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A Riot of Opinions:

A Study of Audience Responses on Organizational Facebook Pages

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Abstract

This paper explores the information sources used in audience responses on the Susan G. Komen for the Cure (SGK) branded Facebook page. The responses to the messages posted by SGK around this decision will be explored through the lens of Media System Dependency Theory, which argues that media is an information system, and access to this system is vital in order for audiences to satisfy their need for information coming from outside their immediate vicinity (Ball-Rokeach and Le Fleur, 1976, p. 6). At the same time, media rely on their audiences not only as consumers, but also as providers of information (Ball-Rokeach et al, 1990, p. 250). Through computer-mediated discourse analysis, I will analyze the responses on the official SGK page, and examine the ways that information is shared in this online platform. An exploration of the ways that technology enables or disables actions that contribute to public discourse will lead to a greater understanding of how audiences use multiple sources of information within a public space that allows for two-way communication. As social media platforms are increasingly being used as marketing and branding tools, it becomes more important to understand the ways that users interact with corporate accounts, rather than simply take in the specific information that is offered to them through a single channel.

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Introduction

This project aims to explore social network sites through the lens of Media Systems Dependency theory. Specifically, I'll be looking at the Facebook page of Susan G. Komen for the Cure (SGK), a prominent breast cancer research and advocacy charity in the United States and the debates that took place on this page during a time of intense audience interaction. This increased level of audience interaction started when it was announced that SGK would no longer be offering funding to Planned Parenthood, an organization providing financially accessible reproductive health care, primarily for women. SGK had resolved to pull the financial aid that they provided to help run Planned Parenthood's clinical breast exam and mammography referral services, citing a revision of funding polices that excluded organizations that were under federal investigation (Casserly, 2012). Planned Parenthood fell under this new exclusion due to an investigation by an anti-abortion senator calling for a review into whether Planned Parenthood was using federal funds to provide abortions, an investigation that many saw as lacking merit (Casserly, 2012). The responses I will study were posted to messages written by SGK officials between February 1, 2012, the day after news about SGK severing their relationship with Planned Parenthood started appearing, and February 3rd, when the organization publicly reversed this decision. The messages posted by SGK on their Facebook page resulted in an astonishing amount of comments and responses as well as a flurry of news stories from both blogs and traditional news media sources such as television broadcast news and newspapers.

Exploring the ways that technology enables or disables actions that contribute to public discourse has many implications for the field of professional communication. At present there is only a small amount of scholarship available on how users interact with corporate or organizational Facebook pages. As Facebook is increasingly being used by businesses and other organizations as a marketing and branding tool, it becomes more important to understand the ways that users interact with corporate accounts. In addition, this project creates an opportunity to better understand the ways that technology has the potential to shape public discourse around contentious issues. Social media is increasingly creating a forum for discussion around issues and has the potential to create a new kind of space for activism. A greater understanding of the ways that the technology itself has the potential to encourage or discourage political arguments and activism allows for those engaging in these discussions to remain cognizant of the limitations of the platform. This study also has implications for Facebook and similar social network sites as they evolve and develop different or additional avenues of communication with branded pages. Finally, this project could also contribute to an understanding of audience reactions on social media platforms in times of intense public debate, and how these debates may in turn shape public opinion. All of these potential outcomes make this an important project to gain a better understanding of the ways that communication plays out on social media platforms.

Theoretical Orientation

Examining the use of organizational Facebook pages through Media Systems Dependency theory (MSD) creates an opportunity to take a framework that is primarily used to understand how audiences experience mass media such as broadcast news and reimagine the theory as applied to social media. MSD proposes that media is an information system, and access to this system is vital in order for audiences to satisfy their need for information coming from outside their immediate vicinity (Ball-Rokeach & Le Fleur, 1976, p. 6). At the same time, media rely on their audiences not only as consumers of media, but also as providers of information (Ball-Rokeach, Power, Guthrie, & Waring, 1990, p. 250).   The roots of MSD sprout from classical sociology theory, providing a framework for understanding effects of media as involving "both the media and its audiences as integral parts of a larger social system" (Ball-Rokeach & Le Fleur, 1976, p. 4). Neither media nor audiences exist within a vacuum, but are actively participating in and creating content and value-systems in relation to the larger society and culture within which they are operating. The crucial aspects of MSD for this project include a focus on how audiences deal with ambiguous messages and the use of value-frames within media and in user responses. In relation to the SGK Facebook page, an example of how I explore ambiguous messages includes analyzing how users bring in outside information to reduce ambiguity. For value-frames, I will consider how audiences employ a language of values in their responses both to official messages and to other users.

MSD was originally conceived in a time before the popularization and mass accessibility of the internet, but is ripe for consideration in a new media context. Social media in particular has been lauded for contributing to a more symmetrical model of media that increasingly features audiences as contributors, as opposed to just passive receivers.   This symmetrical model is also being extended further through online contexts with the rise of the "prosumer", that is, media users who are not just consumers of media, but also producers (Ritzer, Dean & Jurgenson, 2012, p. 379). The notion of audiences as providers of information extends to user-generated content through citizen reporters, amateur bloggers and online commentators. Even while considering more traditional media, Ball-Rokeach still views the audience as active within a media system, including working as "a problem solver in which the problem or goal is to understand, orient, or play in a social environment in which the media system controls essential information resources" (1998 p. 26). The ways that social media encourages users to produce as well as consume media directly relates to MSD's view of the audience member as social (1998. P. 26), and recognizes the ways that audiences may act as a collective, not just a series of individual actors who consume media.

While MSD is primarily concerned with mass media (as opposed to the relatively recent evolution of social media), Ball-Rokeach has begun an exploration of the concepts that make up MSD in a more current context and has noted that "the internet (…) intrudes on traditional relations by being integrated into an expanded media system" (1998, p. 30). This doesn't mean that this intrusion creates a clear upset to the ways that media affects, and is affected by audiences. Rather, the advent of the internet and social media in particular offers an

opportunity to more thoroughly explore the decrease in asymmetry in the media-audience relationship. Perhaps even more importantly, looking at social media platforms through MSD also allows for the consideration of the ways that the media-audience relationship has remained imbalanced despite technology that has been heralded as offering opportunities for increased democratization of information. The internet does not exist as a media outside of a society, and despite the potential for participation, Ball-Rokeach states that "structural realities (…) press toward reproduction of traditional producer-consumer relations realities" (1998, p. 31). With the distinction between producers and consumers increasingly blurred through social media, there may be an increased possibility to disrupt these traditional social systems. With an increased ability to talk back to messages from more powerful groups, whether that is leaving a comment on an online newspaper article or posting about an unsatisfactory consumer experience on a large corporation's Facebook page, barriers to media participation are being lowered, allowing audiences a better opportunity to truly participate in a larger media system.

Ball-Rokeach proposes that the central question that MSD asks is "why, when and how are media powerful regarding individuals and interpersonal networks, and with what consequences?" (1998, p.27). Media can wield power or be powerful through several different factors, including what they choose to print, and increasingly, the platforms through which they choose to disseminate information. The use of social media platforms offers media makers an opportunity to be powerful through shaping the way the conversation unfolds through the use of features of a social media platform such as creating the default view of only official messages, or even very directly through deleting comments by users. Media creators are in

turn constrained by the mediums that they use, both through cultural expectations and also an evolving media environment which changes the level of control that media may have in regards to the ways that their audiences can share reactions. A traditional media model might see these constraints through accountability to an audience, journalistic standards of objectivity and a reliance on content that is attractive to advertisers and offers mass appeal. New media on the other hand, including social media platforms may be constrained by the above factors as well as the frame of online culture, which frowns heavily upon deletion of comments, and the fact that the audience has increased avenues to respond loudly and publicly when they don't agree with the message being put forth (Champoux, Durgee and McGlynn, 2012, p. 28). Overall, media systems and audiences (including prosumers) both experience constraints and possibilities for the ways that they experience different messaging formats and systems.

