and spread messages (Postman, 1992). Such messages are repetitive and continuous, rendering them inescapable (Postman, 1985). As technology grows, so does the ability for propagandists to occupy and define social patterns and popular thought. We fall victim to these messages and are held tightly by the "grip of propaganda" (Ellul, 1965, p. 17).

Ellul (1964) claims that propagandists attempt to suppress public opinions by feeding information (and often misinformation) to the masses as carried by the various channels of technology. This is typically performed to induce action. Yet, propagated messages recommend actions for individuals rather than allowing them to make conscious choices of their own. "Propaganda does not aim to elevate man, but [rather] to make him serve" (Ellul, 1965, p. 38). The use of service here could imply granting the propagandist's wishes. And as more and more channels of communication are created, more and more wishes are granted and individual choices become insignificant. Many of these wishes can be found in marketing, where practitioners utilize persuasive strategies to sell products and services. Technology allows for the opening up of multiple channels to carry marketing messages, adding persuasive prowess.

For example, Marchand (1986) examines the transitions that shaped marketing appeals into more visual means of selling and promoting products and services. He discusses the repercussions of such a move. Modernity meant “converting the verbal imagery of the explicit argument into less argumentative, more emotional, iconic forms” (Marchand, 1986, p. 234). For instance, technological innovations such as the printing press allowed for visual aspects to make their way into marketing appeals. Enhanced color schemes and more advanced printing options allowed the marketer to create emotional appeals based on visual representations, rather than strictly relying on copy. Typically, this meant the greater the visual appeal, the less the need for creative and compelling copywriting. Critics of marketing may view this as just another superficial move toward convincing consumers to purchase products and services without the use of (or even the need for) discourse. In Marchand’s words, “the ads gilded reality” (1986, p. 242). In short, while technological ads are visually appealing, they often neglect to inform consumers.

Habermas (1962) explains that public opinions are no longer free. Instead, they are edited by the maelstrom of mediated messages and the large variety of available channels. Habermas notes the increasing ability to buy information in the press, which is then deemed authoritative. He considers the media and all modes of promotion as mass invasions of privacy; it distorts and edits what is commonplace and creates new realities, some of which are false. Invasions of privacy will be discussed in greater detail later in this dissertation.

More recent views continue to attack the uses of technology and entertainment in marketing rhetoric. For example, Jhally (1997) presents a strong case against the uses of propaganda in marketing and its connections to technology and entertainment in his documentary, “Advertising and the End of the World.” Here, Jhally labels marketing as the largest propaganda effort in the history of the world, with over $175B spent annually. The mass integration and over-saturation of marketing has enabled its presence in virtually every venue and public sphere. Movies, sporting events, and even schools are “swallowed” by advertising, marketing, and PR campaigning (Jhally, 1997). This becomes an even larger problem as new technologies are introduced, which will certainly carry commercial considerations, publicity efforts, and promotion. There seems to be no end to the placement of appeals, rendering exposure to them inescapable (Postman, 1992).

“What distinguishes modern advertising is that it has jumped from the human voice and printed posters to anything that can carry it” (Twitchell, 1996, p. 56). As previously mentioned, almost every physical object now has the ability to carry advertising. “No destination is safe. The Russian government has even sold space inside Red Square” (Twitchell, 1996, p. 62). Some of these ads cannot be willingly avoided (ads on the Internet, for instance), keeping audiences captive by taking away the ability for them to tune out. Yet, there are positive benefits to Web-based communication for integrated marketers, all of which will be discussed below.

The Power of Technology

Postman (1992) surveys the power (or triumph) of machines over mankind. He argues that technology has been granted unlimited sovereignty and has, as a result, taken over all facets of human life. He postulates that we as technicized human beings assume that machines and other technologies equal progress. Yet, by accepting this presupposition, we lose our humanity. All things are reduced to numbers and statistics, even the social sciences. This creates a tension between the technological and the traditional by privileging technological processes over human thought. Postman explains that we have lost trust in our abilities to think and act for ourselves. Due to our overwhelming reliance on machines, we become hurried and mindless in the process and lose sense of ourselves (Postman, 1992, p. 107). Criticisms such as these must be examined to achieve the goals of this dissertation, particularly because IMC is concerned with the utilization of technology to channel messages.

To illustrate the power of technology, Hart and Daughton (2005) explain that it enables marketers to frame various realities through the use of mass media:

1) The mass media changes people's mental habits – consumers are asked to think in terms of sound bites and imagery rather than traditional logic;

2) The mass media is a mode of authority – consumers use the mass media as a primary source of information;

3) The mass media is rather unmediated – consumers assume "to see is to believe" yet may forget that technology comes equipped with the ability to edit and distort realities;

4) The mass media leads to overexposure – unbridled exposure may lead to faulty reasoning on the basis of repetition, and;

5) The mass media has its own logic – it has the ability to set particular agendas (pp. 180-185).

As a result, marketing is epideictic; it tells consumers how to live here and now. Consumers are exposed to marketing messages as carried by the various channels of mass media and asked expected to comply (Mayhew, 1997). By telling consumers how to live, critics claim that marketers have the ability to drive normative thought and action without acknowledging true public voices, a reality of today's technological society. Yet, (as will be discussed below) the enhancement of IMC that I propose in this dissertation will have great concern for public (or vernacular) voices.

Mayhew (1997) warns that as society becomes more and more technological, so does the ability for elitist control. Today, “the organs of power in society have learned to construct and present displays of their own legitimacy that support mere assent to their regime” (Mayhew, 1997, p. 118). Much of the problem stems from channeling, where a channel or mass medium is selected to carry a monologic message to publics. Monologic messages do not require responses – “when messages are sent through channels and by techniques that avoid public response or opportunities for rebuttal, then arguments are not tested in the public realm” (Mayhew, 1997, p. 237). The disallowance of public response increases elitist control over the masses by silencing opinion and allows for marketing messages to go unchallenged, even those that may be systematically-distorted (Ellul, 1964 & 1965).

Various examples of monologic messages are contained in market research methods. For instance, marketers may rely on the use of opinion polls and survey questionnaires to manage consent and to frame discourse (Hauser, 1999). Here, a quantified majority is measured on the basis of a yes or no question or scenario. Through this method, respondents are asked to select either option A for “yes” or option B for “no.” Typically, there is no explanation as to why the option is selected, just the measured result. This assumes compliance or agreement (or on the contrary, noncompliance or disagreement) with certain issues or policies without explaining why or to what degree. It thwarts the ability of publics to expand upon issues of importance and curtails ongoing discourse by assuming a sort of “collective behavior” (Mayhew, 1997, p. 141). Thus, the results of market research and the corresponding realities they presume may become exaggerated and misinterpreted, which warrants additional criticism.

Faulty market research can also occur through the use of focus groups. While random sampling of focus group participants may yield accurate results, the outcomes may become skewed on the basis of groupthink, or the ability of outspoken individuals to influence the rest of the group. Participants may be unlikely to speak up against the majority in the fears that they may be judged for their alternative opinions and therefore refrain from disputing.

Hauser (1999 & 2002) has much to discuss on the topic of technology and how it is influencing public spheres. He claims that technology allows for ongoing manipulation and control, which causes publics to become passive and cynical. Hauser equates public opinion polling with wizardry because it has the power to evoke premature and faulty responses that then get passed off as prevailing opinions. “Taken at face value they [public opinion polls] can be deceiving; weighed alone they offer a limited and sometimes superficial understanding of publics and what they believe” (Hauser, 1999, p. 4). As a result, non-reactionary publics consist of “faceless anonymous bodies whose members are reduced to percentages” (Hauser, 1999, p. 4).

The opinions of public spheres should not be configured through machines and other technologies. As Hauser (2002) explains, rhetorical “processes are not mechanical; they are the products of human insights and intuition in response to the problems people face together” (Hauser, 2002, p. 60). He further explains:

> Reticulate public spheres are not like robots or computers, who perform on appropriate command. They are not small children, who can be told what to do. They cannot be regarded as objects of manipulation through means of suggestion. When we engage in argument we regard our audience as free to make its own choices. In short, we must regard our audience as human (Hauser, 2002, p. 64).

By regarding audiences as human, we take away the ability of rhetors to reduce them to numbers and statistics. As previously articulated, audiences must have the ability to refute and respond.

Yet today, opinion pollers and market researchers continue to possess the ability to provoke desired responses via the use of close-ended questions, demographic profiling, and sophisticated data collection systems (Mayhew, 1997). According to Hauser, "contemporary pollers are skilled predictors. Their survey techniques transcend the limitations of preference-type questions to forecast the behaviors of sampled populations" (1999, p. 191). As Johnstone (2007) explains, "computers do not always tell the truth; they do so only when they are correctly programmed and given data that are correct" (p. 18). Machines are fallible and therefore should not qualify as the only instruments that publics rely on when assessing measured results. According to Hauser (2002):

> Opinion polls do not tell us whether the participants in the survey were engaged by the issue in the questions asked, whether they had little or a great deal of knowledge on the subject, whether they were actively engaged in expressing their opinions to others or preferred keeping them to themselves, or even whether they told the researcher the truth (p. 94).

Therefore, traditional methods of opinion polling limit what they can tell us about actual public opinion.

Alternatives to traditional polling processes involve finding actual "discursive expressions of civic judgment" (Hauser, 2002, p. 94). Hauser calls for an extension of the polling process, or one that supports authentic communication and deliberation of pertinent issues. One way to achieve this is to ask publics to qualify their opinions, or ask them why they really feel the way that they do. By asking publics to qualify their answers, market researchers secure a better understanding of true public opinion.

Nonetheless, research by Mayhew (1997) insists that fractions of publics continue to rely on interpretations of discourse (such as outcomes gauged by opinion polls and mediated news sources) rather than participating in heated debates themselves. As a result, "the public cannot be well-informed, for they are exposed only to sound bites, paid political advertisements, and entertainment, thinly disguised as news" (Mayhew, 1997, p. 248). To elaborate, technology has allowed for the line between news and promotion to become skewed. Practitioners now have the ability to blur the lines between hard news and marketing appeals (Marchand, 1986). In addition, "until the mid-nineteenth century, books often carried more advertising than newspapers" (Twitchell, 1996, p. 66). Today, promotional consideration is common in newspapers and other print outlets. For example, advertorials, or advertisements that resemble news articles, are commonly placed in magazines. Critics of the uses of technology (as discussed above) find this problematic because it becomes difficult for consumers to distinguish between what is news and what is promotional.

The Unbridled Reliance on Technology

Killingsworth (2005) insists that technology has become more powerful than human beings – “it is our machines and inventions that have the power, not we ourselves, our own bodies. Once machines lose their function or break down, we are left exposed and powerless” (p. 81). In short, we rely too frequently on machines to do the work for us; we allow ourselves to become enslaved by machines (Postman, 1992). Machines may possess us, compel us. Once they break down, we are often left feeling confused and lost.

