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## Significance of the general public for public relations: A study of the blogosphere's impact on the October 2006 Edelman/Wal-Mart crisis

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SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS:  
A STUDY OF THE BLOGOSPHERE'S IMPACT ON THE  
OCTOBER 2006 EDELMAN/WAL-MART CRISIS

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Sergei Golitsinski  
University of Northern Iowa  
December 2007

## ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is the general public and its significance in a public relations context. The study questions one of the fundamental principles of public relations, according to which organizations communicate only with those publics which have the potential to cause them negative consequences. The general public, according to this principle, is considered insignificant and even nonexistent.

This study's hypothesis is that new communication technologies have given the general public the power to cause direct negative consequences for organizations. To evaluate this hypothesis, the study examines the October 2006 Edelman/Wal-Mart crisis caused by the "Wal-Marting Across America" blog. The blog was launched by Edelman as a publicity stunt on behalf of Wal-Mart, yet it was presented as an independent blog maintained by a couple traveling in their RV and writing stories about happy Wal-Mart employees. The truth was revealed in a *Business Week* article, which triggered a massive discussion in the blogosphere and mainstream media.

The methodology of this study involves quantitative and qualitative analysis of blog posts and mainstream media articles. Relevant blog posts were collected and processed with the help of a computer science approach, which consisted of automatically exploring the Web and discovering blogs participating in the conversation, and constructing a chronological model of this conversation for further analysis, represented as a graph, with nodes denoting blog posts, and the edges – the links between these posts. The final data set consists of 18 mainstream media articles, and 156 blogs containing 201 relevant posts, connected by 1,548 links.

The results of the study demonstrate that Edelman suffered significant negative consequences which were caused by the blogosphere. The negative consequences included significant negative publicity, as well as a negative public opinion on Edelman, formed through the discussion on the blogosphere. The study demonstrates that the consequences were caused by collective action on behalf of all blogs involved in the conversation. It is argued that the individuals and groups behind these blogs represent multiple publics, which can be described in the context of this study as the general public. Therefore, the hypothesis of this study is supported: new communication technologies, such as the blogosphere, have given the general public the power to cause direct negative consequences for organizations. The study also describes some implications these results may have for existing public relations theory.

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December 2007

This Study by: Sergei Golitsinski

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October 2006 Edelman/Wal-Mart Crisis

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To my parents, my friends, and my professors – for their infinite help and support.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The field of public relations has been traditionally associated with communication. Whether it was regarded as the primary focus of the field, or only as a means to an end – a vehicle to achieve strategic goals, communication has always been a key component in public relations theory and practice.

Throughout the last decade, communication has been revolutionized. Not unlike the telegraph in the 1840s, technology once again has changed the way people communicate. Personal communication was forever altered by email and instant messaging. Mass communication saw the emergence of the World Wide Web, connecting millions, then billions of pieces of content. Anyone with a computer gained access to a global library of information. Then came Web 2.0 – a term which signifies the shift towards user-generated content: discussion forums, blogs, wikis and various social networking sites are gradually replacing the traditional Web publishing paradigm. The global library is turning into a global community, and anyone with a computer can participate.

Needless to say, these massive changes in communication have had a major impact on public relations – a field which historically prided itself as an expert on communication and, at the same time, has been considered by many a communication gatekeeper “controlling the message.” This thesis examines a specific public relations approach in the context of new communication realities. The results of this study may question one of the fundamental principles of contemporary public relations.

## Study Background

The focus of this thesis is the general public and its significance for organizations in a public relations context.

Public relations theory suggests that the profession should focus its activities on a select number of groups, referred to as key constituents, target audiences or publics, as opposed to addressing the mass audience, or the general public. This approach can be explained by the following rationale.

The literature review will demonstrate that the underlying purpose of public relations is to prevent negative consequences, which may be caused for an organization by members of the public. Over the years, the field's methods might have evolved, to a certain extent, from manipulation of public opinion to persuasive communication to building mutually beneficial relationships. However, regardless of the approach, the field's focus remains on those members of the public who may cause an organization negative consequences. It is believed that these consequences cannot be caused by the general public, but, rather, are caused by individual publics, which constitute the general public. Based on this reasoning, the field focuses its communication and/or relationship-building efforts on specific publics, while considering the general public to be insignificant and powerless.

This concept has been criticized by many scholars. Some found that an organization and its social environment simply cannot be segmented into discrete entities. Others argued that an organization is an organic part of society, or the global community, and, therefore, is responsible to all members of the community, regardless of their



perceived importance. However, there has been no empirical evidence of the general public causing direct negative consequences for an organization.

John Dewey (1927) believed that the public could regain its power through a restored sense of community, which could be achieved with the help of communication technologies facilitating conversation. Almost a century later, such communication technologies have become reality, primarily, in the form of blogs. A blog is a frequently updated website, with its content arranged chronologically. The conversation carried out through blogs is facilitated by blog authors referring to each other through contextual links and comments. The collective network of all blogs is referred to as the blogosphere.

In this thesis, I will argue that the blogosphere has created a global community, which can be described, in the terms of public relations theory, as the general public. I will attempt to show that this public may cause negative consequences for an organization.

### Research Hypothesis

I disagree with the assertion about the general public being insignificant and powerless.

My research hypothesis is that new communication technologies have given the general public the power to cause direct negative consequences for organizations.

To investigate this hypothesis, I will conduct an empirical study of a situation involving an organization receiving negative publicity, both in mainstream media and on the Internet. The new communication technologies component of my research will be

represented by the blogosphere. I expect the results of this study to support the following statements about the situation in question:

Statement 1. The organization suffered significant negative consequences.

Statement 2. These consequences were caused primarily by blogs.

Statement 3. The consequences cannot be isolated on a “per blog” basis: i.e., they have an impact only as collective action.

Statement 4. The individuals and groups behind these blogs represent multiple publics and cannot be defined as one specific public according to existing theory.

The first two statements imply that the blogosphere was responsible for causing an organization significant negative consequences. The third statement affirms that these consequences could not have been caused by individual blogs and, therefore, were caused by some public represented by all blogs simultaneously. However, the fourth statement argues that no such public can be defined according to existing public relations theory, which means that these blogs are represented by a mix of multiple publics, which can be also described as the general public.

Therefore, if the results of this study support these statements, it is possible to conclude that this particular situation provides empirical evidence of the general public causing direct negative consequences for an organization.

#### Significance of the Thesis

1. This thesis deals with a fundamental concept in public relations theory. In 1987, Pavlik observed that most research on public relations was concerned with problems in the field. (p. 119) The subjects he brought up – “negative publicity, communication

campaign effectiveness, the ‘professional’ status of the PR practitioner” – are still some of the most common topics in modern PR research, which makes Pavlik’s concern an issue, still valid today:

Because of the practical focus of such investigations, the research generally has not involved the use or development of theory. Instead, most studies are descriptive. These studies ... are limited in terms of generalizability. Since they deal with specific problems, they must be repeated frequently as circumstances change. (p. 119)

The research conducted in this study involves an examination of theoretical concepts and an empirical testing of hypotheses, thus, qualifying as “basic research,” which Pavlik described as “‘theory’ [that] can be applied to a variety of situations, and thus has more generalizability than descriptive research.” (p. 119)

2. This thesis provides a critical examination of the field. Pavlik (1987) observed that critical research on public relations was usually offered as “a vehicle for improving the profession, rather than questioning its role or function in society.” (p. 123) He argued that critical research was much needed:

We need to examine the institution itself. What positive function does public relations serve in society? To what extent do PR efforts actually inform, and to what extent are they merely veiled persuasion? (p. 124)

By challenging a fundamental assumption, both in public relations theory and practice, this study offers a critical examination of an important aspect of the field’s relationship with society.

3. This thesis introduces a computer science approach to collecting, storing and analyzing empirical data. According to my knowledge, this kind of approach has not been used in public relations research and, therefore, can be considered a unique contribution

to the field. I believe computer science can be successfully applied to research in communication in general, and public relations in particular. This study, being an example of this application, may stimulate and improve communication research in other areas.

### Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of an introduction, a literature review, a description of the methodology, an overview and analysis of the collected data, a discussion of the results, and a conclusion.

Chapter 2 will cover theories and recent research findings on the relationship-building approach to public relations, principles of segmenting the general public, as well as the concepts of the public at large, community and new communication technologies applied to contemporary public relations theory and practice.

Chapter 3 will provide a justification of the selected method of gathering and analyzing the data. I will explain why blog posts were selected as the main source of data and the Edelman/Wal-Mart blog campaign as the subject of the study. I will provide a detailed overview of the data collection methodology, including a description of the obtained data set, as well as the quantitative and qualitative analysis approaches used to examine the data. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of the selected methodology.

Chapter 4 will describe the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the collected data. The chapter will identify a set of the most influential blogs in the context of this study.

Chapter 5 will discuss the results of the data analysis carried out in the previous chapter, their implications for this study's hypothesis, as well as for some of the theories discussed in the literature review.

Chapter 6 will summarize the results of this study and will suggest possibilities for further research in this area.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been much debate among scholars about the nature and purpose of public relations. However, there is one common thread which can be identified in most theories, as well as in historical accounts describing the development of the practice of public relations, which is the concept of dealing with a select number of groups, referred to as key constituents, target audiences or publics, as opposed to addressing the mass audience, or the general public as a whole. Contemporary public relations theory suggests that organizations, when planning their public relations activities, must segment their social environment (i.e., the population as a whole) into individual groups, or publics, and target their communication efforts only at those groups that have consequences for an organization, or have the potential to have a negative impact on the organization.

This chapter will review theories, scholarly opinions and research findings relevant to the concept of the public at large, the relationship-building approach to public relations, principles of segmenting the general public, as well as the notion of community applied to contemporary public relations and new communication technologies.

#### The Concept of a Public

The central concept in regards to dividing, or segmenting, a population into specific groups is that of a public. The term has its roots in political science and, according to Price (1992), originates from the Latin phrase *populus*, meaning “the people” (as cited in Vasquez & Taylor, 2004, p.139). Vasquez and Taylor observed that today the term usually refers to matters of common interest and concern, for example, to a mass

population of individuals involved in civic affairs under all circumstances. In other cases, like in the fields of social psychology, marketing and public relations, the term may refer to a situational collection of individuals who emerge in response to a problem – i.e., a situation.