Ambiguity

MSD also includes a strong consideration of the ways that ambiguity contributes to audiences understanding of media and participation in a media system. For this project, Ball-Rokeach's definition of pervasive ambiguity as occurring "when individuals or collectives are unable to define a social situation" (1973, p. 378) creates a starting point for understanding the ways that audiences are affected by, and may attempt to resolve ambiguity. It is further posited by Ball-Rokeach that individuals experience ambiguity in their lives "due to conditions of structural alienation, conflict, and change over which they (have) no direct control" (1998, p. 9). Ambiguity is seen as a problem of communication, and an inability for individuals to effectively self-define their realities due to social instability (Ball-Rokeach, 1998, p. 9). This instability leads

to a diminished control over messaging, both for senders like the mass media, as well as for audiences (Ball-Rokeach, 1998, p. 11).

Beyond the experience of ambiguity as a way of life, MSD also proposes that ambiguity in messaging can result in specific actions that attempt to diminish ambiguity as quickly as possible. The steps used to diminish ambiguity can include "a communicative pattern that develops when (individuals) who are involved in a situation in which something out of the ordinary has happened pool their intellectual resources in an effort to orient themselves" (Shibutani, 1966, p. 9). This act of coming together to reduce ambiguity is at its core, a classic function of rumour, which Shibutani (1966) defines simply as a "message passed from person to person" (p.4). In a context of social media, a community wide effort to reduce ambiguity becomes one of the most obvious ways that information from a variety of sources are used in order by audiences to make sense of the world around them. Rumour as "improvised news" (Ball-Rokeach, 1998 p. 10, Shibutani, 1966) that is generated and distributed collectively has found a new home online, where knowledge is accessible but the concept of proof becomes nebulous through the same riot of opinions. For this project, the experience of and attempts to resolve the ambiguity of official SGK messages becomes an important factor in understanding the ways in which audiences craft their responses and the resources they draw upon to do so.

Value Framing

Ball-Rokeach et al consider abortion to be "one of a genre of issues that may be defined as: a symbolic communication conflict waged to establish the legitimacy of one definition of morality

and/or competence over another in the struggle to win or control scarce resources" (1990, p. 264). The struggle for legitimacy overall informs the discourse in terms of morality, and in this case, the scarce resources refer to the ability to influence laws surrounding reproductive choice (p. 255). These authors view the struggle surrounding abortion to result in a "value-frame", where the race for legitimacy is "waged in the language of values" (1990, p. 255). They define value-frames as "the criterion by which people, events and issues are evaluated" (p. 255) and that these values can be both terminal, or "desired states of existence" such as freedom or equality, or instrumental, as in "preferred modes of conduct" such as being open-minded, capable or charitable (p. 255).

In "Value-framing abortion in the United States: An application of media system dependency theory" (1990), Ball-Rokeach et al examine the ways that attempts at controlling the value-frame of abortion in the mass media by both pro-choice and pro-life groups have an outcome on media coverage and, ultimately, public opinion. Arguing that "publics, however created, have relatively little independent capacity to affect media value-framing behavior" (p. 267), these authors are considering the ways that public opinion can (or cannot) be swayed effectively by working with a larger media system, specifically with journalists as a gateway to access media and potentially influence public opinion.

Considering the race for legitimacy as played out within a social media platform offers insight into the ways that users respond, and the tools that they use when commenting around issues surrounding a contentious topic like abortion. This language of values can be seen in some of the methods that audiences employ in getting their point across. While the tactics may vary,

users on social media platforms have the opportunity to employ value-frames in similar ways to mass media producers, albeit in a condensed manner, and perhaps with less legitimacy granted to their opinions. Mass media has the great benefit of being seen as authoritative, objective and knowledgeable due to its lengthy history and mainstream acceptance. Conversely, user comments may be seen as personal opinion, hyperbole, not-objective and amateur. Despite this, commenters do have the ability to employ value-frames within their responses, and the legitimacy of their opinions could see an upswing based on the volume or responses that are similar in tone to their own.

Social media also represents a riot of opinions and messages. While particular value-frames can become dominant within the public spaces on Facebook, the sheer volume of voices may make it difficult to truly understand what, if any effect might be had either on the mass media or on public opinion. Ball-Rokeach et al also state that "open conflicts about issues of contested legitimacy tend to be 'morality plays'" and that "when there are many morality plays going on at once, organizations have a more difficult job of winning media coverage than when there are few competing attractions" (1990, p. 262). The key to getting your own morality play heard may just be to turn up the volume through multiple messaging strategies as well as working within a mobilized community effort.

MSD theory focuses strongly on media being a system with both audiences and media relying upon each other for legitimacy and information. Audiences also don't act in isolation – whether it is through sharing information with other audience members to reduce ambiguity or

collectively framing issues (ambiguous or not) through a language of morals. With this

understanding of systems and collective action, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ 1: What information resources do users of organizational Facebook pages draw upon in responding to messages from these organizations?

RQ 2: How do social media users employ value-frames in their responses posted on organizational Facebook pages?

Addressing these questions will provide a greater understanding of the constraints of social

media and the implications of these constraints for the field of professional communication. As

traditional media is increasingly adopting a social media model, and as social media becomes a

more widely used avenue for attaining information about the world around us, understanding

the ways that this medium is used by audiences becomes increasingly important. Through a

consideration of the information resources that audiences use to resolve ambiguity and the

ways that value-frames are employed within responses in a social media context, I will show

how audiences are making sense of contentious topics and contributing to a wider media

system.

Literature Review

In this section, I will explore the existing knowledge within the areas of social network sites including the ways that organizations and brands use Facebook for marketing, and how audiences interact with this type of online presence. In addition to these areas, I will also cover the recent studies that consider online comments created by audiences, and the ways that audiences share news in an online context. At the core of this exploration is a consideration of the ways that audiences use social media outside of existing interpersonal relationships and instead are interacting with public entities or other audience members.

Social Network Sites

Social network sites are websites where users can create profiles, post pictures, interact with people they know, as well as meet new people. Facebook is by far one of the most popular social network sites, with over 901 million users (Facebook Newsroom, 2012). Facebook was launched in 2004, originally as a closed network available only to individuals with a Harvard University email address, and this network grew quickly to include high school students in 2005 (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 218). By 2007, Facebook had introduced Fan pages, where brands, businesses, schools, consumer products, charities, musicians, artists, movies and many other entities could build a presence and engage with their audiences (Champoux, Durgee, & McGlynn, 2012, p. 23). In 2010, Facebook switched options for users, and instead of "becoming a fan", users simply "like" branded pages, which still gives users direct access to updates and other information from these pages (Hyllegard et al, 2011, p. 602).

Social network sites present a low-cost opportunity for marketing and branding with high levels of engagement – while Facebook ads may not perform highly for most advertisers, their branded pages typically report a higher number of click-throughs (Klaassen, 2012) and business pages frequently have more followers than website traffic (Champoux, Durgee, & McGlynn, 2012, p. 23). By the end of March 2012, there were more than 42 million pages on Facebook with 10 or more "likes" or followers (Facebook Newsroom, 2012). Social media users have also become an increasingly valuable commodity. Those who share socially, whether that is sharing links, posting comments or re-posting articles, are more likely to "like" Facebook pages and more likely to influence their friends' future purchases (Brien 2012, p. 6, 7).   The appearance of branded Facebook pages and the adoption of these pages by many different types of organizations signals a shift from viewing the social network site only as a place to keep up with friends and family to a place where users also become an audience for advertising, as well as acting as ambassadors for brands to those in their interpersonal networks.