One of the largest problems with a technological society is that it asks people to “appreciate their bondage” (McAllister, 2004, p. 247). It is important to note, however, that propaganda efforts are successful only with acceptance and compliance. Publics certainly recognize the convenience of using machines and are aware that they can be used to distort and control. And as Postman (1985) asserts, we are not only aware that technology is controlling us, but we accept it willingly and without much resistance. He argues that we enjoy the distractions that technology brings.

As Hauser (1999) claims, both power elitists and general publics continue to rely “almost exclusively on mass media for disseminating information and presenting persuasive appeals” (p. 26). As previously articulated, mass mediated communication is monologic, often consisting of technical language that is difficult to understand, and thus difficult to question or refute. At times, mass mediated communication may require a “specialist’s knowledge to resolve” making it even more unapproachable (Hauser, 1999, p. 27). Elitists, then, maintain their authority via an arsenal of power sources, such as the mass media. Technology is just one of these resources. And “for the average citizen unable to match these resources, gaining access to the field of play may seem an exercise in futility” (Hauser, 1999, p. 29).

Hauser explains that elitists maintain their control of the mass media through the use of contextualized language:

> The specificity of issues and diversity of perspectives that enter a public sphere present significant rhetorical challenges to public conversation. They require that participants adhere to the rhetorical norm of contextualized language to render their respective experiences intelligible to one another. Institutional powers and epistemic elites within mass, technologically advanced societies frequently undermine this requirement. They often preempt the possibility for vernacular exchange by substituting technical language as coin of the rhetorical realm. Controlling the language in which issues are discussed determines how they are expressed, relevance of experience and expertise in adjudicating the issues they raise. Language wares are contests for authority since language conveys status on its literate users as sources of knowledge and power. Without a vernacular language to address their common problems, it is a small wonder that those who should be interested and active participants in the public sphere find themselves in full retreat, filled with bewilderment at the character of public conversation and cynicism at the unresponsiveness of their institutions to the concerns of their lives (1999, p. 78).

While some believe that rhetoric by elitist groups keeps the mob at bay through crafty appeals and false promises (Bernays, for instance), Hauser reminds us that rhetoric actually functions in the opposite sense. Technical language is what keeps the power in the hands of elitists. “As arguments become more technical, they become dialectical arguments proper to a specific discipline or domain of knowledge; as they become less technical and more focused on the needs for action, they enter the realm of rhetoric” (Hauser, 2002, p. 34). Technical-specific language, then, should not be used to approach generalist audiences; it does nothing to enhance the understanding of generalist audiences. Instead, it has the ability to confuse audiences.

“A public’s reasoning function requires a shared basis for understanding vernacular talk” (Hauser, 1999, p. 101). Vernacular talk is ordinary in scope and can be understood by all parties sharing a common reference-world. It does not seek to limit, rather engage parties in rhetorical transactions. Vernacular language offers an alternative to technical-specific language. “Public spheres exhibit a rhetorical pattern of understanding that structures and expresses collective judgment” (Hauser, 1999, p. 107). Hauser’s theory of reticulate public spheres relies on ordinary language approaches to get things done.

Furthermore, Hauser (2002) insists that publics approach appeals that attempt to “color” judgment with caution (p. 50). Strong public spheres have the ability to challenge dominant language structures as set up by elitists by demanding that public issues be addressed in a language that is easily understood by all. “The rhetoric of public conversation establishes a participatory framework of ideas and values for the discussions shared by whoever enters society’s public sphere” (Hauser, 1999, p. 79). Hence, it requires a “sociopolitical hermeneutic that is diagonally enacted by rhetorical constructs of meaning” (Hauser, 1999, p. 79). Resulting is a shift from vested interest to public interest through common and ordinary discourse. Marketers must encourage these conversations for the future success of IMC.

On the Uses of Technology to Propel Engagement

While technology has the ability to drive us apart, it also allows us to connect with others. And while technology does have the tendency to oppress public spheres by speaking for us, we can also use it as an impetus for creating new discourses. For instance, we must recognize that as technology develops so too do the channels of communication that can be used to reach others through growing electronic networks. Although electronic networks may not be as personal as face-to-face networks, they allow publics to bridge gaps and barriers that were not always accessible to them, such as those barriers created by time, space, and culture. Publics must take advantage of these networks if they wish to reinsert themselves into public spheres and engage in continuing discourses.

Electronic public discourses are not without rules, however. Many participants in electronic discourses discount these rules, especially when communicating in forums that allow for anonymity (such as online forums). In order for electronic discourses to be civil discourses, then, communication competence, or truth-telling in communication, must be upheld much in the same way it is used in face-to-face interaction. These values cannot be lost simply because we are anonymous agents. As Hauser notes, “partners in rhetorical transactions of necessity must actively engage one another in attempts to understand issues, appreciate other’s views, and form their own judgments” (1999, p. 33).

Electronic discourses must be careful to follow the rule of a bilateral argument – "a rhetor may use no device of persuasion that he could not in principle permit others to use on them" (Hauser, 1999, p. 160). Here, any choice that distorts decision-making is deemed unethical. A bilateral argument is in contrast to a unilateral argument where partners in rhetorical transactions utilize tools that may not be available to others.

As previously suggested, unilateral arguments are often the basis for marketing appeals; marketers utilize mediated channels of communication that do not always allow for immediate response or feedback (Mayhew, 1997). These devices may be used to deter critical responses to messages. Yet, unilateral arguments silence audiences by removing constructive control and may be manipulative. As a result, we must refrain from the use of unilateral arguments and recognize them when they are used against us. In order for a proper bilateral argument to occur, "a person must be able to separate himself [or herself] from the stimuli impinging upon him [or her]" (Hauser, 2001, p. 8). Publics should insist that marketers adopt bilateral communication rather than relying on unilateral arguments to promote themselves.

Additionally, Danish (2007) insists that "we must continue to refine our capacity to use language within a technologically mediated environment" (p. 155). We must continue to enhance our media literacy in order to participate freely. As previously acknowledged, online platforms allow citizens to engage others, something Gronbeck (2004) terms the "digitized rhetorical democracy" (19). For example, grassroots conversations flow freely via digital forums, proving that the Internet allows for fluid discourses among ordinary citizens through rather uncensored platforms. In fact, "the Internet is an essentially unregulated discursive space – a place for free speech – and it's chaotic enough to make an effort to control it almost impossible" (Gronbeck, 2004, p. 26). The Internet provides a forum for ordinary citizens to engage one another through the uses of blogging, chat rooms, bulletin boards, etc.

One distinct benefit offered by electronic communication is the ability for ordinary citizens to craft their own messages without the fear of being edited or controlled. Online discursive space is now being referred to as the "vernacular web," or a space where ordinary citizens can assemble to speak without fear of authority (Howard, 2008, p. 192). "While mass-mediated communication technologies have empowered the institutional, participatory media offer powerful new channels which the vernacular can express its alterity" (Howard, 2008, p. 192). In short, the vernacular web allows for common voices to emerge. This does not necessarily mean that companies and organizations will not be involved in or participate in web-based discussions. Yet, publics should welcome insider voices as long as they exhibit good intentions.

Electronic forums grant publics the ability to communicate with companies and organizations in order to offer feedback and voice concerns. For example, constructive discourses can occur through consumer/employee blogging. Many companies and organizations house blogs on their websites and other forums in order to communicate with consumers. Here, blog activity is both consumer and employee driven with each party lending their voice. Communal blogging provides an atmosphere for ongoing discourse among consumers and corporations because it connects insider and outsider voices and allows for a platform of free and open expression. Unfortunately, "many corporations are afraid of Weblogs because they're afraid of the sound of the human voice" (Hannegan & Fisher, 2006, p. 44). Yet, corporations should not be fearful of blog space. Rather, they should embrace it. Although various blog responses may be critical, insider participation demonstrates to consumers that someone is listening and (better yet) responding to questions and concerns.

“Blogs, because of their means of production and their collaborative ethos, provide ordinary citizens with a viable model for civic engagement” (Killoran, 2004, p. 217). Blog space is readily available and calls upon ordinary citizens to express their views about timely public issues. It encourages readership and participation through the creation of online communities. The ongoing discourse resulting from blogs builds communities of intellects who continuously bounce ideas off of one another. “Unlike mainstream journalists, bloggers assume that their readers are as smart as they are, if not smarter” (Killoran, 2004, p. 218). Ultimately, nondiscriminatory involvement is the lifeblood of participatory blog spaces.

Power to the Consumer

Certain threats and opportunities exist for today’s multi-channeled integrated marketer as well as for their customers, especially as technological innovation increases. Technology has equipped marketers with additional channels to distribute messages, but has also alienated and annoyed potential customers. Likewise, technology has allowed consumers access to additional information, but has also created various distractions. The key is to market without annoying or distracting customers. Traditional electronic-based (or e-based) promotion (such as with banner or pop-up ads) is troublesome because it typically reaches consumers at the wrong place and time. Instead, savvy marketers are realizing that electronic communication is better received if it is permission-based.

Permission-based marketing is the process of gaining consent from consumers prior to contact. It allows consumers to place conditions and provisions on when and how they are contacted. This gives consumers more power over receiving marketing messages. In turn, this makes them more receptive. As Misloski (2005) explains, the most successful marketing programs stem from “the consumer calling the shots” (Misloski, 2005, p. 17). Furthermore, permission-based marketing is much less intrusive and increases the likelihood that messages will be received with positive results.

Gaining permission from audiences and giving them more control also cuts back on the waste marketers accumulate from ineffective messages. For example, Nash and Shulby (2005) compare marketing activity to the flow of our natural ecosystem. Here, the authors argue that just as the environmental ecosystem relies on feeding and nurturing to sustain itself, so does the marketing process. Brand loyal customers can be thought of as “queen bees, emitting energy and helping to show the enterprise the way” (Nash & Shulby, 2005, p. 59). Information from top-feeders (brand loyal customers) will trickle down to bottom-feeders (or those not yet familiar with or loyal to a product or service) who are then convinced of the value of a product or service, often encouraging them to seek it out for themselves.

As technology increases, so does the ability for consumers to filter messages, giving them more control over the communication they chose to receive. And “as consumers gain more and more control over the media messages they receive, the need for advertisers to create more relevant and valuable messages will grow along with it” (Bernstein, 2001, p. 38). Captive audiences are now becoming voluntary audiences, making it necessary for marketers to appeal even more to consumer’s senses.