John Dewey was one of the first to develop a theory of publics. According to Dewey (1927), a public is a group of people who face a similar problem, recognize that the problem exists, and organize to do something about the problem:

The public consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically catered for (pp. 16-17) .... When a family connection, a church, a trade union, a business corporation, or an educational institution conducts itself so as to affect large numbers outside of itself, those who are affected form a public which endeavors to act through suitable structures, and thus to organize itself for oversight and regulation (pp. 29-30).

Dewey (1927) defined a public as “those indirectly and seriously affected for good or for evil [and] form a group distinctive enough to require recognition and a name” (p. 35).

Contemporary public relations theory, in most cases, defines a public in a similar way, although from a more applied angle: “A public encompasses any group of people who are tied together however loosely, by some common bond or interest or concern and who have consequences for an organization” (Newsom, Turk, & Kruckeberg, 2004, p. 90).

### Relationship-Building Approach in Public Relations

The concept of multiple individual publics, as opposed to the general public, or the mass audience, emerged in the field of public relations with the adoption of the

relationship-building approach, which, to a certain extent, replaced the communication and, arguably, public opinion manipulation approach. The idea of relationships being at the core of public relations was first advocated by Fergusoin in 1984 (as cited in Ledingham & Bruning, 2000, p. xiii). The concept was then advanced through the adoption of a relational definition of public relations in leading texts: Cutlip, Center and Broom (2000) defined public relations as “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 6).

Botan and Hazleton (2006) described the shift to a relationship-centered approach as a shift from a functionalist perspective to a co-creational one. The functionalist perspective, according to Botan and Hazleton, focused entirely on communication techniques and treated public relations and communication as tools to achieve some corporate interest. A co-creational approach, on the other hand, focused on publics as co-creators of meaning and emphasized the building of relationships with these publics (p. 13). Grunig (1992) underscored the importance of building relationships with publics that constrain or enhance the ability of the organization to meet its mission (as cited in Ledingham & Bruning, 2000, p. xiii). Dozier (1995), noting that the direction of an organization was affected by relationships with the key publics in its environment, “called for the use of communication as a strategic management function to help manage relationships with publics that affected the organization’s mission, goals and objectives” (as cited in Ledingham & Bruning, 2000, p. xiii). Thus, communication becomes a



vehicle used by an organization to “initiate, develop, maintain and repair mutually productive relationships” (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000, p. 159).

Nevertheless, even today many practitioners continue to think of public relations as mostly publicity and media relations (Grunig & Grunig, 2006, p. 23), in which case the only public, or rather, the organization’s target audience, are people who use the mass media. Grunig and Repper (1992) observed that in many cases, there might have been historical reasons for that: if at some point an organization received unfavorable media coverage, media relations could become the only focus of public relations activities for that organization (p. 118).

However, an approach, focused entirely on media relations, comes into question when considered together with findings from mass communication research. Grunig and Grunig (2006) observed that public relations research began in the 1950s-60s as an offshoot of mass communication research. Mass communication scholars were focused on explaining the effects of mass communication, which was believed to have had a “major effect on elections, strongly influenced children, might be major contributors to crime and violence, created popular culture, influenced consumer choices, and affected decisions about war and peace” (p. 22). Most public relations practitioners saw public relations as an activity to influence the all-powerful media – through media relations and communication campaigns. However, the authors point out that research proved that the effects of media were more cognitive than behavioral: they affected what people thought about more than what they did (p. 22). These theories of media suggested that while some people learned from the media in select situations, the media were not the only solution to

every public relations problem. Therefore, organizations, to achieve their goals, had to communicate with their social environment in different ways in different situations (p. 23), not just through the mass media. And, since the mass media were not the only communication medium, people who used the mass media were not the only target audience, or the only public.

Scholars point out that organizations have numerous pragmatic reasons for building relationships with their key publics. Grunig and Huang (2000) contend:

When public relations helps the organization build relationships with strategic constituencies, it saves the organization money by reducing the costs of litigation, regulation, legislation, pressure campaigns, boycotts, or lost revenue that results from bad relationships with publics – publics that become activist groups when relationships are bad. It also helps the organization make money by cultivating relationships with donors, consumers, shareholders and legislators who are needed to support organizational goals. (pp. 32-33)

In terms of community relations, which is a subset of public relations theory and practice, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) observe the linkage between organization's support for the community and public support for the organization:

Organizational involvement in and support of the community in which it operates can engender loyalty toward the organization among key publics when that involvement is known by key publics [and] what emerges is a process in which organizations must (1) focus on relationships with their key publics, and, (2) communicate involvement of those activities and programs that build the relationship with members of their key publics. (Ledingham & Bruning, as cited in Ledingham, 2006, pp. 471-472)

Ledingham and Bruning (2004) agree:

Not only do communities represent geographic publics, they also encompass key constituencies that share a relationship with local organizations: customers, stakeholders, suppliers, employees and local governmental officials. The nature of that relationship is symbiotic. Organizations may benefit from tax incentives, favorable zoning rulings, and loyalty to the organization's products from local citizens. Communities may also benefit thru organizational sponsorship of

community activities and events, investment in community infrastructure, support for educational initiatives, and so on. (p. 527)

Grunig and Grunig (2006) argue that the practice of public relations should help an organization “interact with the social and political components of its environment, which consists of publics that affect the ability of the organization to accomplish its goals and that expect organizations to help them accomplish their own goals.” (p. 55) Grunig and Grunig contend that organizations not only solve problems for society, but also create them for society. As a result, organizations cannot be considered “autonomous units free to make money or to accomplish other goals they set for themselves. They have relationships with individuals and groups that help the organization’s goals, define what the organization is and does, and affect the success of its strategic decisions and behaviors.” (p. 55) Therefore, the reviewed arguments suggest that organizational effectiveness is determined in part by segmenting its social environment, or general public, into individual groups and identifying among them its key publics.

#### Segmenting the Public

The idea of segmenting a population into relevant categories or groups can be found in such fields as mass communication, public opinion, political science, sociology and anthropology. Grunig (1989), describing principles of segmentation, contends that “segments must be definable, mutually exclusive, measurable, accessible, pertinent to an organization’s mission, reachable with communications in an affordable way, and large enough to be substantial and to service economically” (p. 203). He also notes that marketing researchers have pointed out that the perfect segmentation concept would make it possible for a communication planner to study each member of a market or

public and to develop a personalized marketing or communication strategy for that person. However, such microsegmentation is seldom possible, Grunig notes, even when interpersonal communication is a primary vehicle for the campaign. (p. 205)

The basic idea of segmentation is to divide a population into groups whose members are more like each other than members of other segments. For example, in the field of marketing, segmentation is defined as “the process of taking the mass market for consumer or industrial goods and breaking it up into small, more homogeneous submarkets based on relevant distinguishing characteristics.” (Michman, as cited in Grunig, 1989). In marketing, these characteristics include demographics, psychographics, values and lifestyles, geodemographic clusters of postal zip codes, geographic regions, consumer behaviors, product benefits, etc. However, it is important to note the difference between markets (i.e., segments of the mass audience according to marketing segmentation theory) and publics – segments of the general public in public relations: whereas markets are chosen by the organization, publics choose the organization for attention. According to Grunig (1989), publics “organize around issues and seek out organizations that create those issues – to gain information, seek redress or grievances, to pressure the organizations, or to seek regulation of the organizations,” (p.216) and “organizations have little choice other than to communicate with them; whereas organizations can choose to ignore markets if they wish” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

The term “public” is often used interchangeably with the notion of a target audience. However, Newsom et al. (2004) see a subtle difference between the concepts of an audience and a public:

From a public relations perspective, the term audience suggests a group of people who are recipients of something – a message or a performance. An audience is thus inherently passive. But this conflicts with the goal of public relations: which is to stimulate strong audience participation. (p. 90)

Another significant distinction is that a relationship implies a two-way communication process, for which the term public is more applicable than the term audience, which makes the term “public” more preferable in a public relations context.

### Systems Theory as the Theoretical Basis for Segmentation

Segmentation of the general public is often explained with the help of systems theory. First proposed by biologist Bertalanffy in 1968, general systems theory has evolved into an academic field of its own. One of its main advantages is that “it accounts for complex behaviors of and relationships between system components.” (Witmer, 2006. p. 362) Witmer defines systems as interrelated sets of parts or components that create a unique, bounded entity. Cutlip et al. (2000) give the following definition of a system: “a set of interacting units that endures through time within an established boundary by responding and adjusting to change pressures from the environment to achieve and maintain goal states.” (p. 229) In public relations, the set of interacting units is the organization and the publics with which it interacts, or has relations: both are mutually affected and involved.

However, when applied to public relations, the general systems theory approach defines the environment in rather vague terms. Defining key publics through the process of segmenting the organization’s social environment, in a way, puts meaning into the term environment by identifying its elements whose opposition or support can affect the organization’s ability to achieve its goals. (Grunig & Grunig, 2006, p. 33)

### Stakeholder Approach to Segmentation

There are many approaches to segmenting the organization's social environment; however, most of them, to some extent, can be considered to be based on the concept of stakeholders. According to Coombs (2000), "stakeholders are any person or group that has an interest, right, claim or ownership in an organization." (p. 75) Grunig and Repper (1992) define stakeholders as "people who are linked to an organization because they and the organization have consequences for each other." (p. 125) According to Freeman (1984), stakeholders are "any individual or group who can affect or is affected by the actions, decisions, policies, practices, or goals of the organization." (Freeman, as cited in Grunig & Repper, 1992, p. 126) Brody (1988) offers a similar definition, according to which stakeholders are "groups or individuals whose interests coincide in one or more ways with the organization with which the public relations practitioner is dealing." (Brody, as cited in Grunig & Repper, 1992, p. 126) Comparing these definitions to that of a public – "a public encompasses any group of people who are tied together however loosely, by some common bond or interest or concern and who have consequences for an organization" (Newsom et al., 2004) – it is reasonable to conclude that in the context of this research the terms stakeholder and public can be used interchangeably.