Social Media for Brands and Audience Engagement

Why, how, and when audiences choose to interact with organizational Facebook pages is an area of study that is quite new, but the existing literature in this area is promising. Recent studies have shown that the act of becoming a fan (or in current terms, liking) a Facebook page is not only a way to connect with particular brands or products but it also serves as a way of broadcasting affiliations to their own connections and contributing to their online identity formation (Hyllegard et al, 2011, p. 613). "Market mavenism" or a "consumer orientations towards product/brand and store information sharing" has also been found to be a prime

motivator for publicly showing affiliation with an organizational page (Hyllegard et al, 2011, p.

613). That users' desire to gain and share information is one of the primary reasons they

engage with corporate Facebook accounts shows the importance of interacting within these

sites not just as engaging with a brand but also as an opportunity to share resources through

the sharing of information.

Because social network sites are becoming increasingly important as a low-cost, high-

engagement form of marketing, the motivations for social network site use are also being

carefully studied. Beyond the need to broadcast affiliations, Foster, Francescucci and West

(2011) found that social network site users experienced five primary motivations for social

network site participation which includes "community membership, friendship connections,

information value, participation confidence and participation concerns" (p. 14). Facebook

pages created to represent an organization, entity or product, in this case referred to as

branded pages, tend to have audiences motivated primarily by community membership and

information value (Foster, Francescucci & West p. 16). This motivation points to audience's

desire to interact with people who may be outside of their existing networks as well as a desire

to gain and share information.

Online Comments

Social media encompasses more than just social network sites, and also includes online

platforms that, in a nutshell, offer audiences an increased opportunity to respond and react to

the media that they are presented with (Lee & Ma, 2012, p. 332). This includes the now fairly

established practice of including reader comment sections within media such as blog entries as well as mass media like newspaper articles where audience members can interact both with media makers, as well as other audience members.   In their study of online commenting behaviour, McCluskey and Hmielowski (2011) looked at how traditional letters to the editor differed from online comments on a newspaper website surrounding a contentious case of racism in the Louisiana school system. They suggest that online forums may allow for greater participation in public discourse and interaction with other users due to reduced barriers (p. 304). Their findings suggest that the potential for online anonymity as well as general ease of use of the online comment feature of newspaper websites created a larger volume of participation (p. 304). These authors also examine the role of the internet as a participatory public sphere that allows for greater opportunities to shape the media as opposed to simply receiving messages. Echoing Ball-Rokeach's MSD theory, McCluskey and Hmielowski consider the ways that these online commenters contribute information that may be outside of the official media reports, and share this information with other commenters, readers, and perhaps even journalists which help to shape media messages (p. 316).

While online comments offer avenues for audiences to interact with media, these comments may not actually influence media makers. If social media and the ability to respond instantly and in most cases anonymously to newspaper articles is considered to be a factor in increasing participatory media, then it stands to reason that both journalists and media institutions need to work with these authors. Santana (2011) found that 49% of journalists never respond to user comments, and 41% of journalists made no changes to their reporting practices based on

online comments (p. 73-74). This may be in part due to the fact that traditional letters to the editor are routinely vetted and attributed to a real name (as opposed to a pseudonym), whereas online comments usually contain some degree of anonymity and are not usually checked to ensure they include factual information (Santana, 2011, p. 68). Santana's study also found that most journalists believed that online comments did not promote civil discussion (p. 75) and that their overall view of reader comments was "dim" (p. 76).

While comments in response to posts on organizational Facebook pages are different than those in response to more in-depth online journalism, there are similarities. Social media in general is heralded as a democratic force for two-way communication, whether audiences are registering opinions about the stories of the day, or an unsatisfactory consumer experience. And just as online newspaper comments may not be an accurate reflection of public opinion (McCluskey & Hmielowski, 2011, p. 304) user comments on a brand's social network sites do not always reflect the true sentiment by a page's followers; users are more likely to post negative comments on organizational Facebook pages than they are to post glowing reviews (Champoux, Durgee, & McGlynn, 2012, p. 24).

Sharing News

The ways that audiences use social media and the ways that this reflects participation in a media system is especially important for this project. One action that is particularly salient is the way that audiences don't just consume news, but they share it among their personal and professional online networks. A 2010 study of American internet users found that 37% of those

polled have "contributed to the creation of news, commented about it, or disseminated it via

postings on social media sites like Facebook or Twitter" (Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel, &

Olmstead, 2010, p. 2).   News has always travelled through social networks, and word of mouth

has been a first source of information from everything to world leader's deaths to major

disasters (Yardi & boyd, 2010, p. 317). New technologies are increasingly encouraging the

diffusion of news through social media platforms, as a kind of digitized word of mouth (Yardi &

boyd, 2010, p. 317). The posting of this news is also considered to be a social act – 72% of

respondents to the survey above who identified themselves as online news consumers

reported that in part they shared news because they enjoyed discussing these stories with the

people in their personal networks (Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Olmstead, 2010, p. 4).

Another aspect of news sharing is the disclosure of personal events and history (Harber &

Cohen, 2005, p. 383). At their core, news stories are "the report of recent (especially important

or interesting) events or occurrences, published or broadcast through media or interpersonal

channels as new information" (Lee & Ma, 2012, p. 383). Turning towards personal experiences

rather than public events, emotional broadcasting or "emotionally driven reportage" (Harber &

Cohen, 2005, p. 383) serves as a transmission of news that is personally relevant for the teller,

but also offers significant impact on the receiver of such communications (p. 384). Thinking

about what counts as a traumatic event can be extended to public outrage, which can to be

caused primarily by three major factors: "harm, fear of harm and threatened values"

(Champoux, Durgee, & McGlynn, 2012, p. 22). A public event which threatens dearly held

values can constitute a distressing event which leaves the audience "compelled to

communicate their experiences" (Harber & Cohen, 2005, p. 383), with social media creating an opportunity to communicate these experiences both within and outside of interpersonal networks.

Overall, this literature shows that audiences work with social media in a variety of ways and that social network sites have become a location for interactions that move beyond interpersonal relationships. In addition to audience members and fans or followers becoming a commodity for marketers, users are also carving out a space to add to and share media messages. These interactions create what danah boyd refers to as "networked publics" or "publics that are restructured by networked technologies" (2011, p. 39). This understanding considers how online audiences make use of technologies to interact with the world around them. Looking at social media as a new kind of space, boyd states that "social network sites are publics both because of the ways in which they connect people en masse and because of the space they provide for interactions and information" (2011, p. 45). Like a traditional understanding of a public as a space for people to gather outside of their friends and family, a networked public allows users to gather and share information at a speed and volume that is simply impossible through face-to-face interaction (boyd, 2011, p. 39).

This online space created by social media is an important area of study for the field of professional communication, particularly when considering the variety of ways that audiences use social network sites. As a way to gather information and a space to share information with other users, social media constitutes an addition to the traditional media system and offers audiences increased opportunity to interact with media. All of these factors have important

implications for MSD theory that will be explored further through the study of audience

responses to SGK's decision to defund Planned Parenthood.

Methods

Data collection methods

This project explores user responses on a branded Facebook page, and considers how users of these pages share and interpret information. The responses that make up the data set are publicly viewable by anyone with an internet connection, and as such, are considered in the public domain and do not require ethics approval for collection.