In the new age of technology "even the not-so-remote control adept will have the power to skip through all of the commercials with a mere flick of the wrist" (Bernstein, 2001, p. 38). This is why it is so important for marketers to adapt to new ways of communicating with audiences. One important concept that marketers must familiarize themselves with, then, is viral marketing. Iacobucci & Calder (2002) explain that "viral marketing" enables consumers to build buzz for brands, products, and/or services on their own accord by spreading an "infection," that causes a mass "epidemic" (p. 92). Just like influenza (hence the term, viral), this type of marketing has the ability to reach publics at a rapid pace. Ultimately, viral marketing is concerned with the voluntary and involuntary dispersal of perceptions about products, services, and brands and how they connect to particular communities.

Viral marketing is proving incredibly useful in our information age as consumers are searching for the latest platforms to share and dispense information and opinions regarding brands (Iacobucci & Calder, 2002). In fact, research conducted by Davison and Kiernan (2004) discovered that "consumers were hyper-sensitive to any media or message that they felt was coming from sources external to their perceived community" (p. 22). This is why it is increasingly important for marketers to involve themselves in discourse communities. Specific suggestions on how to achieve these goals will follow in the fifth chapter of this dissertation. But first, I address one final barrier concerning the use of technology in IMC – the tendency of individuals to attack companies and organizations on the Internet, a process otherwise known as flaming.

Technology for Peace, not War

Today, disgruntled publics are utilizing electronic forums to speak up against oppressive forces. “The Internet has become a menu of scourges that reinforce each other’s visions of misfortune” (Dezenhall, 2003, p. 66). To elaborate, technological revolutions (such as the Internet) have unleashed an invisible army of layman attackers against businesses, which leads to vicious flaming, or the process of using electronic media to create attacks and unfounded rumors on the basis of autonomy (Dezenhall, 2003). Here, publics use the Internet (in the form of blogs, chat rooms, etc.) to unleash negative criticisms and rumors against high-profile enterprises, many of which are false. Critics have the ability to remain anonymous in the process, often resulting in attacks that are much more ruthless.

A trend in the digital world by these anonymous agents is to “nail em,” which also means to “destroy them, hunt them down, humiliate them” (Dezenhall, 2003, p. 11). Dezenhall compares electronic attacks to witch hunts, which often end “by extinguishing characters, debates, reputations, and consumer products” (2003, p. 14). He coins our epoch the “culture of attack,” where decorum is replaced by viciousness and betrayal. Dezenhall does acknowledge that many of these attacks are warranted. For example, publics may act as watchdogs and blow the whistle on businesses and organizations that operate unethically. However, numerous attacks are unfounded, which may result in unnecessary problems:

> Business interests are among the most hunted, but the argument that attacks on business ultimately hurt us all in the end (through lost products or higher prices) doesn’t fly. The attacks are seen as victimless crimes

> because no one associates corporations with real people. Corporations are seen as giant, wealthy institutions that play no role in the community (Dezenhall, 2003, p. 58).

As previously discussed, many attacks on big business are unfounded and despite popular opinion, people (from both internal and external publics) do suffer. To demonstrate, several false accusations are detailed by Dezenhall:

1) A widely posted warning on newsgroups cautioned against the use of Microsoft's homepage and Internet explorer alleging that the Microsoft homepage was possibly infected by a virus – it was not, causing vast confusion.

2) Database service Lexis-Nexis was accused of selling the Social Security numbers of private citizens at a profit. It did not. The company was forced to respond to numerous inquiries and was deemed untrustworthy, leading to wasted time and resources.

3) Mrs. Field's Cookies were plagued by anti-domestic violence activists for shipping free products to O. J. Simpson for his acquittal party. A boycott was launched and Mrs. Field's recorded a single-digit drop in sales in a matter of days. Ironically, the free shipments never occurred.

4) Nike's reputation was damaged shortly before an annual meeting by a false rumor that workers had died in its Chinese factory due to hazardous conditions, which were never proven to exist.

5) McDonald's routinely battles online rumors about allegedly unsavory items in its beef. The company has long contended with similar rumors, but the Internet has aggravated their circulation exponentially (2003, pp. 165-166).

The five accusations listed above serve only as a handful of examples concerning the culture of attack. Electronic media has allowed “flamers” to express their woes (Dezenhall, 2003). Too often, disgruntled citizens launch smear campaigns against high-profile enterprises, which (as demonstrated) have consequences.

Dezenhall’s culture of attack is similar to what Sharon Crowley (2006) terms “conspiracy theorists” who “replace analysis with a deus ex machina, a group of shady, powerful men who manipulate events in order to gain power and to disadvantage people” (pp. 172-175). Consumers may launch attacks and smear campaigns against big businesses in order to flush out ulterior motives and hidden agendas. As Melley (2000) explains, companies and organizations do possess “the means to carry out plans” (pp. 12-13). However, corporate plans (whether legitimate or harmful) are viewed as devious works of propaganda that aim to dupe consumers, especially in the eyes of “flamers” (Melley, 2000).

Furthermore, Dezenhall, Crowley, and Melley agree that society has shifted too far “from an access culture to an aggression culture” (Dezenhall, 2003, p. 113). Aggression can only foster mutually-destructive relationships, which ignore productive discourse and serve as “the opposite of responsibility” (Dezenhall, 2003, p. 63). Discourse that occurs in an aggression culture is fueled by hate and distrust. Nothing can be accomplished when such feelings exist (Melley, 2000). As Dezenhall explains, the hardest point of writing about the culture of attack has been “to avoid positioning all aggressive discourse, the backbone of a free society, as being somehow illegitimate” (2003, p. 258).

Moreover, in order to utilize technology for peace and not war, both insider and outsider publics must make a move toward authentic discourse. As previously suggested, authentic discourse requires both citizens and elitists to create responsible and open discussions based on common ground and goodwill. The Internet and other forms of electronic communication have created additional platforms for such discussions. Furthermore, it is extremely important to keep in mind that advertising and other forms of marketing serve as “useful informational functions” and possess a “socially democratizing influence on publics” rather than stripping citizens of choice (Schudson, 1984, p. 239). When approached ethically and responsibly, marketing functions can assist in smart buying patterns and product comparisons, which equips publics with the ability to make wise choices. In closing, electronic discourse should encourage conversations, not impede them.

The fifth chapter of this dissertation will extend the idea that publics and practitioners alike are responsible for creating inclusionary and participatory discourses. Hauser’s theory of reticulate public spheres will be applied to enhance IMC, a practice that can significantly benefit from seeking out and participating in such discourses.

Chapter Five: Enhancing IMC through Discourse

As Mayhew (1997) suggests, the manipulation of mass media has allowed those controlling the channels of communication to have the final say. Much of the manipulation stems from marketing practices, where practitioners utilize monologic communication techniques to lead publics toward decisions that benefit corporate interests while silencing public opinions. As previously examined, elitists have maintained control through various factors, including the creation of social norms and expectations, encouraging solidarity and conspicuous consumption, coercion of the mass channels of communication, and the uses of technological and monologic language. Members of publics have allowed this trend to continue by accepting elitist messages and making them normative, further isolating themselves through our individualistic culture and tuning out by surrendering to the mass noise of our advanced technological society (Postman, 1985 & 1992).

"Self-guidance of a modern society depends on a public capable of discussing and resolving issues and forming an effectual collective will" (Mayhew, 1997, p. 3). Yet, as Mayhew, Hauser, and various other communitarians postulate, the collective will is often disrupted, distorted and redirected by elitist manipulation. Furthermore, a reengagement of public spheres must take place in order to disrupt this process. If handled properly, publics may acquire the abilities necessary to thrive in their discourse communities. Marketers may also take advantage of reengaged public arenas in order to open up the lines of communication with their audiences, which (as suggested) is the primary goal of this dissertation.

Creating Vernacular Discussions

As previously articulated, much of Hauser's scholarship is devoted to revitalizing vernacular discussions. For example, Hauser (1999) suggests a return to "reticulate spheres," where technological and contextualized language is replaced with common vernacular discussions. Ordinary language approaches are the best tools to utilize when forming collective and inclusionary public spheres (Killingsworth, 2005). As Hauser suggests, "[we] must acquire a vernacular language in order to share rhetorically salient messages" (1999, p. 67). Vernacular discussions, then, rely on inclusion. Here, general publics come together to debate issues of salience or concern. All parties have the ability to speak. Rhetorical methods are not used to coerce, but rather to engage.

Hauser calls upon ordinary citizens to enhance their publicness. "Society is engaged most profoundly when issues are transmitted beyond the media, through formal and informal communication within our network of associations in the community" (Hauser, 1999, p. 97). Therefore, it is important to encourage an engaged citizenry. This involves calling into question those constructs that are not born from authentic discourse. Vernacular public discussions enable participants to challenge those controlling and constructing public messages.

A primary goal for Hauser is to "outline a framework for thinking about publics, public spheres, and public opinion in a way that does not presuppose they are distorted" (1999, p. 271). As previously suggested, many public spheres are stymied by elitist control and manipulation. As a result, Hauser calls upon publics to practice rhetorical criticism of governing ideas – "the price of living in a democracy is that the people have a say in decisions made on their behalf" (1999, p. 272). Democratic participation allows for the collaboration of ideas through civic societies. However, such societies must remain active in order to make a difference. This extends the need for collective and vigorous participation.

Vernacular discussions are valuable resources of opinion and reasoning. This does not necessarily mean that publics will reach consensus, but rather enables the formation of theories and ideas by actual publics. The ideas evolving from public spheres curtail elitist control by disallowing manipulation and vested interest. As a result, public messages become more collective and invitational rather than prescriptive and authoritative. A vernacular rhetoric facilitated by publics remains “boundless and always a construction of human choice” (Hauser, 1999, p. 281).

Killingsworth (2005) calls for the use of common and accessible language when forming rhetorical appeals. He claims that the goal of rhetoric is “to understand and create informal arguments for use in public forums among nonspecialists” (2005, p. ix). To appeal to an audience of nonspecialists is to appeal as a “means to promote agreement or harmony, to smooth the waters between author and audience on any two positions” (Killingsworth, 2005, p. 2). This involves a sort of collective reality for understanding discourse among rhetors and audiences that can be realized only through common and ordinary language in a participatory democracy.

Browne (2007) views rhetorical engagement as a precursor for building participatory democracies. He defines rhetoric as “one means through which we expose our structure of reasoning, acknowledge the agency of our interlocutors, and sustain our commitment to the ongoing practice of argument itself” (2007, p. 109). Rhetorical engagement allows ordinary citizens to voice concerns in order to preserve honesty and to continue working for the greater good.

Browne analyzes Johnstone's theory of rhetoric, which contains three governing principles, all set forth under a bilateral argument method – free will, risk, and mutuality (2007, p. 111). Free will claims that all parties have the right to their own opinions and to the expression of those opinions. Risk points to the possibility that arguments may fail after communication has commenced. Finally, mutuality assumes that all parties are willing to shape choices through argumentation. As previously mentioned, bilateral arguments are crucial for rhetorical engagement because they hold both the challenger and the one being challenged responsible.