Publics are often divided into external – i.e., those existing outside the organization – and internal – such as employees, management, investors, etc. This categorization, however, is too broad for public relations purposes. Coombs (2000) takes a more detailed approach and distinguish between primary and secondary stakeholders: primary stakeholders, such as employees, investors, customers, suppliers, government and the

community, “are those whose actions can be harmful or beneficial to an organization. Without the continued interaction of primary stakeholders, the organization would cease to exist.” (p. 75). Secondary stakeholders, or influencers, such as media, activist groups, and competitors, “are those who can affect or be affected by the actions of the organization. (p. 75) An even more definite typology has been developed by Hendrix, who identifies media, employees, members, community, government, investor, international, special and integrated marketing as the organization’s key publics, including 140 subcategories. (Newsom et al., 2004, p. 90)

#### Situational Approach to Segmentation

It may seem that the stakeholder approach to segmenting the social environment provides a reasonably specific way to define key publics. However, Cutlip, et al. (2000) note that whereas the organizational component in the system is clearly defined, publics are abstractions defined by the public relations manager. (p. 229) Grunig and Repper (1992) take this argument further by stating that “a public, a market, or any other segment of a population exists only because a researcher or practitioner uses a particular theoretical concept to identify it.” (p. 129)

Cutlip et al. (2000) suggest that, according to systems theory, different publics can be defined for different situations or public relations problems. This principle is illustrated by comparing a university’s publics when the goal is to recruit students as opposed to the goal being to raise money for a new computing facility. In the first case, the publics would include college-bound high school students, their parents, high school counselors, students currently enrolled at the university and alumni. The second example

would require a different definition of the current system: it would be necessary to determine what groups would be most interested in such a facility, which might include local businesses, corporate foundations that have historically funded innovative educational programs, computer hardware and software companies, and those alumni who have succeeded in computer-related careers. (p. 230)

The systems theory concept of defining different publics for different situations provides a foundation for Grunig's situational theory of publics. Grunig and Hunt (1984) explained:

When organizations have consequences on people outside the organization, those consequences create problems for the people affected. Some people detect the consequences, [thus recognizing] a problem. They become members of a public. Thus, consequences create the conditions needed for publics to form. The presence of the publics, in turn, creates a public relations problem for the organization. (p. 144)

Grunig based his situational theory in part on Dewey's (1927) concept that a public is a group of people who face a similar problem, recognize that the problem exists, and organize to do something about the problem. (Dewey, as cited in Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 145) Grunig and Hunt (1984) observed that publics that develop around problems differ in the extent to which they are aware of the problem and the extent to which they are willing to do something about the problem. (p. 147) Grunig and Hunt classified publics on their recognition of the problem itself, their perception that they can do something about the problem, and their perception that the organization's behavior involves them. Three variables were used to explain why people engage in a behavior and communicate in the process of planning that behavior: problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition. These concepts were tied to the concept of a situation: Grunig and



Hunt argued that people do not think and act in relation to broad values that they apply to all situations, but rather change their attitudes to fit a particular situation.

Signitzer and Wamsler (2006) observed that Grunig's situational theory attempts to predict "when people will think and communicate purposively about situations, when they will develop opinions and attitudes about situations, and when they will act." (p. 449) The theory defines the following types of publics: latent publics, whose members do not detect the problem they are facing; aware publics for groups who recognize the problem; and active publics – groups that organize to discuss and do something about the problem. Grunig and Hunt (1984) also defined a group for whom none of the conditions described by Dewey applied: a nonpublic. For a nonpublic, the organization would have no consequences on the group or the group would have no consequences on the organization. (p. 145)

#### Public Relations and the General Public

Key publics can be identified based on a generic stakeholder approach, where members of each public are linked to the organization through their occupations, or they can be identified through the application of the situational theory, where people are grouped into publics based on their perceptions of a specific situation or problem. However, in both cases, a common thread can be identified in segmenting the general public into individual publics, which is the abandonment of the concept of the general public as a potential candidate for communication and relationship building.

Grunig and Hunt (1984) argue that "if an organization has no consequences upon other systems in its social environment and if those systems have no consequences for the

organization, there is no need for public relations.” (p. 139). For example, a public with a low probability of seeking information and a low probability that messages directed at it will be effective requires less attention: Grunig and Hunt suggest that “seldom should you waste time and money on a public relations program to reach that public. No one will be listening or acting.” (p. 158) However, when dealing with publics with high probabilities of information seeking, Grunig and Hunt suggest that an organization should be more proactive in its communication efforts. If it does not communicate with these publics, they will seek information elsewhere and base their cognitions, attitudes and behaviors on that information; besides other sources “frequently will put the organization in a bad light.” (p. 159)

Vujnovic (2004) observes that “Grunig and Hunt’s preoccupation with the threat of consequences for the organization makes them further argue that active publics are of primary concern to the organization” (p. 49) – not the general public. In fact, both – nonpublics and the general public – are considered in most contemporary public relations theory and practice as being insignificant and powerless. (Vujnovic, Kumar, & Kruckeberg, 2007). Cutlip et al. (2000), for example, declared that “there is simply no such thing” as the general public. (Cutlip et al., as cited in Leitch & Neilson, 2004, p. 130) Newsom, et al. (2005) agrees that “there is no such thing as a mass audience or public” and argues that publics should never be thought of “as undifferentiated mass.” (p. 104)

Describing information campaigns, Grunig (1989) underscores the importance of directing the campaigns to carefully selected segments of the mass audience and

considers the general public to be a convenient term (Grunig & Repper, 1992, p. 118) for those who use the mass media. In his opinion, public relations activities targeted at the general public might build relationships with stakeholders only accidentally, but in most cases “they communicate with no one important to the organization [and] in the process of doing nothing, they cost the organization a great deal of money.” (p. 118) Grunig concludes that segmentation of audiences is crucial to the success of an information campaign. (Grunig, 1989, p. 200)

According to Mendelsohn (1973), publics who are most likely to respond to information messages communicated through the mass media have a prior interest in the subject presented. Therefore, information directed at this audience “requires totally different communication strategies and tactics from information that is to be disseminated to an audience that is initially indifferent.” (Mendelsohn, as cited in Grunig, 1989, p. 200)

Mendelsohn argues:

At the very least, communicators who intend to use the mass media to produce information gain or attitude and behavior modification must realize that their targets do not represent a monolithic mass, although the media they may decide to utilize have the potential of reaching huge population aggregates. (p. 200)

According to Wright (1986), mass audiences are “large, heterogeneous, disconnected, and anonymous to the communicator.” (Wright, as cited in Grunig, 1989, p. 200)

### Limitations of Segmenting the Public

It is important to note, that arguments about the necessity of segmenting the general public are made in reference to information campaigns – which is a type of one-way communication – not communication in general. Mendelsohn (1973, as cited in Grunig, 1989, p. 200) specifically mentions attitude and behavior modification, which is

reminiscent of an early definition of public relations by Edward Bernays (1947), who championed the behaviorist approach and saw the purpose of public relations as persuasion, adjustment of public opinion and “engineering of consent” (Bernays, as cited in Grunig & Grunig, 1992, p. 288) – which is anything but two-way communication. Wright (1986, as cited in Grunig, 1989, p. 200), describing the mass audience, refers to the organization as the communicator – which, like with Mendelsohn’s assertion, again implies a strictly one-way communication model. These observations are important in the sense that the concept of segmentation of the general public is initially explained in a one-way communication setting: information campaigns, behavior modification, organization as the communicator; yet it is applied to the concept of publics, which is based on the idea of relationship-building, whereas building relationships cannot be a one-way communication process a priori. This contradiction is one of the many issues that scholars have found in regards to the concept of segmenting the general public in application to the theory and practice of public relations.

One of the fundamental problems of segmentation stems from the limitations of systems theory, which is often used to provide a theoretical foundation for identifying key publics. Witmer (2006) observes that systems theory advocates artificial delineation between systems and their environments. (p. 364) “The underlying assumption ... that a system and its environment are discrete entities, discounts the recursive nature of system interactions with [the environment].” (p. 364) As an example, Witmer shows how global corporate structures may be embedded into local publics by organizational members, who may have multiple roles as consumers, employees, stockholders, etc.

Witmer (2006) observes that, in addition to the problem of defining publics as discreet entities, systems theory “does not adequately account for the creation and recreation of publics through shared experiences ... or their changeability over time.” (p. 365) In relation to Grunig’s situational theory, Witmer notes, that communication between people “form communities that transcend time and space through communication technologies ... and [through discussion] organize latent, closed publics or nonpublic publics into aware and active publics.” (p. 365) Grunig and Repper (1992) confirm that latent publics may become more aware and active as an issue becomes more public. As the recognition of the problem grows, perceptions of involvement increase, and perceptions of constraints decrease – publics are expected to move into the aware and the active stages.

Leitch and Neilson (2004) argued:

Publics are not fixed categories waiting to be identified but rather are constructed and reconstructed through the discourses in which they participate. Publics have their own views of themselves and their own views of the organizations with or about which they communicate. Although organizations may orchestrate the development of publics to serve organizational objectives, there is no guarantee that such publics will be content with their status as organizational artifacts or will accept the meanings that organizations have imposed on them. (p. 138)

However, the main issue with segmenting the general public and focusing on the identified key publics as opposed to the public as a whole is the abandonment of the concept of the public at large as a candidate for communication and relationship building.

Leeper (2004) argued that there is some question as to whether or not the practice of segmenting publics to better tailor a message is consistent with the idea of two-way communication, which is a prerequisite for relationship-building. (p. 101) Rakow (1989)

“made the argument that such a practice still is in the ‘talking to’ mode rather than in the ‘talking with’ mode.” (Rakow, as cited in Leeper, 2004, p. 101) Rakow argued that the practice of public relations “needs to see the general public at the center of activity, directing the actions of institutions which become its object, and not the other way around.” (Rakow, as cited in Leeper, 2004, p. 101)

Leitch and Neilson (2004) noted:

It is ... both unhelpful and unnecessary to abandon the public and its associated macroforms at the level of the nation-state to validate the focus of organizational relations. Rather, the concept of the public can be retained as representing one possible configuration of individuals within a framework where multiple configurations are possible. (p. 131)

Indeed, segmentation is essential for specific public relations activities or information campaigns; however, as Leitch and Neilson pointed out, “individuals are not ... members of single publics but instead participate in the multiple sites of the public sphere as members of diverse publics. They may simultaneously hold a number of different subject positions within these sites and publics.” (p. 131) As an example, Leitch and Neilson argued:

The same individual may speak as a citizen in one forum, as a parent in another, and as an environmentalist in a third forum. These multiple subject positions may overlap, intersect, or conflict and always will be in a state of flux. Taken together, they provide the context within which individuals must negotiate their own public identities. Once the notion of multiplicity is accepted, it becomes clear that the zones of meaning associated with a particular public cannot be viewed in isolation. Instead, they constitute a series of threads that are woven together to form the fabric of public opinion. (Heath, 1998, as cited in Leitch & Neilson, 2004, p. 131)

### The Organic Model of Public Relations

Another approach which calls into question the concept of communicating and building relationships only with strategic publics and denying the significance of the general public, is the Organic model of public relations proposed by Kruckeberg. (2006)