Collecting the data for this project involved gathering samples from the five official messages posted by SGK that were still visible as of May 2012. These five official messages were the only posts created by SGK officials from January 31 to February 3 that had not been deleted by SGK administration, that explicitly mentioned the defunding of Planned Parenthood, and that were also publicly viewable in the time frame of data collection. As such, these messages made up the most relevant posts to study. Because these five messages garnered between 2000 and 11000 responses each, it was outside the scope of my project to analyze every comment. Instead, I gathered samples from each message, which included the first 50 responses, 50 responses from the middle of the thread, and the last 50 responses. This resulted in a total of 750 responses gathered. Although this sample may be missing important pieces of information, including comments that were deleted by the users that posted them or SGK officials, the sampling is intended to offer consistency and to consider the ways that responses may evolve over time.

For the purposes of this paper, examples of responses will be marked alphabetically (respondent A, respondent B and so on), and will be identified by the date and time they were posted. The responses have been included here as they were posted, with the exception of some editing for length, which has been noted. Because it is the responses that are of primary importance, the original messages will only be identified when the content of the message seems to directly relate to the content of the example. For further reference, the messages posted by SGK have been included in Appendix A.

Data analysis methods

These messages were all considered through a lens of computer-mediated discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a method of inquiry that "refers to attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units such as conversations exchanges or written text" (Stubbs, 1983, p. 1). When considering texts that are produced through online media, computer-mediated discourse analysis includes an examination of the ways that words and expressions create meaning with the addition of taking into account the affordances of computer-mediated communication platform (Herring, p. 66). A wider understanding of discourse that takes the nature of computer-mediated communication into account would, for example, consider the "like" function as part of the discourse, or otherwise consider the way that the audience makes use of the features and constraints present within a computer-mediated platform.

Each section of responses was copied from the Facebook pages and coded according to five

different criteria:

1) If the response contained reference to the original message – this could be directly
   quoting the original message or using specific phrasing from the message, or answering
   a question posed in the original post.

2) If the response contained links to outside sources.

3) If the response included outside information including statistics that were not
   mentioned in the official SGK message, but were also not directly linked. Some
   messages in this category did name the original source of this information, while others
   did not.

4) If the response referred to personal experience in making an argument or offering
   additional information about the events.

5) If the response was directed to other users in general, or conversation with another
   responder who was named directly.

These criteria were chosen in order to further tease out the different sources of information

that audiences of branded Facebook pages are using in responding to official messages. In

preliminary data analysis, these five criteria were found to be the most prevalent sources of

information, and most of the messages that were offering information beyond an opinion or a

judgement fell into one of the above categories. All five criteria function in ways that fit in with

the ways that MSD understands audiences as social and oriented towards reducing ambiguity in

their immediate social environment and through media messages and/or include the practice

of value-framing.

In addition to these criteria, messages were further broken down into general sentiment – either appearing to side with Planned Parenthood and/or pro-choice points of view, or appearing to side with SGK and/or pro-life points of view. Responses that did not clearly exhibit a sentiment towards Planned Parenthood or SGK were included in a third category. Many of the responses did not fall directly under the above criteria and these were excluded from the analysis.

When analyzing the responses to this official message, there are many different factors that could provide considerable areas for study. Responders to these posts had strong opinions about the original message, the overall decision to defund Planned Parenthood, abortion, health care, breast cancer as a disease, SGK as an organization and their integrity (or lack thereof) and many other topics. I chose to focus on the sources of information that were used in responses to the official messages in order to explore the ways that audiences interacted with media and operated as a social, connected group and as individuals.

It is important to note that with the exception of the posting of links, many of these categories rely on my own interpretation of the messages, and as such, there is a possibility that my interpretation would be different than what was intended by users who posted these responses. All attempts have been made to create discrete categories that allow for cut and dry interpretation, but there is a possibility that, for example, a response that I identify as directly referring to the original message was merely a coincidence of phrasing, or my understanding of sentiment was different than their own. Similarly, some messages could fall under multiple categories, and when this happened, they were included in each applicable

group. Despite these limitations, the sources of information used by responders to these

messages are especially indicative of the ways that a social media audience function as part of a

media system and brings into focus the ways that social media can be understood through MSD

theory.

Findings

TABLE 1: FINDINGS AND SENTIMENT

Type of message	Total number	% of sample	Sentiment		
			Pro-Planned Parenthood/ pro- choice	Pro-SGK/ pro-life	Neutral/ unknown
Sharing Links	48	6.4%	82%	14%	4%
Refers to Original Message	104	13.9%	89%	8%	2%
Refers to Outside Knowledge	65	8.7%	65%	33%	2%
Includes Users' Own Experience	31	4.1%	58%	38%	4%
Refers to Other Commenters	59	7.9%	49%	20%	31%

Posting of Links

In total, I identified 47 links posted throughout my total sample of 750 messages, meaning 6.3%

of messages included posting a link to an outside source of information. Responses that

included links frequently had no other text, and the response only consisted of a hyperlink

which, if clicked, would take the reader to an outside source of information. Impressionistically,

it appears that links were more likely to be posted in the last 50 messages than at the beginning

or middle of the response thread, perhaps due to the increased availability of relevant sources

to link to as time went on. Links were also more likely to be posted to articles that reflected a

pro-Planned Parenthood or pro-choice sentiment (82%) than links that lead to articles that

reflected a pro-SGK or pro-life sentiment (14% of links posted).

The links posted primarily led to sources that could be read as critical of SGK's decision or

actions on various social media channels. Links to sources of information that were critical of

SGK's decision frequently led users to left-leaning blogs like *Jezebel* and *Huffington Post*, with some representation from more right-wing sources like *Fox News* and *One News* , a Christian, pro-life news website. In addition to news posts, links also led to action-oriented websites with a petition for Karen Handel, the Vice President of SGK as well as a politician who had campaigned on eliminating funding for Planned Parenthood on a state-level (Casserly 2012). Action-oriented posts continued with links that led to Komen's listing on CharityNavigator.org, a website that rates charities on their effectiveness and explores how much of their budget goes towards the stated mission and how much to administration and fundraising. The third type of action-oriented links were those that included a call for boycotts of sponsors. This type of link included those that led to a list of Komen sponsors, urging readers not to support those that support SGK, as well as a list of supporters of Planned Parenthood, urging readers not to support those organizations. A final type of link included those that were meant to be humourous, including one user's link which led to a music video entitled "Lies" and another to an image that stated "Komen – Time to start with a CLEAN slate! Nancy and the Board that agreed with her - have GOT to go!"

Referring to the Original Message

Throughout the sample of responses, I identified a total of 104 direct responses to the original message as posted by SGK, amounting to 13% of all responses directly speaking to the posts by SGK. This means that the most frequently used source of information posted by audience members was the original message itself. This type of response typically employed phrasing that was taken directly from the original message, responded to a question posted, or denied

that veracity of the original statement or the overall intentions of SGK. For example, in response to a message that began "Our supporters know that no other breast cancer organization serves women at the size and scope that Susan G. Komen for the Cure does", one user posted:

> Respondent A: And do your supporters know that 20 cents of every dollar goes to paying the "Ambassadors" annual salary? (February 6 at 11:54 am)

The vast majority of these responses were considered to express sentiments that sided with Planned Parenthood or pro-choice sentiments, with a total of 93 responses, or 89% of the sample, leaving 9 messages or 8% of responses expressing sentiments favouring SGK or a pro-life stance and 2 responses or 2% categorized as neutral or unknown. One message posted by SGK in particular garnered a much larger number of responses that directly addressed the original message, most likely because this message asked a direct question of the audience. In Message 3, the original message states "Did you happen to catch Nancy G. Brinker on MSNBC's Andrea Mitchell Reports this afternoon talking about our new grants standards? If not, where's [sic] a clip", with a video clip inserted into the post. 51 of the 104 (49%) of messages that referred directly to the original post were in response to this message alone.