Bilateral arguments are not always positive or free from fault, however. To illustrate, Browne outlines the challenges of bilateral arguments. His first argument is against the use of technical or contextualized language that (as previously demonstrated) is often understood solely by specialists – "the use of such language operates to severely circumscribe the range of possible responses, withholding as it does the very basis upon which ones' argument can be made intelligible" (Browne, 2007, p. 112). As noted above, the use of such language has been heavily criticized because it can thwart participation.

Next, Browne challenges Johnstone's second component of rhetoric (or risk) by explaining that risk gets significantly reduced through method. To elaborate, "method can serve to reduce or eliminate the possibility of risk and therefore of failure" (Browne, 2007, p. 114). Once a method is established and practiced, rhetors may find ways to curtail the level of perceived risk in argumentation by copying or studying persuasive patterns. Coercion may occur as a result, which possesses the ability to impede genuine responses from audiences and spectators.

The third and final challenge that Browne outlines concerns mutual investment, or what Johnstone terms “mutuality.” Here, audiences are left to ponder what is at stake when argumentation takes place. Under Johnstone’s method, the answer assumes that both the self (rhetor) and the other (audience) are influenced by argumentation. But, as Browne insists, this premise is faulty because it presumes that the other is personally invested in or is concerned with the final outcome. The only way to secure mutual investment, then, is through authentic communication, where all parties are willingly involved in the process and want to participate.

The above theories suggest that an argumentative culture yields a participatory culture. It involves calling into question power relations and the status quo as determined by elitists. A discourse model challenges norms and ideas, especially when they do not seem sensible (Hauser, 1999). Vocal public spheres are the lifeblood of democratic cultures because they allow for unrestrictive critical decision-making. Discourse is a necessary precursor of democracy. As Goodwin (2007) explains, “standing up has effects on more than just the self; it also gives the self a place or voice among others” (p. 47).

Therefore, in order for ordinary publics to become involved, an open discourse based on alterity and civility is essential. Crowley (2006) suggests methods for publics to participate in discourses through rhetorical invention. For her, the “inability or unwillingness to disagree openly can pose a problem for the maintenance of democracy” (2006, p. 1). There are many reasons citizens choose to refrain from disagreement. Various examples include the possibility of discord, disenchantment, or simple lack of interest. Yet, a reluctance to disagree is to negate our moral responsibility as citizens of the free world. “Failure to respond to a rhetorical situation when in a position to do so would be foolish at best, perhaps even irresponsible” (Hauser, 2002, p. 46). Moreover, responsible publics are those that are informed and vocal. They do not take communication for granted. They are vibrant and alive. They are not controlled, rather engaged. Public conversations enacted by members of publics must persist in order to rebuild reticulate public spheres. On the contrary, a closed system runs the risk of creating tension or hostility within groups.

Civil discourse, then, “is a willingness to acknowledge difference while remaining open to the necessity of respectful address to others and their positions” (Crowley, 2006, p. 22). This model means collaborating ideas rather than compromising or accommodating them. Civil discourse also refrains from choosing beliefs and actions in order to please others or attacking, threatening, and/or silencing opponents to avoid losing arguments. In other words, decisions should be based on input from multiple perspectives in fair and inclusionary forums rather than being directed by individuals or governing bodies. Sound arguments based on collective rhetorical reasoning should prevail.

True rhetorical invention insists on “movement, flexibility, contingency, and difference” (Crowley, 2006, p. 56). It is constantly evolving and never comes to a halt, which demonstrates that rhetoric is investigative and never far removed from thought and knowledge. As Vickers (1988) explains, the aims of rhetoric are “to teach, to delight, and to move” (p. 50). Strength of character (ethos), evoking of emotion (pathos), and evidence and logic (logos) are necessary precursors to creating sound and collective reasoning in public spheres.

Further, in order for civil discourses to evolve and prosper through rhetorical exchanges, Crowley (2006) suggests that we practice a "liberal rhetorical theory" that operates in the following fashion:

> A free, knowing and sovereign agent is moved by circumstances to survey the landscape; develop appropriate arguments concerning it; clothe them in persuasive language; and repeat them to an audience of equally free, knowing and sovereign subjects who hear/read without impediment or distortion (p. 36).

A liberal rhetoric creates a citizenry that is inclusive, tolerant, highly participatory, and engaged, which mirrors Hauser's theory of reticulate public spheres. And today, IMC scholars and practitioners should be concerned with finding ways to engage and include their audiences. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter is concerned with the methods that will enable IMC practitioners to build discourses with their audiences through the reengagement of reticulate public spheres.

Applying Vernacular Discussions to IMC

A revival of discourses means several things for the future of IMC if both internal and external audiences wish to create authentic interactions and conversations. For the practitioner, this means creating sound arguments that are authentic, truthful, and relevant. For the consumer, this means entering into conversations with open minds and listening carefully for persuasive appeals meant to promote or publicize. This also means letting go of the negative sentiments felt for opposing parties (for instance, the dissonance that is frequently shared between internal and external groups). If tolerance, respect, and faith are granted, trust is certain to follow.

Richards (1936) posits that rhetoric ought to be "a remedy for misunderstanding" (p. 3). But this does not mean that parties are free from negotiation. For example, "rhetors cannot afford to ignore the values held by those whose beliefs they wish to change" (Crowley, 2006, p. 200). All parties (internal and external) must be approached and appreciated. "The discontinuities of experience are as important as the unities when we study communication, especially rhetorical communication" (Hauser, 2002, p. 6). Discontinuities allow publics to insert rhetorical interruptions (or breaks in communication systems) that may be closed or distorted. It is through discontinuity that rhetorical messages are mediated and expanded. Further, instead of viewing discontinuity and incommensurability as communication pitfalls, publics (both insider and outsider) should use them to engage.

Today, it is common knowledge that "they [practitioners] cannot function without public consent" (Olasky, 1987, p. 115). As previously suggested, IMC is in need of a mass overhaul. One of the largest revisions must be concerned with reincorporating ethics. It is not enough to stand behind professional accountability. Instead, IMC professionals must take responsibility for public claims. For example, Hauser (2002) discusses "excellence of habits" as positive characteristics of ethical rhetoricians (pp. 149-154). To build solid ethos, one must practice positive habitual characteristics, such as honesty and truth-telling in communication.

Gronstedt (2000) applies the metaphor of "fishbowl organizations" to describe positive habits for IMC (p. 91). A "fishbowl" organization can be described as see-through, clear, translucent, or visual. Here, organizations realize the benefits of practicing openly. Secrets rarely exist in transparent organizations; they are highly permeable. Fishbowl organizations allow for the possibility of genuine discourse and engagement, even with outside publics. This is in contrast to closed organizations, or those that refuse participation from the outside world. A closed organization is often accused of dishonesty. Transparent organizations, on the contrary, are often praised for their openness, leading to better reputations and customer/employee service satisfaction for the long-haul (Gronstedt, 2000).

Gronstedt (2000) claims that Federal Express (FedEx) is a highly transparent, or "fishbowl" organization (p. 238). Not only is CEO, Frederick W. Smith, highly accessible to media, employees, and customers, but FedEx also has an open-door policy when it comes to disclosing business practices and procedures. For instance, Smith speaks openly with media outlets and often answers questions candidly. Employees have access to a highly sophisticated database where they can express concerns and communicate with other employees. Customers can check the status of shipments on the Internet at their convenience. These qualities make FedEx highly successful (Gronstedt, 2000).

In addition to open communication practices, IMC should concern itself with becoming more customer-centric, or the process of establishing marketing programs that cater to the needs of customers (Schultz & Schultz, 2003). By doing so, marketing messages become more relevant, timely, and inclusionary. For example, Dell is a highly customer-centric organization. The company is based around its customer's needs, wishes, and desires. Interaction and support are at the heart of the business (Schultz &

Schultz, 2003). Last holiday season, Dell launched a highly successful IMC campaign geared toward their ideal customer-base. Here, they provided customers with specific needs garnered from direct feedback. At Dell, customers have the ability to build computers and other operating systems from scratch based on their own personal specifications. One of Dell's most popular taglines is "Dell – Purely You," which further enhances the company's mission to focus on their customers. Round-the-clock customer service and support is available, which builds discourse and encourages feedback and interaction.

Additional scholarship in the area of IMC calls for consistency. For example, research conducted by Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn (1994) suggests a direct correlation between message intake and consistency. Here, "marketing messages that are not recognizable, are not related to each other, conflict with what has already been stored, or are simply unrelated or unimportant to the person simply will not be processed" (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1994, p. 26). Furthermore, consistency demands that all communication efforts are coherent, understandable, and believable across all channels of distribution. Due to the oversaturation of sound bites in the media, consumers will concentrate only on the messages they find most relevant.

Inconsistent marketing cannot produce successful brands (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1994). On the contrary, companies that remain consistent, including Nike, Intel, Disney, McDonalds, and Apple, are extremely successful. Consistency should be extended through all channels of distribution (television, print, electronic, etc). Consistent collateral must be coherent in look, font, and feel. In addition, every aspect of branding, including logo usage, package design, website, and brand extension, should be consistent, as well (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1994).

Today, many companies are satisfied once they have established brand awareness. This, however, may not be enough to maintain a strong customer base. As Percy (1997) demonstrates, marketers must push for brand salience in place of simple brand awareness. For example, when asked about particular department stores available at a shopping mall, consumers may be able to envision distinct stores. This is simple brand awareness – consumers are aware that they exist and can be located in the mall. Brand salience, however, would involve consumers mentioning a particular department store before others when asked where they would most likely shop (mentioning Macys before Nordstrom, for instance). Ultimately, brand salience examines the process of consumers thinking about a particular store first (because they are fond of it), thus encouraging brand loyalty.

The theory of brand contact points looks at the complex web of associations consumers make about particular brands, which includes each time a consumer comes into contact with any dimension of a company's brand (Iacobucci & Calder, 2002). More specifically, brands are constantly evaluated and reevaluated at every point of contact, even when not under the direct control of companies, themselves (Iacobucci & Calder, 2002, pp. 58-61). For example, consumers often formulate opinions when dining at particular restaurant franchises concerning the overall brand. Often, the home company does not possess control over every restaurant franchise they grant. Furthermore, companies must be diligent in ensuring that customers have positive experiences at every point of contact with their brands. This may involve additional testing and evaluation of partners, outsourced distributors, franchises, etc., to measure accountability and acceptability of service (Iacobucci & Calder, 2002). Nonetheless, positive consumer perceptions are incredibly important for the maintenance and longevity of brands.