The Organic model is based on the idea that an organization is not centered as the hub of a social system, but rather is only an organic part of the whole social system of society, and therefore its responsibility to society is greater. (Kruckeberg, 2006, p.8)

Vujnovic, Kumar, and Kruckeberg (2007) argued that, although communicative exchange is grounded in modern society's three dominant social actors – corporations, non-governmental organizations and governments, it is not limited to these actors. Numerous publics exist simultaneously; however, the author also noted that those public's positions are diminished by the three major actors and the media, which has a powerful role as well, since it can privilege dominant voices and marginalize other voices. (p. 2)

Starck and Kruckeberg (2003) pointed to multiple global challenges, such as “free trade, the global emergence of fledging democracies, the ever-increasing power of transnational corporations, a growing public distrust, the rapidly changing media environment, and corporate mega-mergers,” (Starck & Kruckeberg, as cited Vujnovic, Kumar, & Kruckeberg, 2007, p. 3) in faced by societies throughout the world. Therefore, Starck and Kruckeberg argued:

The power public relations practitioners must take into consideration is not simply that which is created between narrowly defined internal and external publics, but that which occurs in the societal communicative level, more specifically those relations that are created in the media spaces among nation-states, corporations and civil society. (p. 4)

Vujnovic, Kumar, and Kruckeberg (2007) argued that the organization's responsibility must extend beyond their strategic publics; that organizations must view society itself, not just the individual strategic publics that are considered to be most threatening – “as the larger social system within which organizations must seek co-existence and harmony.” (p. 5) Therefore, society's citizens who did not make it into strategic publics according to their perceived importance to an organization should still be considered a strategic public “solely by virtue of their membership in society.” (p. 5) The authors conclude their argument by emphasizing that nonpublics and the general public are today's most challenging and arguably most important publics and require the fullest attention of the field of public relations. (p. 5)

#### Public Relations and Community

The concept of the Organic model is closely related to Kruckeberg and Starck's Community-building theory of public relations. The Community-building model redefines the purpose of public relations as that of restoring the sense of community in society – thus, providing the grounds for the Organic model's argument about the organization's role as a member of the whole social system of society.

Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) observed that “public relations today ... operates from much the same perspective as it did before the term was even used.” (p. 20)

Organizations want to survive and prosper. Adverse public opinion – especially in a free and democratic society – can threaten such survival and prosperity, while positive public opinion can help assure [it]. Therefore, public relations practitioners attempt to develop and maintain positive public opinion, or at least to neutralize negative public opinion... To accomplish this, they use persuasion ... in an attempt to influence both the emotional and rational factors contributing to public opinion formation...or assure a good environment for the ... client. Such attempts include a simplistic concern for altruistic good citizenship, a concern with the dynamics of



public opinion formation and change within a highly behaviorist conceptual framework ... and a simple, usually nontheoretically-grounded, emphasis on the techniques of involvement with the organization's various publics. (pp. 20-21)

The authors argue that such practice is an attempt to remedy symptoms and not deal with basic social problems which directly affect the organization's relationships with the various elements of society. In the authors' opinion, one of such basic social problems of society is the loss of small town community in the XIX century resulting from new means of communication and transportation. (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988) Dewey (1927) observed that "the Great Society created by steam and electricity may be a society but it is no community." (p. 98) Quandt (1970) reflecting on the works of Dewey and other communitarian scholars, offered the following description of the breakdown of traditional community:

A social organization based on family, neighborhood, and small-town solidarity was being replaced by one based on more impersonal and tenuous ties of the market place .... So far technological changes had produced... the Great Society – an urban, industrial order whose size and complexity precluded a sense of belonging.... In such a social order ... relationships tended to be superficial, the restraints imposed by public opinion weak, the common cause with one's neighbor lacking. (pp. 17-19)

Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) argued that "most of the concerns of public relations practitioners today simply did not exist before the loss of community [and] it was this loss of community that provided impetus for the development of modern public relations." (p. 43) The authors concluded that public relations, while being commonly practiced as persuasive communication to obtain a vested goal on behalf of a client, is "better defined and practiced as the active attempt to restore and maintain the sense of community." (p. xi)

### Communication as the Link between Community and Public Relations

The connection between the concept of community and the field of public relations is communication. Scholars of the Chicago School of Social Thought (a group of sociologists, which consisted mostly of professors at the University of Chicago) considered that community existed through its members sharing attitudes, opinions, knowledge and information – i.e., through communication. Dewey (1927) observed that there was “more that a verbal tie between the words common, community and communication:” (Dewey, as cited in Quandt, 1970, p. 25)

Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge – a common understanding – like-mindedness the sociologists say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another, like bricks, they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie... Consensus demands communication. (p. 25)

Dewey (1927) noted that “by fostering personal communication, the community center would bridge the barriers of class and race, creating sympathy among men who might otherwise segregate themselves into mutually exclusive groups.” (Dewey, as cited in Quandt, 1970, p. 49) He believed in the power of communication to restore community characterized by mutual identification and shared values. He saw personal face-to-face communication, discussion of ideas, as being “the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood” (Carey, 1989, p. 80) and the main prerequisite for community: “Ideas which are not communicated, shared and reborn in expression are but soliloquy ... broken and imperfect thought.” (Dewey, 1927, p. 218) Quandt (1970) observed that, according to communitarian scholars, sharing of ideas and sentiments, the

exchange of opinion, and the transmission of knowledge could correct the imbalance of the physical integration of modern society and its moral unity: (p. 23)

Communication carried such weight because of their assumption that society was not a loose collection of self-sufficient individuals, but an organic whole made up of interrelated parts ... The common values which unified the social organism were created by the mutual exchange of ideas and attitudes. (p. 23)

Carey (1989) developed this argument by considering communication to be “a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed.” (p. 23) He concluded that “communication through language and other symbolic forms comprises the ambiance of human existence.” (p. 24)

Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) suggested that public relations came about to “fill a social vacuum created by the disappearance of community,” (p. 43) that it helped fulfill “the need for people to be put back in touch with their changing environment.” (p. 43) The authors based their argument on the premise that since public relations practitioners were communication professionals, they were ideally suited for the task of helping restore community in modern society. They suggested that public relations practitioners could help in the following ways:

Take an active part in helping community members become aware of and interested in common ends ... help individuals in the community maintain their existence as individuals and promote their worth as persons ... help individuals overcome alienation, help members of the community to know one another ... help develop person-to-person relationships. They can help bring about a sharing of personal experiences among members of the community. (pp. 65-66)

In their more recent work, the authors reaffirmed their views by proposing that “community building can be proactively encouraged and nurtured by corporations with

the guidance and primary leadership of these organization's public relations practitioners." (Starck & Kruckeberg, 2004, p. 59)

### A Historical Overview of Public Relations, its Purpose and Focus

Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) maintained that the role of public relations practitioners was not just to serve their clients, but also society at large. Following on this premise, public relations, indeed, could have filled, to a certain extent, the information and communication void that appeared as a result of the loss of community. Nevertheless, a brief overview of the history of public relations will clearly demonstrate that public relations filled this void with persuasive communication and favorable information on behalf of a client, and that the primary purpose of the field in practice was and, arguably, still is, influencing public opinion through the use of mass media.

Although historians and authors of textbooks sometimes trace the roots of the profession to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when press agency was used to promote settlements on the East Coast of America (Zoch & Molleda, 2006, p. 279), most scholars agree that public relations appeared as a profession in the late 1800s. Zoch and Molleda trace its beginning to the founding of the Publicity Bureau in the mid 1900 and the firm's work for Harvard University, the railroads and AT&T. (pp. 279-280) Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) contend that the birth of contemporary public relations was prompted by the reaction against the muckrakers - investigative journalists who used publicity to attack business: "Business people began asking themselves whether traditional policies of secrecy were really the wisest course. If publicity was being used so effectively to attack business, why could it not be used equally well to explain and defend it?" (p. 6)

Ledingham and Bruning (2000) agree that the field began to emerge as a powerful corporate tool in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Industrial and business leaders sought to prevent governmental interference by hiring experts in public relations to shape public opinion through the use of mass media. These experts were usually journalists – often referred to as “journalists in residence” – who provided advice on ways to get an organization’s name in the press. (pp. xi-xii)

Lippmann (1922), in his analysis of the concept of public opinion, pointed out that leaders in business and politics were “compelled often to choose even at the best between the equally cogent though conflicting ideals of safety for the institution and candor to [their] public,” and had to decide what facts and in what setting would be made available to the public. (p. 158) Lippmann suggested that the underlying reason for the existence of the press agent, or public relations, was the knowledge of how to create consent:

The enormous discretion as to what facts and what impressions shall be reported is steadily convincing every organized group of people that whether it wishes to secure publicity or avoid it, the exercise of discretion cannot be left to the reporter. It is safer to hire a press agent who stands between the group and the newspapers .... Many of the direct channels to news have been closed and the information for the public is first filtered thru publicity agents. The great corporations have them, the banks have them, the railroads have them, all the organizations of business and of social and political activity have them, and they are the media through which news comes. (pp. 217-218)

Lippmann (1922) explained that “the publicity man” made his own choice of facts for the newspapers to print, thus saving the reporter much trouble by presenting him a clear picture of a situation. Yet, that picture was “the one he [wished] the public to see. He [was] a censor and propagandist, responsible only to his employers, and to the whole

truth responsible only as it accords with the employer's conception of his own interests.”  
(p. 218)

Grunig and Hunt (1984), in their influential theory of four models of public relations, which traces the evolution of public relations from a one-way asymmetrical to a two-way symmetrical communication model, offered a slightly different viewpoint, describing the early practice of public relations, also known as “the public be fooled” (Goldman, as cited in Grunig & Grunig, 1992, p. 286), as press-agentry/publicity, or a one-way asymmetric model, which implies unbalanced, one-way communication between the organization and its audience. Grunig and Grunig (1992) considered the practice of hiring a “journalist in residence” to be the next stage in the development of public relations, which is the public information model. They noted, that although these journalists, hired as public relations counsel, included only favorable information in their handouts, the information was generally truthful. (p. 288) However, Ledingham and Bruning (2000) argued that “the dominance of the field ... by former journalists reinforced the notion of manipulation of the mass media and generating favorable publicity as the central focus of public relations practice.” (p. xii) Cutlip (1994) quotes an early practitioner: “I was in the publicity business. I was a press agent. Very simply, my job was to get the client's name in the paper.” (Cutlip, as cited in Ledingham & Bruning, 2000, p. xii) Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the goal of early public relations was influencing public opinion through the use of mass media.