Outside Knowledge

While many of the posts linked directly to outside information to add to the discussion occurring on the SGK Facebook page, a larger number used outside information without directly leading readers to the source of that information.   Throughout the sample taken of

these responses, I identified a total of 65 responses (8.6% of the sample) that made use of

outside knowledge that was not directly linked, and only sometimes attributed to an outside

source. Of these 65 responses, responses that expressed sentiments that appeared to favour

Planned Parenthood or were pro-choice added up to 40 messages or 65% of responses, and

those that favoured SGK or pro-life sentiments equaled 22 messages or 33% of responses.

These responses in this category included mentioning outside sources by name but not

providing direct links, as well as simply including information about the events, Planned

Parenthood and SGK that were not given within the original messages posted by SGK. The

posts in this category included information about the salaries of SGK and Planned Parenthood

executives, the amount of funding that was rescinded, the number of abortions that Planned

Parenthood performed in the history of their existence or within a set time period, the

percentage of Planned Parenthood's budget that was set aside to performing abortions,

responders beliefs about the links between abortion and breast cancer as well as many other

contentious topics. While there is little way to know exactly where users found the

information, the large number of articles surfacing in blogs and mainstream media sources are

likely to have led to responses that include a variety of viewpoints and information beyond that

which SGK presented in their official messaging.

Personal Experience

In total, I identified 31 (4% of the total sample) responses where the writer used their own

personal experience in their response. 18 (58%) of responses appeared to express pro-choice

or pro Planned Parenthood sentiments, 12 (38%) of responses appeared to express pro-life or

pro-SGK sentiments, with just 1 message being classified as neutral or unknown. Comments

that were considered to use personal experience included those that made "I" statements such

as "I'm a breast cancer survivor" or "I've donated to SGK in the past". While the use of personal

experience was the least frequently used source of information found in the responses to

official SGK messages, this category is still important in understanding the ways that a wide

variety of sources that information can come from, and the ways that personal experience is

used to validate arguments.

Responses Directed at Other Commenters

In total I identified 59 messages (7.9% of the total sample) that were in direct response to other

posters, 29 (49%) of those responses appearing to be pro-choice or pro-Planned Parenthood,

and 12 (20%) of the responses expressing pro-life or pro-SGK sentiments. Of special note in this

category is the number of responses that could not easily be determined to be expressing clear

preference for one "side" of the debate, and 18 (31%) of the responses were classified as

neutral or unknown. This large number is likely due to the inability to effectively track

conversations. If a responder posted something like "Jennifer, you are wrong" but Jennifer's

response is unavailable, there is little context to determine the sentiments being expressed.

Responses that were coded as responding to other users within the thread were included if

they were a direct response, that is, they included another user by name or if the wording of

the response indicated that they were talking about another user or otherwise mentioning

other comments in their response. It is likely that there were more responses posted that were

in indirect response to other users but directly tracing these messages through such a massive

amount of responses was impossible due to the scope of this project. Another limitation of this category is the inability to effectively track conversations between users. Because this project includes 15 message clusters from 5 different messages, and 50 message clusters of 50 were usually posted within very short time frames, often as short as 4 minutes, it was not possible to view the ways that responders continued to engage with each other. The appearance that SGK was deleting a large number of responses (based on surviving comments by audience members mentioning that their comments were disappearing) also made it difficult to track possible conversations. Despite this, there were still a considerable number of commenters who posted directly to other commenters rather than to the SGK messages, showing the ways that audiences may operate outside of directly available media and experience sociality with other users.

Overall, there were a total of 307 messages (41% of the total sample) coded for this project. This means that more than half of the messages included in this sample were not clearly exhibiting information use that fell into one of the above five categories. The omitted messages tended to be short (frequently just one word like "shame" or "yay"), wildly off-topic, spam, or were otherwise responses that didn't clearly articulate a sharing of information, and were more likely to be opinion, admonishment or praise. This sample also appears to reflect the general sentiment within the message threads as a whole, and Polipulse, an online conversation aggregator, estimated that approximately 75% of all social media responses were against the SGK decision (Basset 2012).

Discussion

The results for this study show that audience members do not exclusively use the information provided to them through the official messages posted by SGK on their Facebook page. Only 13% of responses of the 750 response sample directly responded to the official media message. Many of these responses aren't only direct replies to the official messages, but they often call into question the sentiments that SGK is expressing. In addition to replying directly to the messages posted by SGK, audience members found news from blogs, traditional media and other sources and shared this news with other users, as well as shared their own experiences with breast cancer, SGK or Planned Parenthood, and they discussed these issues with other users. The use of information not included by SGK officials further exhibits qualities of a media system, where audiences are active, social and sharing information resources in order to reduce ambiguity. Regardless of whether the messages posted by audience members included the direct sharing of information or were short opinions directed at SGK, the space carved out on SGK's organizational Facebook page had effectively become a public space for users to interact about the many intersecting issues the SGK's decision to defund Planned Parenthood's breast health programs brought up for audience members.

In 1998, as the internet was growing in popularity and use but before the rise of social media and social network sites, Ball-Rokeach proposed that computer mediated communications would still exist "in context of the established media system with all of its asymmetric producer-consumer relations, that privilege producers over consumers" (p. 31). The responses on the

SGK Facebook page show that users can upset relationships between media makers and audiences through social media platforms and how the increasing opportunities for audiences to publicly speak back to media makers with diminished barriers allows for greater voice for people outside the media machine.

Posting of Links

The ability to post links to outside information is a unique capability that is offered by online forums. While avenues for audiences to contribute to or respond to media such as letters to the editor certainly allow the reader to mention sources that could counter or support the original message, social media platforms like Facebook allow users to see this information first hand, almost immediately. The posting of links within user responses is also a direct example of one way that online audiences share news. By making use of the ability to post links within a comment thread on Facebook in response to official messages, users are taking the opportunity to share news with those outside of their immediate social networks and instead they are disseminating news to a larger public gathered to discuss the issues surrounding SGK's decision to defund Planned Parenthood.

By posting links, users are also working in two ways that are consistent with MSD – attempting to reduce ambiguity and acting socially in regards to media. The messages posted by SGK officials to their Facebook page contained a very limited amount of information. And unlike traditional media sources, there is no expectation on a branded Facebook page to tell the truth or to remain objective. As such, the audience on this Facebook page expressed doubt that they

were getting the whole story, and sought out (or found) alternate sources of information that

would help them to understand these events more. It is the sharing of this news, and how

users end up "pooling their resources" (Shibutani, 1966, p. 9) to reduce ambiguity that follows

Ball-Rokeach's understanding of audiences as social creatures working collectively to

understand the world around them (1998, p. 26).

Outside Knowledge

Many of the responses to the messages posted on the SGK Facebook page made use of outside

information that is not directly and immediately linked to readers. In contrast to posting links,

this category of responses usually presented information not contained within the original

message, but presented this information as fact with no easy way for the reader to verify this

information without additional effort. Several of the messages did name the sources of the

information that was presented within the response, but in the context of online

communications, offered little opportunity for readers to find this information with ease.