Roberts (2005) explains that branding is driven not only by marketers, but also by consumers. Here, Roberts theorizes that in order for brands to succeed in our ever-changing and increasingly-competitive market, companies and organizations must find ways to emotionally connect to consumers. The key for Roberts is to incorporate mystery, sensuality, and intimacy to build love (the most important factor of all) for brands (2005, pp. 74-75). This assists companies with building long-term, emotional connections with consumers that create lasting brand loyalty.

Various companies that house successful and timeless brands are Coca-Cola, Disney Corporation, and Nike (Roberts, 2005). For instance, Disney Corporation uses metaphors of magic and enchantment to enhance mystery. Disney is regarded as a family company and as a result must also cater to adult audiences. They do this by offering adult activities, such as fine dining and wedding packages at their facilities to foster sensuality. Intimacy is met by offering custom vacation packages for specific needs. Finally, love is a primary metaphor of Disney’s marketing. Young and adult audiences alike have an affinity for the Disney Corporation, which continues to make it a leading vacation destination for travelers of all ages.

The above suggestions explain how enhancements to IMC are viable. Recently, numerous revisionary models in communication literature were created to help guide the field of IMC. For example, Olasky (1987) presented his “four-fold discipline,” which is detailed below:

1) Government – here, the government does not have the right to infringe upon individual industries and interests. Instead, we should return to a democratic government that is run by the people, for the people. This would include keeping elitist's personal interests at bay in order to focus on consumer interests, a process that can only be achieved by refraining from the manipulation of opinions to gain compliance and/or acceptance.

2) Role of corporate management – here, top management and key executives should make it their goal to communicate openly and honestly with the press and other publicity platforms. They should be willing to share information with publics, even if it could cause detriment. They should improve corporate social responsibility and ethics within their organizations.

3) The need for PR education – we need to place a greater emphasis on PR, advertising, and marketing education and media literacy. This includes both an increased need for scholarship along with the surveillance of case studies. Students should survey both successful and unsuccessful case studies in order to understand the various outcomes of IMC practice. In doing so, students not only learn how to create campaigns for clients, but also study the overall effects of campaigning, including how they impact members of internal audiences. Success of IMC campaigns should not only be measured by fiscal results and ROI for clients, but also by how publics benefit favorably (and in some cases, unfavorably) from particular operations.

4) The need for PR ethics – truth should not be subjective, not even in marketing. Half-truths must be eliminated. Trickery should be abolished. Practitioners should make it their goal to practice with clean hands (pp. 135-145).

By following the “four-fold discipline,” Olasky is hopeful that companies and organizations may refurbish their images.

Another revision model is presented by Ewen (1996). In the coda of his work, Ewen supplies eight suggestions for building better relationships between consumers and practitioners:

1) Democracy cannot exist as long as fractured publics exist – insider and outsider groups must band together through discourse. This requires a major rebuilding of trust.

2) Public lives must be driven by ordinary people – publics must assert the right to speak and act for themselves without the fear of elitist intervention or control.

3) Public agendas must be established and defined by actual publics, not by “unseen engineers.” This involves the reestablishment of meeting places (public spheres) where publics band together to collectively carve out societal norms and expectations without political pull.

4) Public opinions cannot be measured by applause, which tends to originate from skilled orators and not by the logic of appeals. As mentioned, opinion measures are often skewed and unreliable.

5) Publics must have better access to communication channels and tools. They must utilize these channels in order to become active participants in discourse.

6) The content of the media should not be determined by commercial considerations. News reports should be devoid of spin and commercialization. Sponsorship should not take precedent in determining headlines.

7) Democracy cannot survive when emotional appeals overwhelm reason and thought. Logos should be the primary influencer. Reasoning should be engaged, not suppressed.

8) Publics must enact a more productive role in developing public climates. Elitists should not determine how publics think and respond. Rather, a popular democracy based on the people should be practiced to curtail widespread control (1996, pp. 409-410).

In addition, Ewen (2001) urges publics to take the time to understand the imagery used in marketing appeals in order to "decipher the world" (p. 16). By understanding appeals, publics will begin to recognize the differences between solid persuasive appeals and those that do not hold ground when properly scrutinized. This should lead to proper media literacy and a decline in the ill effects associated with overexposure. It also allows publics to determine the differences between the voice of the publicist, who may have ulterior motives, and the voice of the citizen. Although not completely unbiased, the voice of the citizen is typically devoid of commercial interests.

Mayhew (1997) calls upon both practitioners and general publics alike to practice responsible rhetoric when making public claims. "To redeem a rhetorical claim is to respond to demands for clarification, specification, and evidence to the satisfaction of an audience" (Mayhew, 1997, p. 13). Under this model, all rhetorical claims are subject to questioning and scrutiny. Questions would not necessarily be used to prove claims false, but rather to provide a system of checks and balances in order to ensure that they prove factual and are of benefit. This should increase the levels of believability and trust between insider and outsider publics and create authentic discourses not based on authority or power but rather on validity and truthfulness. Publics become truly satisfied when "they have been well and honestly informed and advised" (Mayhew, 1997, p. 125).

Asking members of general publics and IMC practitioners to qualify their remarks is a step toward reinvigorating communication processes by opening up debate. Perhaps one of the most important steps is to “allow citizens to engage in productive discussions and thereby reconnect with each other and with public concerns” (Mayhew, 1997, p. 261). In fact, recent studies (as with the Harwood Group – 1993) have indicated that publics are “hungry” for the reestablishment of forums to foster deliberation and build communities of interaction (Mayhew, 1997, p. 261).

Mayhew (1997) suggests the establishment of a National Citizen’s Forum (NCF), which will hold public leaders accountable for the following criteria:

1) The achievement of legitimacy and imparity to achieve policy that yields true public good;

2) Participation by normal citizens so that public voices are represented;

3) Socially-diverse deliberation in order to trump majority rule based on hierarchy, and;

4) Access to leaders and key decision makers to continue ongoing discourse (p. 261).

Despite the various revisionary models for IMC and other public communication processes, tensions and pressures are bound to persist between insider and outsider groups. Yet, research suggests that many of these tensions and pressures may be eliminated. For example, Doxtader (2007) offers insights for achieving peace between parties of difference. He is concerned with finding ways to connect IMC practitioners and publics. His thoughts on reconciliation offer various starting points to mending fractured relationships. Doxtader (2007) terms reconciliation as:

> The open-ended form of (ex)change that counts not as the achievement of peace but a moment in which aggrieved and alienated parties discern and fashion the ground for clash over what counts as peace, how it can be created, and the ways in which it might be sustained” (p. 124).

Furthermore, Doxtader provides partners in rhetorical transactions with starting points for mutual acceptance. He explains how “standing rationales for conflict contain the grounds for productive (dis)agreement that energizes individual and collective action” (2007, p. 125). The principle of recognition offers various foundations in finding common ground among two competing parties. Recognition involves a sort of “full acknowledgement” that provides the “potential for understanding” (Doxtader, 2007, p. 134). Once parties understand one another fully, communication becomes much more manageable. Too often, unknown motives keep parties from trusting one another. When motives are unmasked, open and honest discussions can prevail.

Slob (2002) offers additional thoughts on overcoming dissention and difference. His thesis is to produce a dialectical-rhetorical model, which is a type of balancing act between differences or competing standards that emerge from conversations. Slob posits that normative rules and methods should not drive discourse. Such a system would make discourse much too prescriptive. Instead, discourse should involve a coming together of interested parties to discuss, debate, and deliberate issues.

As with the various other discourse models presented in this dissertation, Slob’s inquiry focuses on truth-telling – “truth brings along commitment, and we should take responsibility for it, even if our convictions are only and necessarily provisional” (2002, p. 3). Then (and only then) can we give birth to proper authority and collective truth. And although inclusionary discourse may begin with “dissention,” its primary aim is to resolve it (Slob, 2002, p. 70). A fundamental goal of discourse is conflict-resolution, which can only be achieved through sincere commitments to understanding, negotiating, and resolving differences between competing parties (i.e., consumers and practitioners).

In order to welcome dissent, publics must "presume that our partners in discussion will not try to fool us" (Slob, 2002, p. 78). Discourse models will not be operating ethically if they involve deception. Further, Slob insists that "as long as all participants of a dialectical discussion agree on the basic problem, on the logical rules that are applied and moreover are sincere and keep their promises, the system will work" (2002, p. 79). Any activity that exists outside of these criteria should be approached with caution, especially when alternatives cease to exist. Presuming a universal audience would be one such fallacy.

Slob (2002) explains that there can be no method of absolute commensurability for IMC and other public practices. Rather than viewing incommensurability as a curse, then, we should view it as an opportunity. In addition to Slob, Heidlebaugh (2001) offers insights for moving beyond incommensurability and communicative stalemates. Instead of refusing to move beyond difference (which is a negative impact of incommensurability), opposing parties should see it as an opportunity to negotiate outcomes from various viewpoints to reach the best conclusions (a positive impact of incommensurability). Therefore, public decisions can move away from "either/or" judgments that have the tendency to marginalize public opinions (Heidlebaugh, 2001, p. 64). Essentially, a welcomed incommensurability system stymies authoritative rhetoric.

"Contradictions" bring new ideas opening up "the need to respond with something novel" (Heidlebaugh, 2001, p. 5). For IMC, the positive-benefits incommensurability model is an opportunity to do better. For the practitioner, this means enhancing communicative practices to ensure truth-telling by building communication competence. For the consumer, this means approaching IMC claims with open minds instead of passing them off as fallacious. Consumers must also invest in IMC discourse, which highlights “the difference between relying on spectator judgment and engaging in active ways” (Heidlebaugh, 2001, p. 9).

In a true discourse model, then, each party bares the responsibility of validating claims; “both participants face the burden of proof” (Slob, 2002, p. 96). False claims made by companies and organizations (and other elitist institutions, for that matter) should be minimized as a result. A true discourse model for IMC results from a partnerships of internal and external audiences – the indication that an outside party or another “person can help in achieving some aim, which without [his or] her help, would not be achieved as well, as quickly, [or] as smoothly” (Slob, 2002, p. 160). This model is not only concerned with finding common ground, but also with uncovering ways to “bring them together,” or what Heidlebaugh terms “commonplacing” (2001, pp. 28-68). This reminds IMC professionals that claims made in solidarity are not the preferred methods of communication (because they are typically made to advance the good of a company or organization), but rather are emergent and conditional upon conversations with consumers (which, as a result, meet the needs of both internal and external audiences and build trust).