Beginning with the Creel Committee during World War I public relations practitioners began to incorporate into their work behavioral and social sciences; “the

foremost of these practitioners was Edward Bernays.” (Grunig & Grunig, 1992, p. 288) The approach was based on gathering information about the organization’s target audience and applying it to achieve the organization’s communication goals. Bernays’s definition of public relations stated that “public relations is an attempt, by information, persuasion, and adjustment, to engineer public support for an activity, case, movement or institution.” (Bernays, 1955, pp. 3-4) The theories of this approach introduced by Bernays were based on propaganda, persuasion and “engineering of consent” – which, again, can be described as manipulation of public opinion through the use of mass media.

The two-way symmetrical model, proposed by Grunig and Grunig (1992) implies the use of research to gather information about the organization’s publics to facilitate understanding and communication rather than to identify messages most likely to persuade or motivate publics. In this model, understanding, rather than persuasion, is the principal objective of public relations. (p. 289)

However, most scholars, including Grunig and Grunig (1992, p. 305), agree that today’s public relation is still focused primarily on media relations and publicity. Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) argued that public relations was most commonly practiced today as persuasive communication to obtain a vested goal on behalf of a client. Ledingham and Bruning (2000) observed that, although some scholars argue that the role of “journalist in residence” has been replaced by that of the “expert prescriber” – a public relations counselor who advises the client on matters of public policy (Broom & Dozier, 1986, as cited in Ledingham & Bruning, 2000, p. xii), in reality, organizations “still view public relations primarily as a means of generating favorable publicity. Their rationale for

public relations is found not in the management of reciprocal relationships between an organization and its publics, but rather in ‘the credibility attached to information that has been examined by reporters through third party endorsement by the media.’” (p. xii)

Finally, Grunig and Grunig (1992) discovered that, contrary to their expectations, press-agentry – the first model of public relations – was still the most common form of public relations in practice (p. 305).

Thus, it is easy to conclude that, despite the existence of theories, according to which the profession is based on two-way communication and mutual understanding, in practice, public relations, rather than restoring community, is still, to a large degree, centered on influencing public opinion through the use of mass media.

#### Public Relations Applied to the Concept of Modern Community

Nevertheless, Starck and Kruckeberg (2004), in the later works, reaffirmed their Community-building theory and, noting that today’s communication technologies allow for new forms of community to exist, which are based on occupational criteria and allow for a higher level of participation, argued that “enlightened public relations practitioners who philosophically subscribe to and have a theoretical understanding of Community-building can exploit modern means of communication to build and enhance a desirable sense of community.” (pp. 51-52) The authors observed that today’s society and communities within society are far more complex than in the past, and make adjustments to the concepts of the Chicago School of Social Thought, thus bridging the social and historical context of the past with modern reality and providing theoretical grounding for the concept of a restored, yet transformed community.



According to the Chicago School, an individual can belong only to one community. (Kruckeberg, Starck, & Vujnovic, 2006, p. 488). Kruckeberg et al. contended that today it is possible to belong to many different communities due to modern communication technology. The authors acknowledged that, although the early work of the Chicago School of Social Thought and the related work of Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) support the idea that the sense of community was lost because of transportation and communication technology, “new communication technologies have shown promise for an ever-increasing capacity for communicative interactivity, and therefore for the individuals greater participation in the community.” (p. 489) Therefore, while new communication technologies a century ago may have contributed to the loss of communities, “the potential exists today for a sense of community to reevolve through the ease of community participation that is now available.” (p. 489)

Kruckeberg et al. (2006) agreed with the Chicago School that membership in the community is defined in part by the community and in part by the individual; with the individual’s level of participation determining his true community membership. The authors emphasized that, while participation requires communication, “other community members must recognize and accept the individual’s membership in the community.” (p. 489)

Yet another assertion of the Chicago School was that “people in a community occupy a definable geographical area.” (Kruckeberg et al., 2006, p. 489) Geographic proximity, indeed, used to be essential to community:

The medieval village, the colonial town of New England, and the American country town of the nineteenth century had required direct intercourse and personal acquaintance with the whole round of life for a sense of belonging to flourish ... The size of the city-state which Aristotle prescribed did not exceed the range of human voice, for the good state was one in which the citizen identified with the whole and dealt knowledgeably with all aspects of public affairs. (Quandt, 1970, p. 53)

However, Quandt noted that small size was no longer a requirement for community:

In the modern world, the printed word replaced speech as the architect of the common will and an enlightened public opinion ... Howe suggested that the press might convert the American city into a larger version of those ancient and medieval cities which evoked such loyalty from their citizens. (p. 53)

In this regard, Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) noted:

In [public relations], a community is most often thought of as a city or area where the organization is physically located. Employees, customers, stockholders, suppliers and many other key "publics" of the organization may be located within the same "geographic public." Therefore, practitioners will sometimes describe the community in community public relations as all those who do not have a direct financial interest in the organization, although these members of the geographic public might have a considerable secondary financial interest. (pp. 23-24)

Community relations is defined as an organization's "planned, active and continuing participation with and within a community to maintain and enhance its environment to the benefit of both the institution and the community. (Peak, 1998, as cited in Ledingham & Bruning, 2004, p. 527) However, Kruckeberg and Starck argued that a community in traditional community relations might be more accurately called a "geographic public." Public relations practitioners "are simply utilizing persuasive communication to obtain a vested goal for their client, and this goal is directed towards a geographic public." (p. 26)

Kruckeberg et al. (2006) argued that several public relations concepts need to be revisited, such as the concept of the nonpublic, which cannot exist within the global community because of everyone's importance within the community and therefore

everyone's membership in at least one of the organization's publics. "In this context, the long-discredited general public is given new meaning – indeed ultimate importance, if society is the organization's most important stakeholder." (p. 494)

Other scholars make similar arguments in regards to the organization's role in the new community. Grunig and White (1992) suggested that "public relations should play an idealistic role in society by serving the public interest, increasing mutual understanding, and encouraging debate and dialogue." (as cited in Leeper, 2004, p. 102) Leeper (2004) noted that "recognizing community as the context within which organizations operate, and recognizing the importance to organizations of establishing strong communities, is a good backdrop for realizing [this] idealistic role of public relations." (p. 102) Wilson (2004) notes that participation in a community is both a right and a responsibility. She observes that the modern corporation and its pr are different from what they have been to date. "Business approaches that have focused predominantly on profit and have formed relationships with internal and external publics for primarily manipulative purposes are doomed to fail in today's evolving business ecosystems. Probably with rare exceptions, corporate success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be based on the quality of the relationships built...emphasizing communities of mutual support and cooperation." (p. 524)

Vujnovic et al. (2007) concluded that "without the recognition of nonpublics and the general public, public relations in its theory and practice can only be hypocritical in its attempts at relationship building and can only remain inadequate in its efforts at community building." (p. 6)

### Public Relations and Communication

Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) emphasize the role of new communication technologies in restoring the sense of community. This concept comes directly from the writings of Dewey (1927) and other scholars of the Chicago School. Quandt (1970) observed that in the notion of communication, new communication technology was of equal importance to face-to-face relationships; that it was “a phenomenon which overcame the limits of geography, multiplied the frequency and variety of contacts, and gave access to a nearly endless supply of information and opinion.” (p. 51) The technological advances which were the underlying reasons for these ideas, included:

the telegraph of the 1840s which speeded up newspaper reporting; the rotary press of the 1870s which accelerated the printing of newspapers; the improvements of papermaking and bookbinding which made possible the production of inexpensive books in the 1840s; the telephone, patented in 1876; and finally, the motion picture, launched as a commercial enterprise in 1906; and the radio, given its first commercial station in 1920. (Quandt, 1970, p. 20)

Quandt concludes that for communitarians these inventions contained “the unprecedented promise of making the nation a neighborhood.” (p. 20)

In a similar way, Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) hoped that public relations practitioners will shift their focus from influencing public opinion to applying their professional communication skills and new communication technologies to the process of restoring community in modern society. Kruckeberg and Starck’s ideas are based on a logically flawless assumption: community exists through communication, public relations practitioners are professional communicators, therefore, public relations can and should help restore community. However, this assumption implies, to a certain extent, that community members are not capable (or are less capable) of restoring community

through communication on their own, without the help of communication professionals. This theme brings up the famous debate between Walter Lippmann and John Dewey about the role of communication and the public itself in the shaping of public opinion.

#### Debate on Public Opinion Applied to Public Relations

Carey (1989) observed that in earlier writings on mass media the central problematic was freedom. Freedom “guaranteed the availability of perfect information,” and perfect information guaranteed that people would be rational in choosing the most effective means to their individual ends, and if so, “in a manner never quite explained, the social good will result.” Therefore, “once freedom was secured against these forces, truth and social progress were guaranteed.” (pp. 75-76) Lippmann changed this problematic by arguing that a free system of communication would not guarantee “perfect information” due to the nature of news and the audience itself. (Carey, p. 76) Lippmann (1925) considered the public to be incapable of understanding and acting upon the complex nature of facts because there was too much to learn, too much info to keep track of, because “the citizen gives but a little of his time to public affairs, has but a casual interest in facts and but a poor appetite for theory,” (pp. 24-25) and because “[the citizen] cannot know all about everything all the time, and while he is watching one thing, a thousand others undergo great changes.” (p. 25) Lippmann concluded:

The individual man does not have opinions on all public affairs. He does not know how to direct public affairs. He does not know what is happening, why it is happening, what ought to happen ... There is not the least reason for thinking ... that the compounding of individual ignorances in masses of people can produce a continuing directing force in public affairs. (p. 39)

The solution, offered by Lippmann, is to leave public affairs to “men of quality,” to the experts and elites, and have the mass media repackage the information in simple terms for the general public, which will react to this information emotionally and will align itself with one of the sides in the debate.

Likewise, although not to the same extent, Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) suggested that communication should be left to the experts – i.e., public relations practitioners, who are experienced in communication. Other public relations scholars take this argument further. Kent and Taylor (1998), for example, in discussing the building of dialogic communication with publics through the Internet, suggest that organizations must leave communication through email to those who have been specially trained for that:

There is a danger that organizational members who may be technically proficient ... may not be skilled in addressing public concerns. Dialogic public relations on the Internet requires the same professionalism and communication skills as it required from public relations specialists who use the more traditional media of print and broadcast. Although direct access to key members of an organization might represent the most dialogic and egalitarian means of providing publics with access to an organization, such an approach might create more public relations problems than it solves. One way to avoid such problems is to designate particular individuals on the public relations staff as Internet contacts. These individuals can be trained to answer questions, explain organizational policy and have the communication skills necessary to handle difficult questions or public concerns. (p. 327)

Clearly, there is a close resemblance between the two arguments, and, although Lippmann (1925) discusses the public’s inability to understand the complexity of facts to shape an educated opinion, whereas public relations scholars question the public’s ability to communicate independently, both cases are dealing with the idea of delegating a social activity, practiced by members of the public in everyday life, to a select group of experts specially trained to handle this activity.