Messages that included outside information with sources included:

> Respondent B: "Breast cancer deaths have dropped steadily since 1990, *but they
> have declined at slower rates among women living in poor areas, according to a
> new report from the American Cancer Society*. The report, released Monday,
> finds that despite continuing progress in reducing breast cancer deaths
> nationwide, survival rates are lower among women in poor areas. From 2003 to
> 2007, those women had a 7 percent higher risk of death from breast cancer than
> women living in affluent areas." (February 1 at 8:54am)

> Respondent C: Maybe pp should spend their money more wisely also! Do you know how much they spend for POLITICAL LOBBYING for abortion policy? Total Lobbying Expenditures: $1,740,644 from OpenSecrets.org Center for Responsive Politics (February 6 at 11:44am)

Messages that included information presented as factual but without sources listed, creating an even more difficult task for readers who might wish to verify this information included:

> Respondent D: sadly you spend less then 40% of all your income on research and women's health. The other 60+% is spent on fundraising and executive salaries...... (February 2 at 9:06pm)
>
> Respondent E: I posted the following, but it disappeared.
> "Thank you for your recent decision to stop supporting Planned Parenthood!!! I'm so excited!!! Still, no body is talking about **the proven link** [emphasis added] between abortion and breast cancer... You want to help fight breast cancer? Fight abortion!!! God Bless!!!"   (February 2 at 9:07pm)

While the first type of message is arguably leaving a source for audiences to verify this information, without a direct link, this information does become more of a challenge to find and is a less effective way of sharing information than directly linking the source is. With the second example of presenting information without any source mentioned, a clearer example of the difficulty of verifying information emerges.

Considering the information in this category under Shibutani's (1966) definition of rumour as a "message passed from person to person" (p.4) poses challenges to the idea of how rumors may be spread online. Social media offers a chance for individuals who would typically be considered consumers rather than creators of media to broadcast their opinions to a larger readership than they would normally be able to reach by word of mouth. The act of becoming

a prosumer in this case allows for rumour to be broadcast on a larger scale. With this unverifiable (or difficult to verify) information being shared on a public forum where users can express their opinions and share information, an extension of Shibutani's definition for the age of social media to could include messages passed from audience member to audience member. The information contained in the responses included in this category could be classified as rumor then, due to the audience member to audience member nature of the messages.

The messages included in the category of outside knowledge can also be seen as another opportunity for users to pool their resources (Shibutani, 1966, p. 9) to make sense of the confusing events surrounding SGK's decision to defund Planned Parenthood. When considering the responses as a whole, it is important to note that none of the messages explicitly stated what led to the defunding of Planned Parenthood beyond "changes in priorities and policies" (SGK Facebook Page February 1 2012). Because of the lack of information offered by the official messages, audience members who were publicly responding had little choice but to gain information from outside sources in order to make sense of SGK's messages, and they shared this information either directly as evidenced by the posting of links, or more casually through outside knowledge that was not directly linked. In this way, SGK's vague messaging encouraged audience members seek additional information in order to make sense of the events, and a lack of clarity on the part of SGK caused users to work together in order to reduce the ambiguity of the official messages.

Referring to the Original Message

The comments that were included in this category directly answer to the original message

posted by SGK through repeating phrasing or offering a statement that directly challenges or

supports the original message or otherwise makes clear mention that their response is directly

related to the original message. There were a number of responses that used the words of the

original message to make their point, and these responses tended to be critical of SGK's stance.

The fourth message posted by SGK that was studied for this project reads:

> Our supporters know that no other breast cancer organization serves women at the size
> and scope that Susan G. Komen for the Cure does. Screening, help through treatment,
> social and financial support provided by $93 million in Komen community funding to
> 2,000 organizations last year alone.

Some users chose to flip SGK's words and use this message against the organization and their
decision:

> Respondent F: And how many of them are under federal investigation but still
> receiving funding from SGK? Because I can think of one. (February 2 at 9:06pm)
>
> Respondent G: All EXCEPT Planned Parenthood. One of the largest providers of
> mammogram's to women without insurance. (February 2 at 9:07pm)
>
> Respondent H: Really? Why don't you go stand outside of PP and tell that to the
> women that you just threw under the bus. Tell that to your sponsors that are losing
> money hand over fist because you jumped when the right wing said frog. (February
> 2 at 9:07pm)
>
> Respondent I: You mean you used to be the largest. Those days are over. SGK and
> their corporate supporters are boycotted from here on out. (February 2 at 9:07pm)

These responses illustrate the ways that users do actually pay attention to the original message.

This example also shows the ways that value-frames can be turned by a hostile audience. While

SGK is framing their organization as positive, helpful and charitable, the responses answer back

with a different vision. Through language like "our supporters know", SGK is positioning

dissention as coming from individuals who are not (or were not) really supporters in the first

place, thus attempting to diminish the legitimacy of those audience members who do not agree

with SGK. Further, the assertion in this message that "no other breast cancer organization

serves women at the size and scope that Susan G. Komen for the Cure does" creates an

impression of SGK as the biggest and best breast cancer organization, perhaps implying that

giving money to other organizations would not have those dollars as well spent, and donations

to SGK would be more effective. Finally, the mention of "$93 million in Komen community

funding to 2,000 organizations last year alone" serves to frame SGK as generous and charitable,

an example of Ball-Rokeach's (1990) understanding of instrumental values, particularly of

"preferred modes of conduct" (p. 255).

SGK's attempts to value-frame their own position as moral and fair was swiftly interrupted by

audience members that responded directly to original messages. Looking at the general

sentiment contained within this category of responses, we find the highest proportion of

responses identified as being pro-choice or pro-Planned Parenthood (89% of responses) than in

any other category. This suggests that SGK's attempts at value-framing themselves and their

decision to defund Planned Parenthood were ineffective, and may have encouraged a high

number of responses that value-framed Planned Parenthood as deserving of donations,

attention and protection.

While 89% of responses in this category exhibited sentiment identified as pro-Planned

Parenthood or pro-choice, the responses that made reference to the original message in a

supportive manner sometimes did so by subtly reinforcing the perceived reason for the

decision – for SGK to distance themselves from abortion providers – rather than the vaguely

stated "changes in policies and priorities" offered by SGK:

Respondent J: I wish I could like this post for every child that has ever been aborted. Spew your hate elsewhere. The decision has been made and it is a wonderful and glorious decision. Praise Jesus! (February 1 at 6:04pm)

Respondent K: Sick and appalled at your decisions to help fund PP.....the LARGEST provider in the world to kill babies! I was very excited to hear you pulled the grants. This is sick :(..... PP doesn't even provide mammograms! THIS IS JUST WRONG! (February 3 at 12:03pm)

These messages in particular are especially interesting in that they are expressing approval for

SGK's original message, but by reinforcing the perceived reason of distancing themselves from

Planned Parenthood due to issues around abortion. This does point to users on both sides of

the argument (both pro-choice and pro-life) believing that the message posted by SGK is lacking

credibility, with some responders believing that this is a negative decision, and others believing

that this is a positive decision. This could be a result of the ambiguity in the messaging posted

by SGK. By keeping their statements ambiguous, audience members who were generally

oriented towards a pro-life standpoint were able to see SGK's decision in a positive light, and

shared their beliefs about SGK making a moral decision.