Nahser (1997) explains the importance of resurrecting pragmatism in business, which encompasses ethics, morality, and spirituality. Pragmatism is most concerned with building ongoing corporate missions and goals that prevail for the long-term (instead of focusing on the short-term, which many organizations attempt to do, resulting in quick fixes to problems while neglecting larger issues at hand). Nahser reminds us that businesses are part of our communities. Furthermore, it is important that we keep both corporate and social interests in mind. In order to achieve this, we must challenge those filters or presuppositions that impede us from communicating. As previously discussed, this reminds IMC practitioners to promote with integrity. Consumers should be viewed as partners in transactions rather than adversaries. IMC thrives on respect – it has to be given in order to get it back (Roberts, 2005, pp. 61-62).

One of the most powerful tools for IMC, then, is “the rule of reciprocation” – once we receive something from others, we are inclined to return the favor (Cialdini, 2001, p. 20). In other words, we feel inclined to pay favors forward. To illustrate, Cialdini provides the example of free sampling, where companies distribute a portion of their products and/or services gratis in the hopes that they will create more customers. While the rule of reciprocation has been used in marketing for some time, IMC can expand this function. Instead of relying on free sampling to sell products, perhaps marketers should practice the rule of reciprocation for communication.

Consumers do not necessarily want to be bombarded with free samples and services. Instead, marketers should create forums for consumers to connect with companies and organization in order to reciprocate communication. Consumers then have a voice in marketing discourse. Commitment and consistency also rank high on the list of positive influence-building strategies. A strong commitment to customers and consistency in products and services are important strategies in building brands for the long-haul.

Killingsworth’s rhetorical reasoning (2005) can be successfully applied to IMC. For example, the stories that marketers tell their audiences must be believable and authentic so that consumers can envision themselves as connected to the stories.

Audiences will only feel connected if stories speak to them personally. By connecting stories to audiences, marketers reach the widest range possible while also involving them in the process.

As Killingsworth (2005) suggests, “the aim of general rhetoric is to open the access of communication as widely as possible without compromising the message” (p. 16). This involves matters of timeliness, or finding the correct times to distribute messages. Various concepts help to dissect matters of time more clearly – the ancient concept of *kairos*, or finding the right arguments for the right moments, and the modern concept of *exigence*, or topics that are marked as urgent for a particular timeframe (Killingsworth, 2005, p. 38). *Kairos* plays a role in the temporal appeals available to the field of IMC. Temporal appeals are either found in the past, the present, or the future.

The rhetoric of progress may be overused in IMC. Companies and organizations are constantly claiming that their products are “new and improved.” The overuse and abuse of these token phrases has caused publics to become skeptical when they hear them. Appeals to the future, then, cannot be fulfilled by empty rhetorical talk. Instead, they should be based on what the product or service can do (in other words, its functionality or use-value). Perhaps buzzwords, including “improved,” “innovative,” “groundbreaking,” and “original,” are no longer strong enough to stand on their own.

“The old paradigm of reliance on information distributed to the mass audience through the paid medium of advertising is simply outdated” (Edelman, 2004, p. 7). Therefore, it is imperative that marketers search for additional avenues to reach consumers and customers. As previously posited, traditional models of PR and advertising no longer work on their own. Consumers are reaching out to third parties (i.e., current customers) for information regarding products and services. “Consumers are no longer content to be passively entertained, they want to be part of the show; they don’t want to be talked to anymore, they want to do the talking, and they want to be heard” (Edelman, 2004, p. 8).

Ongoing discourse with consumers, then, allows for the building of trust and serves as a catalyst for establishing brand loyalty and customer retention. A discourse model enables a range of voices and opinions so that strengths and weaknesses can be assessed and addressed. Not all feedback will be positive, but if conversations are embraced, positive change will likely occur. Feedback allows for effective customer service. In fact, “customer service is as much a part of a product or service’s value proposition as its price, packaging, and performance” (Mounts & Rosenwasser, 2004, p. 34). A discourse model for IMC will only evolve if companies and organizations invest in strong customer service and satisfaction.

A strong customer base results from an open marketplace of ideas where customers are not taken for granted, but rather engaged. Once engaged, retention rates skyrocket, where loyal customers become brand ambassadors for products and services. A loyal customer base provides an additional avenue for consumers who are looking for information on purchases and product comparisons. The nurturing of a loyal customer base can result in additional profits and an increase in retention because the information gathered from them originates from an independent third party.

Toyota’s luxury-brand of cars, Lexus, provides a case study that examines the importance of catering to existing customers before searching for new ones. For example, the Lexus brand is concerned with enhancing on-going relationships with existing clients for the long-haul. This includes round-the-clock service for vehicles and a relationship-oriented sales team. Lexus does not treat its customers like marching bodies in a row, but rather like family. This strategy helps generate brand loyalty and keeps Lexus' existing customers coming back for repeat business. By focusing on a strong customer base, Lexus and companies similar to it can avoid wasting money and resources on marketing that is geared toward uninterested targets (Roberts, 2005).

As previously mentioned, brand-loyal customers often act as brand ambassadors for companies, encouraging them to share thoughts and opinions concerning their favorite products and services. Undecided consumers often look for these types of expert opinions before making purchasing decisions because they are viewed as bipartisan. For example, Rapacz and Reilly (2009) focus on the importance of heavy buyers. They argue that heavy buyers are extremely important because they reach more obscure audiences by exciting and enticing them to try and/or purchase new products and services. "Lighter buyers often view core heavy buyers as experts, so marketing with [a] heavy buyer focus is a powerful way to represent the brand to all buyers" (Rapacz & Reilly, 2009, p. 67). Marketers must embrace these non-biased voices to extend their efforts. They often determine the success or failure of a brand. Therefore, brand-loyal customers or heavy buyers often serve as older siblings; younger and less experienced siblings will often approach older siblings for advice. In sum, outside advocacy can only increase the reputations of brands.

Today, marketing tactics are shifting from push to pull; rather than pushing messages onto consumers, they are pulling in what they want to focus on. Smart marketing is less intrusive and more conversational; consumers voice their opinions and provide feedback on products and services. This feedback should be embraced to enhance IMC efforts. Often, the use of “real people [in marketing] are far more believable to the masses” (Bernstein, 2001, p. 43).

As stronger customer bases are built, one way to nurture relationships is through the alignment of interests. To elaborate, consumer and customer goals should be aligned with corporate interests and objectives for a discourse model to thrive. “Those corporations that act in their customers’ interest with conviction, business smarts and earnest intent will grab attention and market share from those that hide in the shadows” (Densen, 2005, p. 10). The building of mutual interests demonstrates to customers that companies and organizations are partnering with them to reach mutual end-goals. But, these goals must be authentic and integrous and coupled with a genuine commitment. Otherwise, customers may accuse companies and organizations of deceiving them in order to achieve their goals. One example of a genuine alignment of interests would involve a commitment to brand quality and ongoing consumer support to enhance both a company’s brand (for corporate interests) and ongoing use-value (for consumer interests). To summarize, “a truly effective program can only begin when all the key drivers are aligned – only teams win” (Magnani, 2006, p. 13).

Two of the most important values to consider for IMC are honesty and integrity, which are key business functions for the future of the practice. Consumers are raising the stakes by demanding that corporations remain honest and forthright in their communication. Dishonesty can only harm companies and organizations, especially in our fast-paced digital economy, where fraudulence and deception are quickly challenged.

For example, “In a 2006 Opinion Research study, more than 75 percent of consumers claimed that they prefer to buy from a company that operates ethically, even if they have to pay more money” (Upshaw, 2009, p. 16). This demonstrates that honesty is truly the best policy. As previously discussed, remaining open and candid with customers creates higher standards and in return yields enhanced reputations with an ever-increasing brand-loyal base. In summary, honesty, integrity, and a willingness to communicate with consumers and customers prove imperative for today’s IMC practitioners.

Moreover, ascribing to honesty, integrity, and openness delivers success for IMC programs and practice. Rigorously abiding by these rules brings the most achievement in customer satisfaction and loyalty. To illustrate, the sixth and final chapter of this dissertation will provide an application study of Netflix, a highly successful Internet subscription service for movies and television. This application study will examine Netflix and its IMC program in order to demonstrate how a successful model for IMC practice that remains committed to discourse is thriving in the current competitive market.

Chapter Six: Netflix – An Application Study

This dissertation envisages successful IMC programs that focus on discourse. Today, companies and organizations that remain committed to communicating with customers are finding the most success. Winning IMC programs are reestablishing direct bonds with customers by opening up the lines of communication with them and inserting public voices into discussions. Netflix is one such company that has capitalized on a discourse-based IMC program by engaging and welcoming consumer voices rather than marginalizing or silencing them. The final chapter of this dissertation examines Netflix's IMC discourse-based model, connecting the company's success to the engagement of functioning reticulate public spheres.

Background

Founded in 1997, Netflix "the world's leading Internet subscription service for enjoying movies and TV shows," changed the way consumers rented and viewed film and television (Netflix Website, "About Us"). Virtually meaningless as little as a decade ago, "I have that in my queue" is now a common phrase utilized by Netflix's large and ever-increasing client base that explains the list of movies and television programs that users select to receive from the service.

With more than 20 million members in the United States and Canada, Netflix caters to a vast and wide audience. The success of the company stems from the availability of a large library of films and television programs that can be streamed instantly over the Internet or through one of Netflix's 200+ compatible devices. Instant streaming capabilities are unlimited, meaning that customers can pick and choose from the instant library as often as they like for a flat and fixed rate. In addition, Netflix offers unlimited DVD and Blu-ray rental plans to customers who may not have access to instant streaming technology or who wish to have access to titles not available for instant streaming. Packages range from as little as one DVD or Blu-ray rental up to eight at one time and are available through standard mail (Netflix Website, “About Us”).

Since its inception, Netflix has received various accolades, ranking high in customer satisfaction. For example, in December 2010, the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) named Netflix the number one ecommerce company for customer satisfaction. Netflix has been named the number one retail website since 2005 for customer satisfaction in 11 out of 12 surveys by ForeSee Results. In December 2007, Netflix was ranked the number one online retailer by Nielsen Online. In January 2007, Netflix was named the Retail Innovator of the Year by the National Retail Federation. In the fall of 2005, Fast Company named Netflix the winner of its annual Customers First Award. Additionally, in December 2008, TIME magazine named the Netflix Player by Roku one of the top 10 gadgets of the year (Netflix Website, “Media Center”).

Most recently, Netflix ranked #1 on Brand Keys’ annual survey of customer loyalty, beating Apple and over 500 other major corporations for the top spot. Brand Keys’ president Robert Passikoff stated that the annual survey ranks brands on the merits of “products and services that respond with a truly consumer-centric view of their category – delighting the customer – based on predictive loyalty metrics, [which] stand to gain the most, and establish themselves as this decade’s brand leaders” (Morran, The Consumerist Website, “Netflix Tops Customer Loyalty List”).