Carey (1989) observed that Lippmann viewed the public as a second-order spectator: experts observed reality and represented it in simple terms for the mass audience.

Dewey (1927) cautioned that “a class of experts is inevitably so removed from common interests as to become a class with private interests and private knowledge;” (p. 207) “the man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches, even if the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how it can be fixed.” (p. 207) He argued that the public was a participant in reality’s “actual making.” Dewey argued that the knowledge needed to be involved in politics, was to be generated by the interaction of citizens and experts. Lippmann (1925) believed that the public was not able to participate in the process of democracy and was essentially “a phantom,” or nonexistent. Dewey, however, hoped the public would regain a sense of self. The solution was communication: “Till the Great Society is converted into a Great Community, the Public will remain in eclipse. Communication alone can create a great community.” (Dewey, p. 142)

In public relations, a similar argument can be made in favor of the community being restored through the communication efforts of the public itself. However, according to my knowledge, such an argument has not been made in public relations literature. On the contrary, as it has been already noted, the general public is considered in most contemporary public relations theory and practice as being insignificant and powerless (Vujnovic et al., 2007), or even nonexistent (Cutlip et al., 2000). This is unfortunate, yet understandable: an acknowledgement of the public’s ability to

communicate independently ultimately questions the role of the “communication experts” in society.

### Conversation as a Requirement for Community

Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) argued that public relations came to being as a result of the loss of community. This statement can be supported with an argument that the concept of influencing public opinion simply could not have coexisted in the same context together with traditional community and became possible only after traditional community was lost. Dewey (1927) referred to “remote and invisible organizations” that significantly affected local communities: “the local communities without intent or forecast found their affairs conditioned by remote and invisible organizations. The scope of the latter’s activities was so vast ... that it is no exaggeration to speak of ‘a new age of human relationships.’” (p. 98) However, these kinds of organizations simply did not exist in traditional community. Instead, these “remote and invisible organizations” were local and quite visible members of the community. Wiebe (1967), describing America of the nineteenth century, calls it “a society of island communities” (p. xiii) where communication was carried out in personal, informal way. Face-to-face communication, with everyone in the community knowing each other, and common problems being discussed and solved at the town meeting made facilitating communication on behalf of a community member – whether an individual, or a business – both unnecessary and, arguably, impossible: community members “facilitated communication” on their own – through the means of conversation. “Engineering public consent” by sending different



messages to different members of the community would have been impossible due to the simple fact that there were no secrets in the small town community.

Certainly, these communities are in the past and cannot/will not be restored. Dewey (1927) and the other communitarian scholars proposed to restore the values of traditional community through communication, specifically – new communication technologies. However, a closer look at Dewey’s arguments will demonstrate that the mass media did not have the ability and the necessary characteristics to fulfill its purpose. Dewey saw the essential need, “the main problem of The Public,” to be the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate and discussion, with the improvement depending upon “freeing and perfecting the processes of inquiry and dissemination of their conclusions.” (p. 209) Dewey considered conversation to be the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood:

Conversation has a vital import lacking in the fixed and frozen words of written speech.... Ideas which are not communicated, shared and reborn in expression are but soliloquy, broken and imperfect thought... Publication is partial and the public which results is partially informed and formed until the meanings it purveys pass from mouth to mouth. There is no limit to the intellectual endowment which may proceed from the flow of social intelligence when it circulates by word of mouth from one to another in the communications of the local community. That and only that gives reality to public opinion.(Dewey, as cited in Carey, 1989, p. 79)

Communication technology failed to satisfy this requirement simply because it did not provide the means for a true discussion. It is reasonable to suggest that, until recently, the mass media has been a one-way communication venue, with the exception of letters to the editor and similar features allowing minor feedback from the audience. Even if processes of globalization, referred to by Vujnovic et al. (2007), have caused a type of global community to be created, Vujnovic et al. noted that governments, non-

governmental organizations and corporations are still the main actors in the society's communicative exchange, with mass media being the venue – which leads to a conclusion that it is not a true community, since only three of its most powerful members are allowed to communicate. Therefore, Dewey's (1927) ideas about restoring community with the help of communication technology remain idealistic, or even naïve, and unattainable – just like the arguments of public relations scholars who defend the importance of the general public, which, according to the presented argumentation, has no significant voice in modern mass media, cannot communicate independently, and, therefore, cannot have any significant consequences for the organization.

However, that would change dramatically, if only the public were given the means for conversation.

#### The Blogosphere as the Restored Community

Starck and Kruckeberg (2004) observed that “a technological global society can retain very few secrets, just as there were no secrets in the American villages of the 1800s.” (p. 52) Such a statement, arguably, implies the existence of a global community, which has to exist through communication, since it has been shown that community and communication are, to a certain extent, inseparable.

It is widely accepted that the Internet has been instrumental in creating the new global community. Bell (2001) summarized this opinion by observing that “globalization [has] opened up the whole world as a potential source of community” (p. 96) with the Internet being key to this global community through providing members with new ways to belong. However, Bell also believes that communication is not the cornerstone of the

new global community. For example, discussing the contemporary meaning of community, the author argues that the new “imagined community” is held together by its members believing in it and sharing cultural practice rather than face-to-face interaction. (p. 95) Nevertheless, other scholars emphasize the unique communication possibilities offered by the Internet. Rheingold (1999), elaborating on the type of activities individuals carry out online, demonstrates, beyond any doubt, the communicative nature of these activities:

In cyberspace we chat and argue, engage in intellectual intercourse, perform acts of commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games and metagames, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. We do everything people do when they get together, but we do it with words on computer screens, leaving our bodies behind. (Rheingold, as cited in Bell, 2001, p. 98)

Wijnia (2003), in reference to Berners-Lee’s view of the purpose of the World Wide Web (WWW), notes that “the WWW should be a place in which everyone can speak for him or herself without the boundaries that are set by traditional media.” (p. 1) The boundaries, in this context, can be understood in terms of the media being the gatekeepers of not information, but conversation. The best venue for conversation on the Internet today is, arguably, the blogosphere - a term referring to the collective network of blogs. A blog is a type of website, usually frequently updated, with its content arranged chronologically. The conversation carried out through blogs is facilitated by blog authors referring to each other’s posts through contextual links and discussing them directly through comments. Wijnia observes that blogs “could contribute to a new form of democracy in which consensus is no longer built by the mass media through broadcasting, but a process of conversations between people to reach consensus.” (p. 1)

According to Hendrickson (2007), “blogging in many ways has returned to individuals and small groups the power to affect public discourse.” (p. 188)

Discussing the blogosphere’s phenomenon and its relation to traditional media is beyond the scope of this research. However, I will argue that new communication technologies, represented by the blogosphere, through facilitating a public forum for people from different groups, communities and nations, who previously could not have discussed matters of common interest due to location constraints, have given the public the means for conversation – in a way proving Dewey’s (1927) assertion that the “Great Community” can be attained with the help of communication technology. I will not elaborate on whether a sense of community has been restored or not, for that is not the point of this study. Instead, I will argue that the general public is emerging from its “eclipse” (Dewey, 1927) and is ready to be heard and cause significant consequences for organizations who choose to focus their public relations efforts on their perceived strategic publics and disregard the presence and significance of the public at large.

#### Summary of Reviewed Literature

The literature review has demonstrated that, although there has been much debate about the nature of public relations, there is a common thread which can be identified in most theories, which is the concept of segmenting the population, or the mass audience, into individual groups, or publics, targeting communication only at those publics which may have negative consequences for an organization.

The concept of a public, while originating from the field of political science, is defined in public relations as a group of people tied together by a common bond or

interest or concern and who have consequences for an organization. The concept of multiple individual publics, as opposed to the general public, appeared in public relations with the adoption of the relationship-building approach, which was proposed as an alternative to the traditional communication and, according to many scholars, public opinion manipulation approach. According to this new philosophy, public relations was meant to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its key publics.

There are numerous ways in which the public at large can be divided into smaller publics. In public relations, two main approaches have been identified: the stakeholder approach, where members of each public are linked to the organization through their occupations; and the situational approach, where people are grouped into publics based on their perceptions of a specific situation or problem. However, in both cases, a common thread can be identified, which is the abandonment of the concept of the public at large, or the general public, as a potential candidate for communication and relationship building. This public is considered insignificant, powerless and even nonexistent in regards to public relations.

This concept has been criticized by many scholars, who found that the organization and its social environment cannot be segmented into discrete entities and the perceived publics are not fixed categories. Kruckeberg and Vujnovic proposed an Organic model of public relations which supports the concept and significance of nonpublics and the existence of the general public and suggests that the organization is not the center, but rather an organic part of the whole social system of society.

The concept of the Organic model is closely related to Kruckeberg and Starck's (1988) Community-building theory of public relations. The authors argue that public relations should shift its focus from persuasive communication on behalf of a client to serving the society as well as the client and help restore and maintain the sense of community. And, although a historical overview of the profession has demonstrated that public relations is still centered on influencing public opinion through the use of mass media, Vujnovic et al. (2007) argued that "without the recognition of nonpublics and the general public, public relations in its theory and practice can only be hypocritical in its attempts at relationship building and can only remain inadequate in its efforts at community building." (p. 6)

The connection between the concept of community and the field of public relations is communication: community exists through its members sharing attitudes, opinions, knowledge and information – i.e., through communication. Therefore, according to Kruckeberg and Starck (1988), public relations practitioners, being communication professionals, should use their communication skills to help restore community. However, this assumption implies that community members are not capable of restoring community through communication on their own, which brings up the famous debate between Walter Lippmann and John Dewey about the role of communication and the public itself in the shaping of public opinion. Similar to Lippmann's (1922) argument, public relations scholars have suggested that communication should be left to communication professionals. However, just like Dewey (1927) defended the public's ability to make decisions in regards to public affairs, an argument can be made in favor of

the community being restored through the communication efforts of the public itself. Unfortunately, such an argument has not been made. Instead, the general public is considered in most contemporary public relations theory and practice as being insignificant and powerless.