Referring to Personal Experience

While the use of personal experience in responses was the least populated category with only

31 messages, or 4% of the total sample sharing this type of information, this category is still

important for the ways it exhibits audience members' personal ties to the issues that the events

surrounding SGK and the defunding of Planned Parenthood. In a blog post written by digital

activist Deanna Zandt about the social media response to SGK's decision, she notes that

"people who are involved in working towards a cure for breast cancer are coming to this work

often for very emotional reasons: because they have survived, or they know someone who has–

or hasn't" (2012). The emotional reasons and personal experience with breast cancer that

brought people to the SGK page are especially evident within this category. Some examples of

messages that were categorized as using personal experience as a source of information

include:

> Respondent L: It is SO SAD what has become of you guys. I lost my sister to this and supported your for a very long time. Maybe now it is time to pull out and let everyone know just exactly what is going on. SAD, SAD SAD HOW COULD YOU (February 1 at 6:03pm)
>
> Respondent M: [message cut for length] Before the left starts screaming at me...I DO have skin in the game. I am fighting breast cancer right now and have two daughters who one day will more than likely fight it too. We've talked and we would rather die than support an organization like SGK who behind our backs gives our donations and time to PP. (February 6 at 12:17pm)

The use of personal experience within these responses is an example of what Harber and Cohen

(2005) refer to as "emotional broadcasting". As the events surrounding SGK and Planned

Parenthood were distressing for a number of audience members in part due to an emotional

connection to the issue of breast cancer, it stands to reason that this audience would feel

compelled to share their experiences with a wider audience. Harber and Cohen suggest that

"disclosing emotionally arousing events serves important intrapersonal needs, including the

need to align schemas and beliefs with new information" (p. 396). By using their own

experiences to make sense of the issues brought up by the SGK decision to defund Planned

Parenthood, users on both sides of the issue were able to create a better understanding for

themselves and their audience about the complexities of the events in question.

Another important function served by the audience's use of personal experience is the ability to

work explicitly with value-frames. While value-frames are evident in many types of messages,

the use of personal experience within this category frames the author as good and right, and

SGK, Planned Parenthood or other users as less so.

Respondent N: My mother died of breast cancer this year. I have supported your
organization for years now. I am very disappointed in your decision to support
planned parenthood in any way. Pre born women have just as much of a right to
life as those who have already been born. You have lost my support permanently
until you renounce and apologize to pro life advocates for taking our funds and
supporting an organization such as this. (February 5 at 7:40pm)

Respondent O: I was waiting for your response before I made this decision. I have
raised thousands of dollars for you over the years. I was volunteer of the year for
my affiliate in 2009. I was also helped by a Planned Parenthood grant you funded
eight years ago. You just lost my support. I am so sorry you brought politics into it.
(February 1 at 8:57am)

Each of these responses frame the users as moral, and SGK or Planned Parenthood as counter

to the values expressed in the response. Both messages make explicit mention of the past

support that each individual has offered to SGK. The first message adds additional personal

experience with losing a family member to breast cancer, and the second message offers

additional information about the ways that the author was helped not just by SGK, but also by

Planned Parenthood. While these two messages express opposite standpoints on the events,

they are both writing against SGK – the first message after SGK reversed their decision to

defund Planned Parenthood, the second message before the reversal. Ball-Rokeach writes that

value-frames are "the criterion by which people, events and issues are evaluated" (1998, p.

255). This understanding allows us to view messages that use personal experience as offering

an evaluation of the major players in these events. The use of personal experience in creating

value-frames in these instances create an opportunity for users to share a different type of

news and a different source of information than the messages that rely on sources such as links

to other websites or the original message. That this information is built upon value-frames may

also allow this information to be seen as legitimate by other users as well as SGK who are

invested in their past supporters as necessary stakeholders in the charity's future success.

Comments Directed at Other Users

As seen in the previous section examining the posting of links in user responses, audience

members made use of the technological potentials of social network sites in order to share

information. Similarly, the nature of social media platforms and comment sections also allow

users to engage with other users in ways that are much easier than through traditional media,

such as letters to the editor. The data sample as a whole shows that not only were audience

members engaging with the official messages posted by SGK, but they were also engaging with

each other in a way that clearly demonstrates audience's sociality. The ability for users to

interact with each other with an immediacy not offered by non-digital media creates

opportunities to change the way conversations unfold as additional information,

admonishment, praise, opinion reinforcement and other factors are added into the mix. It is

beyond the scope of this project and the limited data set to determine what, if any effect

comments directed at other users might have had on the discussion as a whole. But what is clear about these comments is that users are engaging with each other within a new type of public space, and in a way that reflects Ball-Rokeach's understanding of value-frames and using a language of morals in their interactions with other users.

Comments directed at other users are the clearest example of the communication possibilities within what danah boyd refers to as "networked publics" (2011). boyd argues that platforms such as Facebook constitute a new kind of public with specific possibilities of connecting a large number of people to share information (p. 45). Importantly, she also stresses that the features of social network sites "do not dictate participants' behavior, but they do configure the environment in a way that shapes participants' engagement" (p. 39). The environment of the SGK Facebook page, as a space created and maintained by SGK officials and with a default view set for users to first see the official messages left by SGK does encourage a space for discussion about SGK, even in this time of upheaval and protest. But the users who are engaging with each other went outside of the expectations of the environment to engage with each other as well as official messaging. For example, some users responding to each other did not mention SGK or Planned Parenthood at all, instead dealing with the larger issue of abortion:

> Respondent P: arent you pro choicers glad your moms chose life??????????
> (February 7 at 6:57pm)
>
> Respondent Q: Ian Arnold is right, life does not begin at contraception. That is the whole point if you use contraception correctly you will not have a life. However, life does begin at conception. The cell does not have to have a human shape for it to be human, what makes us human and separates us for monkeys is the DNA, the DNA begins to duplicate immediately, with both DNA's combining and first cell separation around 30 hours after fertilization. IAN personhood does begin at conception, that is when the DNA combines and figures out what it wants to be. (February 4 at 12:01 am)

> Respondent R: James, you know what is alive and also has human DNA? Cancer cells! ~*~ life is precious ~*~ (February 4 at 12:02am)

In these entries, we can see that some users have moved on entirely from considering whether SGK was right or wrong to cease funding Planned Parenthood's breast cancer screening programs. Rather, these users are engaging with each other over the much larger issue of abortion and when life begins – a discussion probably not intended by SGK officials.

In addition to the ways that users' engagement with other users can be understood within a context of networked publics, these actions can also be understood in relation to MSD theory. First and foremost, MSD's understanding of audiences as social can be seen as exhibited strongly within this category. Beyond this, users within this category are typically responding to other users to either assert or defend their own moral positions in a way that clearly demonstrates the concept of value-frames. According to Ball-Rokeach, it is through the language of values that groups work towards giving their views legitimacy (1990, p. 255). The messages contained within this category were typically calling into question other users' values and implicitly or explicitly holding their own values as right, moral and legitimate:

> Respondent S: Hey, Marianne... did you know your precious SGK gave 7.5 million dollars to Penn State this year? Are you proud to be a supporter of child rape? (February 3 at 1:14am)
>
> Respondent T: "Pro-choice or pro-life- irrelevant when it comes to preventing breast cancer." Really? Then how come all you pro-abortion people are pulling your support because an organization that works tirelessly to prevent breast cancer no longer gives funds to a pro-abortion organization? Obviously it matters to you, you'll only help cure cancer if pro-abortion groups get money out of it. (February 1 at 6:04pm)

> Respondent U: Good, to all of you who say you will now give to PP personally, so the blood can be on your hands. (February 2 at 10:55pm)

Ball-Rokeach understands value-frames as being asserted in order to control scarce resources (1990, p. 264). In the case of user comments directed at other users, the scarce resources could be media coverage or the opinion of both readers and responders. While at times the responses that are directed to other users are verging on crude or malicious, these responses function as a direct questioning not only of the moral position of SGK or Planned Parenthood, but also of their supporters. In addition to challenging official messages, we can also see these responses within a context of "open conflicts about issues of contested legitimacy" and as coming from actors in their own "morality plays" (Ball-Rokeach et al, 1990 p. 262). The personal attacks, the rudeness, and the sarcasm are ways that users are able to assert the legitimacy of their own positions over others.