Due to its success, Netflix is quickly driving its competitors out of business. Various competitors include Blockbuster, Hulu, On Demand or Pay-Per-View screening, and subscription services to premium television. One reason that the company is finding a high level of success is because it is committed to bringing a large degree of content to users. For example, Netflix is striking deals with production houses that traditionally offered licensing fees to premium television networks such as Showtime and Home Box Office (HBO).

Netflix recently announced that they partnered with FilmDistrict, a distribution and production company of feature films, to stream primary or “first run” content directly through Netflix in lieu of licensing to premium television networks (Netflix Press Release, “Netflix and FilmDistrict Announce Agreement to Stream First-Run Theatrical Films to Netflix Members”). This move indicates that other production houses will soon follow suit by offering Netflix primary access to content before their competitors in the premium television and film markets. Popular production house Nu Image/Millennium Films also recently partnered with Netflix to allow for “first run” content (Netflix Press Release, “Netflix and Nu Image/Millennium Films Announce Long-term Agreement to Stream First-Run Theatrical Films to Netflix Members”).

In addition to film production houses, Netflix has reached numerous deals with television and film studios to share and distribute content. For example, the company recently announced a deal to stream an array of ABC Network, Disney Channel and ABC Family Shows to Netflix Members (Netflix Press Release, “Netflix and Disney-ABC Television Group Announce Deal to Stream Array of ABC Network, Disney Channel and ABC Family Shows to Netflix Members”). Netflix is committed in partnering with such outfits in order to bring their users enhanced and increased content. The studios benefit as well, as the Netflix platform allows programs and films to be viewed more readily and with ease.

By offering programs that are distributed directly to consumers, Netflix provides unmatched convenience of streaming content via an array of Netflix compatible devices, such as computers and televisions. As the company grows, so does the ease of access. For example, in January 2011, Netflix announced the addition of "one-click" remote control compatibility with major consumer electronics makers. Here, a "number of the world's leading consumer electronics companies have joined in a development effort to place Netflix-branded one-click buttons on remotes that operate Internet connected TVs, Blu-ray disc players and other devices that connect the Internet to the TV" (Netflix Press Release. "Streaming From Netflix Will Soon be Even More Convenient With Netflix One-Click Remotes Introduced by Major Consumer Electronics Makers"). The new remote control devices are scheduled to launch in the spring of 2011 and will surely enhance convenience for subscribers.

In addition, Netflix is regarded by consumers as a cost-effective means of entertainment, especially when compared to other rental and subscription services. Netflix offers unlimited streaming to customers for a fixed rate while various competitors (such as On Demand and Pay-Per-View) charge per program.

Netflix's Discourse-Based Program

The success of Netflix is not derived from services alone. The company also applies a highly customer-centric IMC program that enables users to involve themselves in the process of rating and reviewing titles. This type of discourse-based IMC program gives Netflix a strong competitive edge over business rivals. A primary focus of Netflix is to foster and encourage discourse with and among subscribers by using the company website as a hub for interaction.

Instead of driving and directing discourse on their website, Netflix gathers information and feedback from actual users (otherwise known as subscribers or members). Subscribers are treated as partners rather than clients. This turns users into critics, where they share positive and negative feelings about movies and programs. By supporting user feedback, Netflix is adapting to today's "sophisticated consumer" (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1994, p. x). Sophisticated consumers want to share thoughts and opinions and know how to voice them. Sophisticated IMC models, such as the program developed by Netflix, embrace thoughts and opinions from actual users.

Netflix's program qualifies as discourse-based because it is highly "customer-centric," meaning that the company encourages users to take on the primary role of communicators on their website (Schultz & Schultz, 2003, p. 50). Customer-centric organizations realize the benefits of encouraging open and honest feedback to build strong discourse communities (or public spheres). The Netflix brand is driven by users who possess a high level of control over what gets communicated on the company's website. As previously articulated, putting control of information directly into the hands of customers enhances the success of IMC programs because it allows publics to manage their own agendas (Kitchen & De Pelsmacker, 2004).

Putting control in the hands of subscribers achieves grassroots marketing for Netflix, with many new customers subscribing to the service through referrals from existing members. For example, more than 90% of Netflix members claim they are so satisfied with Netflix service that they recommend it to family and friends. Also, more than 70% of new Netflix members claim they joined the service partly due to being evangelized by a Netflix member (Netflix Website, “Media Center”). The company rewards customers who recommend their services with an affiliate program, which allows those that refer it to family and friends to earn money and monthly credits for enticing others to sign up (Netflix Website, “Affiliates”). Netflix’s affiliate program enables users to act as brand ambassadors for the company. The referral program demonstrates that Netflix has a high brand salience; subscribers are fond of the brand and want to share their admiration for it (Percy, 1997).

One reason that a wide range of consumers relate to and are fond of the Netflix brand is because of the vast variety of content it delivers. The company is committed to bringing an array of content from both mainstream and specialized markets. One niche market that Netflix serves is the Independent (or indie) film market. The company provides a large library of indie films, which demonstrates Netflix’s commitment to cater to the widest degree of audiences possible by supplying both mainstream and self-governing content. Indie films differ from other films in that they are produced mostly outside of major film studios and conglomerates. Netflix claims that the wide variety of indie films available to their audiences “adds meaningfully to the company’s known reputation as a great source of Independent Film for both members and distributors” (Netflix Press Release, “Netflix Adds Hundreds of Indie Films That Can Be Watched Instantly Through a String of New Streaming Deals”). This allows users to enjoy content that is not widely known or heavily advertised (such as with major film productions) and supports producers in the indie film market.

Whether users enjoy mainstream or independent content, Netflix is diligent in establishing viewing preferences for each of its subscribers. For example, once signed up for the service, users are asked to partake in an extensive survey to pinpoint likes and dislikes. This way, Netflix gets to know each customer and can make recommendations based on viewing patterns and priorities.

One method of understanding subscriber preferences is through the Netflix rating system. Via this system, users are asked to rate films and programs on a scale from 1-5 stars. One star suggests that the viewer “hated” the movie or program, two stars means that the viewer “did not like” it, three stars is equivalent to “liking” it, four stars means that the viewer “really liked” it, and five stars corresponds to “loving” it. The star rating scale garners quantitative data to track user patterns and preferences. This system also allows Netflix to track cumulative ratings for each movie and program in order to demonstrate the mean or average review. The more content that users rate, the more personalization and customization they receive. Netflix houses a “suggestions for you,” icon on their website that offers recommendations based on individual taste preferences.

In the event that subscribers wish to learn more about films and programs (rather than relying solely on numerical reviews or suggestions by Netflix), they have the option to navigate through the company’s extensive member review pages that offer detailed feedback from actual users on particular films and programs. Netflix members respond openly and frequently on these pages, which operate as discourse communities (or public spheres, to be discussed in the following section). The review platform is the lifeblood of Netflix’s online community. For example, Netflix’s website houses more than 3 billion movie ratings from members. The average member has rated about 200 movies and Netflix members rate about 4 million movies a day (Netflix Website, “Media Center”).

Netflix’s online community can be viewed as a legitimate forum for information because it is highly “viral” (as defined in Iacobucci & Calder, 2002, p. 92) where ordinary citizens spread word of products and services on their own terms. The information gathered from the website is viewed as “useful information” rather than influential (Schudson, 1984, p. 239). Moreover, it qualifies as a legitimate public sphere.

The Netflix Community as Legitimate Reticulate Public Space

Netflix’s website is discourse-based because opinions and feedback are not only numerical, but also contain substance, which addresses Hauser’s concern regarding the inaccuracies of public opinion polling (1999 & 2002). By asking users to qualify reviews in their own language, Netflix users offer feedback that is not tied to traditional restrictive judgment. This move enhances “discursive expressions of civic judgment” (Hauser, 2002, p. 94).

Hauser’s theory of reticulate public spheres encourages active participation from ordinary citizens. As previously discussed, reticulate public spheres develop when ordinary citizens form together on the basis of common interests through the fostering of discourse that is dynamic, ongoing, and invitational (Hauser, 1999, p. 71). Reticulate public spheres build authenticity and veracity which helps provide genuine references (Upshaw, 2009). Such spheres are highly responsive because ordinary citizens “contribute to the course of civil society” (Hauser, 1999, p. 12).

Netflix’s review process is supported by ordinary (or vernacular) language that is not intimidating. This is in contrast to the reviews given by professional movie critics who often reference sophisticated metaphors and other forms of artistic expression that ordinary citizens may not understand. As a result, the language of the Netflix community fits nicely into the realm of "vernacular talk" (Hauser, 1999, p. 101). Here, members use conversational, ordinary language to express feedback and opinions. Furthermore, the Netflix community is not regarded as impermeable; rather it feeds off of the strength of the public voice. The community embraces feedback, which allows for true public rhetoric to unfold and emerge.

The Netflix community assists with the formation of Mayhew's "effectual collective will" where citizens are willing and capable of forming their own discourses (1997, p. 3). These discourses are highly participatory and nondiscriminatory. Feedback is welcomed by both Netflix and members of its community and the company does not edit, distort, or control the content they receive. Further, the Netflix community qualifies as a true reticulate public sphere because content is not highly technicized or filtered, two key drivers of facilitating authentic discourse (Hauser, 1999 & 2002).

The reticulate public sphere as enacted by Netflix enhances the "digitized rhetorical democracy" (Gronbeck, 2004, p. 19). The company uses technology as a tool for authentic expression where users are active participants, not mindless bystanders. Netflix subscribers form into discourse communities by coming together to discuss a shared interest of television and film and act as "collectives" (Killingsworth, 2005, p. 119). This assists in the rebuilding of public spheres because members of the general public are coming together to discuss issues of relevance and salience. Reticulate public spheres enable ordinary citizens to gain access to "the field of play" in order to shape and share public agendas (Hauser, 1999, p. 29).

The welcoming temperament of Netflix's online community equips subscribers with a sense of power and debunks the premise that all corporate intentions are to control consumer voices (as addressed in Mayhew, 1997). With this, Netflix has seen an increase in participation and the quality of reviews. By including members in the review process and asking them to play the primary role, Netflix affords citizens the opportunity to move from spectators to actors (Heidlebaugh, 2001). The company's review process is not consensus-based. On the contrary, it is extremely varied, containing a wide range of viewpoints. Diversity is a welcomed component, which affords members the luxury of voicing honest opinions rather than following along with the crowd.