It has been shown that community exists not just through communication, but through conversation. Conversation has not been supported by the mass media; however, new communication technologies provide such a possibility through the blogosphere. This study will argue that the general public may cause significant consequences for organizations who choose to focus their public relations efforts on their perceived strategic publics and disregard the presence and significance of the public at large.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

The method of this research must provide a way to gather empirical data which either supports or does not support the hypothesis, which states that new communication technologies have made it possible for nonpublics and the general public to have significant consequences for an organization. In my opinion, such data can be obtained by examining a case study dealing with an organizational communication crisis, during which an organization is being associated with negative information and/or opinion which has caused, or may cause, significant negative consequences for this organization.

The data required to support or not support the research hypothesis must show who was responsible for initiating, as well as continuously supporting the negative information which caused the crisis. The key data are the identities of the individuals or groups responsible for this communication activity. If those responsible can be aligned with a specific public, identifiable by an existing method of segmenting the general public into individual strategic publics, the hypothesis will not be supported, for nonpublics and the general public had no significant effect on the situation. However, if none, or most of the individuals responsible for the crisis cannot be aligned with a specific public, the hypothesis will be supported, for such data will demonstrate that individuals representing nonpublics and the general public have caused significant negative consequences for an organization.



### Justification of the Method

To collect the data required to support the research hypothesis, I have chosen to select blog posts as the main source of data with mainstream media articles as additional evidence of negative publicity, and the Edelman/Wal-Mart crisis created by the “Wal-Marting Across America” fake blog campaign as the subject matter. News articles were collected by manually searching the LexisNexis database. Blog posts were automatically collected from the Internet by a computer program written specifically for this research.

#### Selecting Blog Posts as the Main Source of Data

A blog is a website, usually frequently updated, with its content arranged chronologically. However, what makes blogs unique and particularly suitable for this research, is the link structure which connects them to each other. Tremayne (2007) explains:

The social ties [of a blog author (blogger)] are explicitly designated when a blogger provides a link to another blog.... Bloggers link to other blogs within their posts, typically to respond to a point another has made or to direct readers to an item the blogger found interesting or useful.... Collectively, these links and the blogs connected by them comprise the blogosphere. (p. xi)

Links can appear in the text of the post, in the comments section, in the trackback and pingback sections (both are mechanisms for facilitating and improving cross-blog discussions), and the blogroll section – “a list of links provided by a blogger to inform readers of work he or she considers useful or of high quality” (Tremayne, 2007, p. xi). Through these links, as well as through their multiple feedback/discussion features, “blogs have the capacity to be virtual communities” (Sundar, S.S., Edwards, H.H.,

Hu, Y., & Stavrositu, C., 2007) or, according to Johnson (2007), have become “the closest thing to a genuinely self-organizing community that the web has yet produced (as cited in Rutigliano, 2007, p 229).

In regards to the readership of blogs, a recent Pew Internet (n.d.a) study revealed data which clearly demonstrates the blogosphere overall popularity, as well as its growth:

By the end of 2004 blogs had established themselves as a key part of online culture. Two surveys by the Pew Internet & American Life Project in November established new contours for the blogosphere and its popularity:

- 7% of the 120 million U.S. adults who use the internet say they have created a blog or web-based diary. That represents more than 8 million people.
- 27% of internet users say they read blogs, a 58% jump from the 17% who told us they were blog readers in February. This means that by the end of 2004 32 million Americans were blog readers...
- The interactive features of many blogs are also catching on: 12% of internet users have posted comments or other material on blogs. (p. 1)

Figure 1 demonstrates a summary of some of these findings.

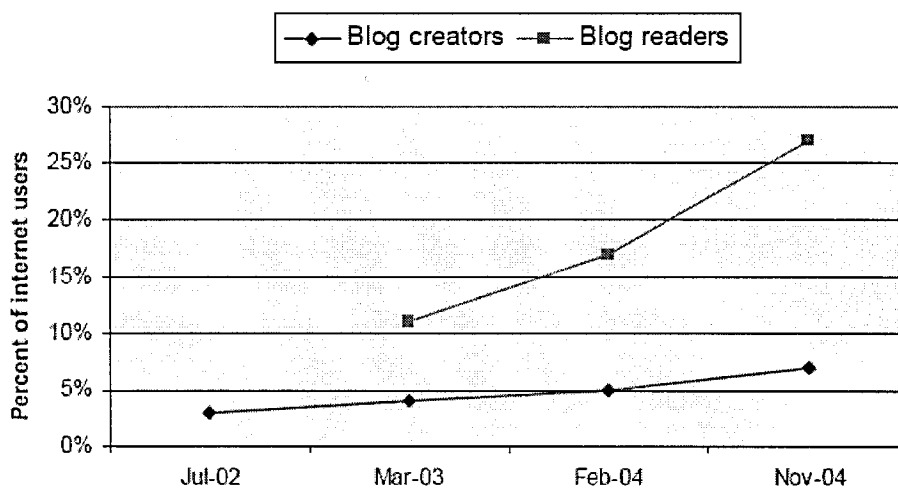


Figure 1. Blogosphere Growth.

Even though the study also showed that blogs have not yet gained the recognition of mainstream media – “blog-reading audience is about 20% of the size of the newspaper-reading population” and “only 38% of all internet users know what a blog is,” (Pew Internet, n.d.b) it is possible to conclude that the blogosphere is both adequate and appropriate as the main source of data for this research.

The link structure of the blogosphere makes it particularly suitable for this research. Besides, posts and comments are permanently stored together with the date and, often, the exact time of their creation. This makes the blogosphere unique as a source of data for research. Traditional content analysis could be used as a descriptive tool only. Pavlik (1987) observed that it “does not allow the researcher to draw conclusions about cause-and-effect relationships. Sending a message does not guarantee its being received or processed in the desired fashion.” (p. 40) However, with the blogosphere, one can exploit blog archives and the blogosphere link structure to chronologically trace the spreading of a particular story or theme, as well as the development of a discussion around it.

Besides, one can derive, in a similar way, the cause-and-effect relationships between the discussion in the blogosphere and articles in mainstream media, which suggests a conclusion that one medium – the blogosphere or the mainstream media – may be the cause of publicity in the other. Therefore, when the blogosphere generates negative publicity around some issue, after which the story is picked up by mainstream media – provided that negative publicity in mainstream media can be, without any doubt, considered as negative consequences – it is reasonable to conclude that bloggers caused negative consequences for the organization involved.

## Selecting the Edelman/Wal-Mart Crisis as the Subject

The chosen subject of this research is the Edelman/Wal-Mart crisis caused by the *Wal-Marting Across America* blog:

It all started [on September 27, 2006], when a folksy blog called Wal-Marting Across America was set up. The site featured the musings of a couple known only as Jim and Laura as they drove cross country in an RV, and included regular interviews with Wal-Mart workers, who were dependably happy about the company and their working conditions. (Gogoi, 2006a)

The first suspicions were expressed on October 3 on *The Writing On the Wal* – an activist blog dedicated to Wal-Mart issues – in the form of an open letter to Jim and Laura challenging them to reveal their true identities and financial sources. (Rees, 2006) On October 9, *Business Week* (businessweek.com) published an article revealing the truth behind the blog:

The story shot down speculation that Jim and Laura weren't real people, identifying the woman as Laura St. Claire, a freelance writer and an employee at the U.S. Treasury department. But it also disclosed that Wal-Mart was paying plenty for the couple's support, including money for renting the RV, gas, and fees for writing the blog. (Gogoi, 2006a)

What followed was an outrage among bloggers: “once bloggers heard that Jim and Laura had undisclosed benefactors, they were furious,” (Gogoi, 2006a) which fueled a conversation on multiple blogs which lasted for more than a month. The discussion mainly focused on Edelman – the public relations agency responsible for the creating the blog – questioning the ethical choices and communication skills of the agency’s top management – especially after a week-long silence from Edelman and an apology finally posted by the agency’s CEO, which, arguably, caused even more controversy than the original story. As a result, Wal-Mart made a statement that the company had nothing to

do with the campaign, the blog was removed (a screenshot of the blog web page is presented in Appendix A), and Richard Edelman, the agency's CEO, posted an apology on his own blog, which ignited further debate and criticism from other bloggers.

Thus, in this situation, the blogosphere, arguably, created a public relations disaster – i.e., significant negative consequences – for one of the world's largest public relations agencies. The question is, which I will try to answer in this research, what publics were responsible for initiating and maintaining the online conversation which led to these negative consequences. Answering this question will support or not support the main hypothesis of this thesis.

#### Selecting the Sources of Relevant Data

The first step to collecting the relevant data is to determine the criteria for relevance. There is plenty of information on the Internet about Edelman and even more on Wal-Mart. To retrieve information relevant to this study, after trying different combination of search terms, the following search query was selected: “edelman blog wal-marting or walmarting,” which proved to be optimal compared to alternative combinations.

The LexisNexis database was selected as the source for mainstream media articles. Selecting a source for blog posts proved to be more complicated. The traditional search approach using the LexisNexis database returned only four posts and was discarded as inadequate. The next obvious choice was manually searching the Internet. Using a general purpose search engine proved inefficient: searching Google returned more than 12,100 results, Yahoo returned more than 2,100 results. MSN returned more than 9,300

results. The main problem with these results was relevance: even though each result, most likely, contained all the search terms, most of them were not blog posts – which made them not relevant for this research.

A better source for blog posts is a blog search engine. After examining the two most popular blog search services – Technorati (technorati.com) and Google Blog Search (blogsearch.google.com), I selected Google. While the technical differences between these two search engines are beyond the scope of this research, Google was selected for the following reasons:

1. It is not restricted to particular type of blogs and searches for blogs automatically, thus, not requiring blog owners to submit their blogs: “Blog Search is Google search technology focused on blogs .... The goal of Blog Search is to include every blog that publishes a site feed... It is not restricted to Blogger blogs, or blogs from any other service” (Google, n.d.).
2. It relies on the blog feed to provide the blog’s content, thus, providing access to the most recent blog posts: “Blog Search indexes blogs by their site feeds, which will be checked frequently for new content. This means that Blog Search results for a given blog will update with new content much faster than standard web searches” (Google, n.d.).
3. It returned significantly more results than Technorati: 435 versus 7.

#### Computer Science Approach to Collecting Data

Collecting relevant news articles from mainstream media proved to be trivial: a total of 18 articles were manually retrieved using the LexisNexis database. However,

even after selecting an appropriate source, collecting relevant blog posts introduced significant complexity.