The responses to official SGK messages that are directed at other users are not as easily classified as a source of information in the same way that links or other mentions to outside sources, personal experience or the original message itself. Despite this, looking at the comments directed at other users does give an impression about the ways that this space is used in multiple ways beyond just answering the original message. As a public space, users are able to interact with each other and not just those who are broadcasting official messages. This interaction not only demonstrates the ways that audience members are acting socially, but also that the low barriers to contribution within social network sites explicitly encourage this interaction.

The categories used for these responses – responding to the original message, posting links to outside information, including outside information that was not linked, personal experience, and responses to other users - are just some of the more common ways that users chose to express themselves. Again, it is important to also note that many users did not share information directly with other users or engage with other users at all and instead used short statements that registered support or displeasure with SGK's decision. What is also interesting about these responses is the ways that they can overlap. All categories show a level of sociality – whether that is through sharing of news or personal experience, or engaging in discussion with other users. Similarly, several of the messages used in this sample also used multiple strategies in their responses, showing the ways that these strategies are not always hard and fast, for example, a comment that uses both personal experience of previous support for SGK alongside a link to an outside news source.

What is also clear from this data sample is that several aspects of MSD theory can be applied to social media. Particularly, what this data shows is that audiences are active, social participants in media. Further, these audience members are especially engaged in working collectively to reduce the ambiguity of the official SGK messaging, and actively employ value-frames through the use of personal experience and in conversation with other users in order to assert the legitimacy of their own position and to question the legitimacy of positions that they find disagreeable. At the very core of these findings is preliminary understanding that Ball-Rokeach's MSD theory can indeed be expanded to include social media platforms and online

communications, making this theory all the more relevant for communications studies and the

field of professional communication.

Conclusion

This project shows a few of the ways that social media audiences are using different sources of information in their responses to media messages. Further, these audience members are working in ways consistent with MSD, including being active, social participants in a media system. By taking advantage of the space created by SGK on Facebook, audience members are able to participate, both as individuals and as a collective, in a public space, and in ways that are distinct from creating or maintaining interpersonal relationships. While the digital public space carved out by SGK may have been created with the intention of marketing or branding, audience members were able to recast this space as a forum for discussion about abortion and related issues. This also points to the unpredictable nature of social media, and the ways that an active audience can use media outside of any intended usage, and in ways that may reflect poorly upon the media maker.

Audience members responding to SGK's messages also actively employed value-frames in their responses on the SGK Facebook page, and these responses were directed at SGK, other commenters, as well as a general reading public. Because of an increased use of social media websites, in particular social network sites like Facebook, there is the potential for postings on these sites to have an increased effect on public opinion. This means that SGK's Facebook page became a location for the race for legitimacy as described by Ball-Rokeach. While it is outside the scope of this project to determine what effect value-framing by audience members may have had on public opinion surround SGK's decision to defund Planned Parenthood, or if the

value-frames employed effected public opinion in a larger way around the issue of abortion, what is clear is that the space created on SGK's Facebook page was used as a place to question the moral legitimacy of abortion and SGK's position in these debates.

SGK's Facebook page may not be considered media in the same sense that a large newspaper or a nightly television news broadcast might be; while these sources of news can be understood within a larger system of journalism and the many ways that audiences engage with that type of media, a branded Facebook page is more clearly focused upon a more narrow range of interests, for a more narrowly defined audience. Despite this, branded Facebook pages do have the potential to shape discussion within social media platforms, including the ability to delete comments, or control what users see when they first arrive on the page. It is in these ways that the central question of MSD - "why, when and how are media powerful regarding individuals and interpersonal networks, and with what consequences" (Ball-Rokeach, 1998, p. 27) - can be revisited. This study shows that social media can be powerful in providing a space for discussion that suggests what shape this discussion should take, but that this power does not translate into control over what ways that discussion evolves. Further, SGK may have reduced their own power due to the ambiguity of their messages, and this likely contributed to the large volume of messages in that audiences needed to work collectively to create a fuller understanding of the issues at play.

While this project has considered several crucial aspects of MSD theory in relation to social media, and in particular social media audience members, there are still a number of limitations for this study. The limited sample in the face of the overwhelming amount of data means that

the findings presented here could be different if the full range of responses was considered.

The research presented here is a good starting point to understanding the sources of

information that social media audience members use in response to contentious issues, but

additional studies might include the full range of responses as well as tracking interactions

between users more fully to consider the ways that branded Facebook pages evolve as

networked publics. The limited scope of this project also necessitated a somewhat limited

exploration of MSD theory as well. Additional research in this area could also explore multiple

social media platforms and the ways that official messaging (as opposed to user-generated

content) fits with MSD theory.

Despite these limitations, this study does show the ways that audiences can be powerful in

their responses to media, perhaps in part due to the increased ability for users to generate

content as prosumers. Ball-Rokeach considered the increased use of the internet to exist in the

"context of the established media system with all of its asymmetric producer-consumer

relations" (1998, p. 31), and it may be that the rise of social media has served to create

sufficient production resources to leave audiences more powerful in relation to media than

ever before. Future research could look further at the ways that social media audiences, user

comments and other forms of user-generated content may be effect public opinion, and how

user-generated content may be adding to the messages transmitted by mass media, such as

national newspapers. As social media and social network sites continue to grow and act as a

source of shared information as well as a public space for audience discussion, this medium will

need to be a continued area of study for professional communication.

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Appendix A

Message 1:   Posted by SGK on Facebook on February 1 2012

At Susan G. Komen for the Cure, the women we serve are our highest priority in everything we do. Last year, we invested $93 million in community health programs, which included 700,000 mammograms. Additionally, we began an initiative to further strengthen our grants program to be even more outcomes-driven and to allow for even greater investments in programs that directly serve women. We also implemented more stringent eligibility and performance criteria to support these strategies. While it is regrettable when changes in priorities and policies affect any of our grantees, such as a longstanding partner like Planned Parenthood, we must continue to evolve to best meet the needs of the women we serve and most fully advance our mission.

It is critical to underscore that the women we serve in communities remain our priority. We are working directly with Komen Affiliates to ensure there is no interruption or gaps in services for women who need breast health screening and services.

Grant making decisions are not about politics--our priority is and always will be the women we serve. Making this issue political or leveraging it for fundraising purposes would be a disservice to women.

Message 2: Posted by SGK on February 2 2012

Our Board of Directors approved new grants standards to improve direct services to women, says Komen Founder and CEO Amb. Nancy G. Brinker. Money is not being "withdrawn" from Planned Parenthood – will be invested in programs to serve low income, uninsured and underinsured women.

Message 3: Posted by SGK on February 2 2012

Did you happen to catch Nancy G. Brinker on MSNBC's Andrea Mitchell Reports this afternoon talking about our new grants standards? If not, where's a clip: *(included embedded video)*

Message 4: Posted by SGK on February 2 2012

Our supporters know that no other breast cancer organization serves women at the size and scope that Susan G. Komen for the Cure does. Screening, help through treatment, social and financial support provided by $93 million in Komen community funding to 2,000 organizations last year alone.

Message 5: Posted by SGK on February 3 2012

The events of this week have been deeply unsettling for our supporters, partners and friends and all of us at Susan G. Komen. We have been distressed at the presumption that the changes made to our funding criteria were done for political reasons or to specifically penalize Planned Parenthood. They were not.

Our original desire was to fulfill our fiduciary duty to our donors by not funding grant applications made by organizations under investigation. We will amend the criteria to make clear that disqualifying investigations must be criminal and conclusive in nature and not political. That is what is right and fair.