To demonstrate just how varied the review process can be, one only has to survey the reviews for a particular film or television program. For example, as of February 2011, the 2010 Academy Award recipient for Best Picture, "The Hurt Locker," received over 2 million quantitative reviews on Netflix's website. The film, which follows one of the U.S. Army's elite EOD (explosive ordinance disposal) teams in wartime Iraq, received an average of 3.9/5 stars on the Netflix rating scale. The film also received 2595 qualitative reviews from users in the form of written evaluations. The written feedback varied from positive to neutral to negative. Member "RJP" wrote positively about the film, stating that it was "one of the best military action movies" ever produced and that it was "highly recommended" due to "well developed action sequences" and "edge of your seat suspense." Member "sjp 1600170" had more neutral feedback claiming that the military thriller was "entertaining" but a bit "overrated" and "unrealistic." Member "MisterGraves" was not impressed with the film, criticizing it for being "painfully inaccurate" and "illogical;" nothing more than "a silly action flick" (Netflix, "The Hurt

Locker”). The diversity of reviews surrounding this Oscar-winning film demonstrates the wide assortment of opinions that are posted to Netflix’s website and exhibits the extensive range of diversity and variety expressed by subscribers.

Whether they are positive, neutral, or negative, the temperament of reviews is based on actual feedback from subscribers rather than originating from insiders or traditional critics. As a result, the Netflix community is designed so that it simply cannot function without assistance from users, which connects to Hauser’s theory of publics acting “weblike” (1999, pp. 60-72). Conversations are ongoing, never-ending, and diverse, but also possess a common thread. A multiplicity of voices, then, expands each web of conversation (Hauser, 1999, pp. 61-64). This permits members to enhance and reinforce their publicness, a main theme of Hauser’s scholarship (1999 & 2002).

Netflix’s website operates as an authentic online discursive space, a key component of the “vernacular web” (Howard, 2008, p. 192). Conversations flow freely and continually without the fear of propagated control. In efforts to keep the public sphere authentic, Netflix refrains from the incorporation of advertisements into its instant streaming technology (unlike many of its competitors, i.e., Hulu). Netflix does this in order to focus on “content providers without relying on advertising to pull it off” (Reisinger, CNET News, “Netflix not into Ads”). This is welcomed news to users who do not want outside advertising interfering with viewership and satisfies the demands of a highly engaged digital culture.

Furthermore, Netflix’s technology is not used as an infiltration of the public sphere (as described by Postman, 1985 & 1992), but rather to assist and engage subscribers. Participation in the company’s public forums is accessible. Boundaries remain “permeable” and open (Hauser, 1999, p. 77). By not controlling or distorting communication, Netflix assists in the birth of rhetorically salient meaning and “rhetorical give and take” (Hauser, 1999, p. 5). True rhetorically salient meaning has both positive and negative implications. Yet, unlike other companies that shy away from negative commentary, Netflix welcomes it in order to better serve users. And Netflix does see its share of criticism.

Various complaints surrounding the company originate from disgruntled users. For instance, Netflix recently received harsh criticism for removing its “friends feature” from its website, where users could share movie and television program reviews, recommendations, and top ten lists directly with their Netflix “friends,” or online acquaintances. The company justified this decision by stating that “less than 2% of users actually used this feature” and that removing this aspect of the website would allow it to focus on other developments that would “benefit” a wider percentage of users (Netflix Blog). Despite justification of this move, Netflix continues to receive occasional complaints about removing the feature.

There has also been some speculation that Netflix’s unlimited rental plans may actually come with limitations. A recent article criticized Netflix for a trend called “throttling,” meaning that Netflix customers who pay the same price for the same service are often treated differently (and perhaps not as favorably), depending on their rental patterns. For example, the company’s system identifies heavy users of the service or members that ship DVD and Blu-ray rentals back quickly in order to receive their next order. Quick exchangers are noticing a drop in the turnaround time for new discs while also being sent to “the back of the line for the most-wanted” discs, such as popular new releases (Wired.com News, “Netflix Critics Slam Throttling”).

This dissertation has acknowledged the importance of catering to “heavy buyers” in order to extend brand loyalty and awareness (Rapacz & Reilly, 2009). By “throttling” heavy users, Netflix is failing to reward its most loyal customers, a trend that may cause continued criticism in the future. Yet, despite its critics, Netflix continues to rank high on customer satisfaction surveys and maintains a high degree of brand loyalty due to its customer-centric IMC program.

To address criticisms and extend IMC efforts, Netflix houses a blog (http://blog.netflix.com/) to better communicate with subscribers. The blog is maintained by members of the Netflix team and discusses news and current events that are relevant to customers. While the blog is written and maintained by members of the Netflix team, users are asked to participate in the forum to enhance the interactive experience. And members are participating. For instance, the most recent blog article concerning the “removal of add to DVD queue from streaming devices” spawned over 5000 comments from users, both positive and negative: (http://www.blogger.com/comment.g?blogID=2765056849626104020&postID=5085770701190661055).

By soliciting feedback from users concerning reviews and blog entries, Netflix does not wish to create “mass societies” that are traditionally passive and inactive (Hauser, 1999, p. 77). Rather than treating subscribers as dormant, they are viewed as partners in rhetorical transactions. As previously demonstrated, companies and organizations that partner with their clients are securing a higher degree of trust and credibility.

Trust is a primary theme in Hauser and Benoit-Barne's article "Reflections on Rhetoric, Deliberative Democracy, Civil Society, and Trust" (2002). Here, the authors define five components of a viable deliberative model that help build trust (ppgs. 263-267):

1) We must reconceive political relations from being interest-based to deliberative-based – once deliberative, societal relations are based on a range of interests rather than personal and/or self-serving interests.

2) A polity marked by political pluralism requires a different vocabulary – participatory dialogue invites engagement rather than monologic dialogue, which attempts to stymie it.

3) A deliberative model requires a move from a procedural model to an equality model – here, all interested parties have an opportunity to participate in the spirit of pluralism.

4) A deliberative model requires a move from a philosophical reasoning model to a practical reasoning model – practical reasoning helps put a stop to personal and group interests from influencing what is publicly in the best interest.

5) Such a model must move beyond a narrowly institutional construction of democracy to include the vast associational network in which most citizens experience democratic participation and deliberation – the public voice should be vast and multidimensional and welcome difference to secure the best outcomes, where opinions and actions are not influenced or regulated by traditional authorities.

Hauser and Chantal propose that lapses in trust (we have for others and for governing bodies) can be remedied through the establishment of mutually inclusive public discourses that are shaped through deliberation. For instance, the more mutually-dependent we are as a society, the more we tend to trust because we are working toward common end-goals. Ongoing conversations help secure trust and goodwill. The more one participates, the more one begins to trust. This is why it is imperative that both citizens and governing agents alike engage one another to ensure that communal good is established and actualized. In summary, it is possible for a "deliberative democracy to flourish in a nation of strangers" (Hauser & Chantal, 2002, pg. 272). This possibility is being realized through Netflix's discourse-based IMC program.

As previously articulated, IMC programs are most successful when they actively elicit responses (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1994, p. xvii). By maintaining a high level of communication with members, Netflix is committed to ongoing contact with their users, a necessary element to any successful IMC program (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1994). By allowing users to control communication and conversations on their website without asserting editorial control, Netflix offers one such model for IMC that welcomes discourse. Moreover, discourse-based models for IMC provide one avenue for the reengagement of public spheres to enhance communication processes, reputations, and responsibilities.

Final Thoughts – Returning to Hauser

This dissertation has applied Gerard Hauser's philosophical framework of reticulate public spheres to advocate constructive discourse models for IMC practice. IMC practitioners are beginning to realize that building inclusionary relationships with consumers is a win-win process (Pettegrew, 2001). Moves toward reciprocity and consistency have proven to be the best strategies for the future of IMC practice and for the revival of positive reputations in professional communications, as a whole (Gronstedt, 2000).

One of the primary goals of a discourse model lies in negotiation, which may be defined as a meeting of minds between consumers and practitioners in order to understand the motivations of one another. Once motivations have been unmasked, it becomes easier to understand the frames of reference from which the other works. Once frames of reference have been discussed and understood, partners in rhetorical transactions can vocalize their needs and opinions in open forums. The needs of consumers can then be appropriately met. This replaces the monologic script of the practitioner.

Social cooperation constitutes social power and both knowledge and power are shaped through discourse. An open rhetorical discourse model points at discontinuity and questions monologic thought and action. Responsible rhetoric, then, “must be based on truth, as best we can know it, and serve moral ends” (Hauser, 2002, p. 64). Rhetorical discourse insists on making commitments, and such commitments must be upheld in order for parties to continue responsible discourse.

“Responsible rhetorical arguments are always cast with the listener in mind, but such arguments must also reflect the essential views of the rhetor” (Hauser, 2002, p. 66). Adopting this method encourages all parties to work collectively to solve problems and reach mutual end-goals. Various criteria for establishing communicative competence include reciprocity, critical listening, open-mindedness, and inclusion. Two opposing parties (such as practitioners and consumers) learn to tolerate one another through the encouragement of discourse. Ultimately, “an empowered public is more likely to differentiate between the glitz of public relations satisfied with images and competent rhetoric seeking to articulate shared reality" (Hauser, 2002, p. 94).

A rhetorical democracy grants every citizen a voice. However, "a rhetorical democracy [also] opens up the Pandora's Box of persuasion, which may lead to manipulation for personal gain under the guise of the common good" (Hauser, 2004, p. 1). This is why it is increasingly important to regard publics as "more than nose counts" (Hauser, 2004, p. 6) by ensuring that platforms for public expression remain open.

For IMC, this involves several movements:

1) From elitist to collective reasoning – the heart of authentic interaction;

2) From winning and creating consent to finding the consumer voice – true vernacular discussions are applied to campaigns;

3) From concealment of information to openness of discourse – naturally there are times when concealment of information benefits both internal and external audiences, but if the information *should* be made public (if disclosing information promotes utility, for instance) all efforts *should* be made to do so.

In summary, the future of IMC demands that ethical models are created to cure the strong public sentiments against marketing functions. "Rhetoric is our last best alternative to a world run by power or privilege; it offers a world run by the people" (Hauser, 2002, p. 286). While this is a lofty goal for any democratic model, Hauser's reticulate public spheres can be applied to IMC to offer fresh perspectives. By applying Hauser's theories, it is my hope that public messages may become invitational rather than prescriptive. Messages constructed for publics can and *should* be influenced by both internal and external audiences. This will allow companies and organizations to increase their integrity by partnering with customers.

A partnership relies on ongoing discourse between insiders and outsiders. Therefore, internal and external audiences need one another. Together, they possess the ability to form authentic partnerships that transcend ignorance and coercion. Together, they can make proper and well-informed decisions that lead to enhanced and authentic discourses. Most importantly, they can rely upon mutually-beneficial systems based on trust, veracity, and responsibility.

Furthermore, marketers and consumers must increase their levels of participation by embracing the shared responsibility of creating discourses that emerge from interaction. This is perhaps one critical step toward resolving the faltering reputations of IMC practices. It is my hope that the proposed enhancements to IMC as informed by Hauser's reticulate public spheres will play a role in curtailing the dissonance often felt between those controlling discourse and the publics that they wish to serve.

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