The main idea behind selecting the blogosphere as a source for data was to explore the “conversation” – i.e., determine how, when and by whom it was started, how it developed, how long it lasted and how many participants it attracted. Examining the results returned from Google manually would only provide information about how many participants the conversation attracted and when each post was created. A larger problem was that each post contained links to other web pages, some of which were blogs, which might contain relevant posts. Each of these potentially relevant posts could have more links to more relevant sources. Discovering this network of interlinked relevant posts would provide the necessary framework for examining the conversation. However, due to the number of links to potentially relevant blog posts, it is impossible to construct such a network manually within a reasonable period of time.

To solve this problem, I chose to use a computer science approach and wrote a program which automatically discovered all the relevant blog posts, linked directly or indirectly to the initial set of results obtained from the Google blog search engine.

### Collecting the Data

The first step in collecting the data was running the initial search for the “edelman blog wal-marting or walmarting” search terms using the Google blog search tool, which returned 435 results. After removing duplicate results, links to irrelevant pages (such as lists of links or blog directories), pages requiring signing-in, inaccessible pages, nonexistent pages and pages in other languages, there were 108 results left. This set of

URLs (URL stands for unique resource locator, which is the Internet address of a web page) was used as input to the program which proceeded to automatically discover all related posts.

### Description of the Program

The program can be described as a focused crawler – a computer science term describing a program which explores the hyperlink structure of the World Wide Web focusing on a specific type of web pages.

The program's most basic functionality can be described as connecting to a remote web server and retrieving the contents of a web page based on a provided URL – just like a human views a web page through an Internet browser like Mozilla Firefox or Internet Explorer. The content of a web page is retrieved as a string of text, which can be stored in a file or a database, viewed with the help of a text editor (or a word processor), and searched for terms, phrases or patterns.

The program executes by continuously retrieving web page content based on a collection of URLs, analyzing that content to determine the retrieved page relevance, and processing relevant pages by extracting all the links contained in the page and adding those links to the set of URLs waiting to be processed. As a result, the program (also referred to as the crawler, or the spider) will keep exploring the link structure, adding relevant pages, while it has URLs to process. If the criteria for relevance are tight enough, the program will eventually terminate because there will be no more URLs to process. However, if the criteria for relevance are not tight enough, the set of URLs to explore will



grow very fast beyond manageable size. The current program implementation proved to be sound and the program executed and terminated normally.

Figure 2 provides a more precise description of the program's algorithm:

- Add 108 results from the initial Google search to URL queue
- Repeat while URL queue is not empty:
  - Remove next URL from queue
  - Add the removed URL to the set of processed URLs
  - Retrieve web page by URL
  - If the retrieved web page contains the search terms:
    - Add the URL and the web page content to the set of relevant pages
    - Retrieve all relevant links from web page
    - For each retrieved link:
      - Add the link to the set of retrieved links
      - If the link points to a URL which is not in the set of retrieved links, is not in the URL queue, and is not in the set of processed URLs:
        - Add URL to queue

*Figure 2. URL Collection Algorithm.*

The relevance of a link was determined by two criteria:

- 1) The link does not point to the same domain name. For example, a link from `www.foo.com/1.html` pointing to `www.foo.com/2.html` would be considered irrelevant. A blog web page usually contains links to archive sections and most recent posts: processing those links would result in wasted time and duplicate records.
- 2) The link points to a specific web page, not a domain name. For example, a link pointing to `www.foo.com` would be considered irrelevant, while a link to `www.foo.com/1.html` - relevant. The reasoning behind this is based on the assumption that a blog post usually has a specific page address, whereas the

domain name-only address is, in most cases, reserved for the site's homepage.

Since the algorithm's purpose is to discover blog posts, links to homepages were ignored.

The program was written in the C# language for the .Net platform and was executed on a desktop computer running Windows XP. The program terminated in 4.5 hours, exploring a total of 11,935 web pages. The program discovered 477 relevant pages and 36,694 links.

### Description of the Final Data Set

Each of the 477 pages discovered by the program was manually examined. The first step was to eliminate irrelevant pages, such as duplicates (same posts appearing on other blogs or in different sections of the same blog), lists of links or blog directories, pages requiring signing-in, inaccessible pages, nonexistent pages, pages in other languages, as well as posts without a date, for they would be of little use for this particular research. The remaining 201 web pages were manually processed; the title, main body, author, posted date and time, and the number of comments for each page were stored in a relational database.

A few of the web pages in the final set turned out to be mainstream media articles – such as stories posted on [cnn.com](http://cnn.com), [businessweek.com](http://businessweek.com) and a few other online publications. These pages were not excluded for two reasons: first, in some cases it is hard to determine whether a post belongs to a blog, or a mainstream media publication; secondly, and most importantly, most of them have comments and are linked to from

blogs, which makes them part of the conversation going on in the blogosphere. Therefore, these pages will be treated and referred to as blog posts.

There were five blog posts which were posted on two separate blogs. These cases were treated as separate posts, since each received different comments and was lined to from different blogs.

The 11,935 links were automatically processed through running multiple scripts which normalized the URLs, bringing them to a common standard, discovering duplicate links and removing links to pages not part of the finalized set of blog posts. The remaining set of 774 links connecting only the final blog posts were also stored in a database. It is important to note, that, since the textual part of each link, as well as the total number of links connecting any two blogs were irrelevant, only distinct links were stored: i.e., if blog A linked to blog B through N links, only 1 link, or connection, was stored.

Therefore, the final data set consisted of three database tables, one containing blog post data (such as title, body, author, date and time of the post, and the number of comments), another one – summaries data for each blog, and the third – linkages between blog posts. This kind of data model offers the possibility of discovering various quantitative data by running selection queries.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis will consist of several parts. First, I will run several selection queries on the data to reveal statistical data, such as the number of blogs each blog is linked to (counting only relevant links – i.e., links to blog posts in the data collection), the

number of blogs that link to each blog, etc. The results of these queries will help me identify the blog posts which had the most effect on the discussion according to several criteria. I will proceed with a quantitative analysis of the blog posts to reveal the timeline of the conversation (i.e., how it developed chronologically). The next step will be a qualitative analysis of the content of all blogs (as well as their comments sections) in order to classify each blog as positive, negative, neutral or balanced. I will then perform the same qualitative analysis on the mainstream media articles obtained from LexisNexis.

The final step of the data analysis will be to select a set of the most influential blogs in regards to this particular conversation based on the obtained results from all previous analysis, identify the authors of these blogs and determine whether they can be considered to be members of any key public, defined with the stakeholder or situational approach to segmenting the general public.

#### Quantitative Analysis of Blog Posts

Quantitative analysis of the blog posts data will be based on the following reports:

1. List of all blogs, sorted by the following criteria for each blog:
  - number of posts
  - number of comments
  - number of links from other blogs
  - number of links to other blogs

2. List of all blog posts, sorted by the following criteria for each blog post:
  - posted date and time
  - number of comments
3. Number of posts per month and per year, starting with October 2006
4. Number of comments per month and per year, starting with October 2006
5. Number of posts per day for October 2006
6. List of links for each blog with the following data:
  - parent (i.e., “link from”) blog URL
  - parent blog post date and time
  - child (i.e., “link to”) blog URL
  - child blog post date and time

#### Qualitative Analysis of Blog Posts and Mainstream Media Articles

The purpose of the qualitative analysis of the most influential blog posts will be to determine whether the posts and the comments made on these posts were overall negative, positive, balanced, or neutral. Based on the results, I will estimate what percentage of the conversation (calculated based on the total number of both, posts and comments) was negative. I will also discuss the extent to which the posts were negative: while this analysis will not offer any concrete quantifiable results, it will help illustrate the specifics of the negative consequences caused to Edelman by the discussion on the blogosphere.

The news articles will be analyzed in a similar way, to determine the negative publicity related to the case.

A list of negative news articles and negative blog posts sorted by date, may also reveal the cause-and-effect relationship between the blogosphere and mainstream media, provided one mentions the other as a source.

### Assigning Blog Authors to Publics

The final step of the data analysis will be obtaining the identities of the authors of the most influential blogs (determined in the previous steps) and attempting to map these authors to specific publics, defined by either the stakeholder or the situational approach. The source data for this step will vary. In some cases, a blog description (usually, the “about” web page) will be sufficient to determine that the blog represents an activist group. In other cases, a blogger’s biography (often available as a separate web page) will provide clues to his or her professional affiliation, which will help align the author with a specific public. If there is no data about the author’s identity, I will analyze other posts on that blog by looking at the list of categories available on most blogs, to determine the author’s main interests and the main topics covered on the blog. This data will help speculate on the author’s possible alignment with a particular public.

The process of mapping a blog author to a public will be unique in every case, so each mapping will be discussed separately. I will attempt to align each author to a known type of public (such as employees, media, activist group, etc.); if such an alignment is not possible, I will assign to author to the “nonpublic” category. The general public consists of both, publics and nonpublics (i.e., everyone). Thus, if all or most of the authors of the most influential blogs are assigned to nonpublics, I will conclude that the general public

caused significant negative consequences for the organization involved in the crisis. However, if that is not the case, my hypothesis will not be supported.

### Limitations of the Method

The main limitation of the methodology is that it does not analyze the entire collection of blog posts related to the case study. Gathering additional relevant posts might be possible by expanding the set of search terms used to determine web page relevance by more general terms, such as wal-mart and not requiring that all terms appear on a page. For example, a blog post about the Wal-Mart fake blog not mentioning the name of the blog or the name of the public relations agency responsible for the blog, would be still relevant, yet it was not captured by the selected data collection method.

Another limitation is that the comments on each post as well as the trackback and pingback sections were not processed in detail: only the total number of comments was recorded, whereas the trackback and pingback sections were only used as a source of outbound links – just like the rest of the web page’s content. Recording each comment’s author, posting date and time, as well as the author’s blog’s location (when applicable) would provide a far more detailed network of posts and comments, which would offer possibilities for a much more detailed and precise analysis of the network and the conversation.

However, both of the described limitations do not affect the data significantly. The constructed network, which represents a chronological model of the conversation, contains the most relevant blog posts, thus being an adequate representation of the data.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This research examined 156 blogs containing 201 relevant posts, connected by 1,548 links (which constituted 774 connections between pages). This chapter describes the results of examining this data.

The data analysis consists of the following parts:

1. A quantitative analysis of blogs will examine the blogs in terms of numerical data, such as the number of posts and comments for each blog, as well as the number of inbound links from relevant blogs and the number of outbound links to relevant blogs.
2. A chronological analysis of blog posts will quantitatively describe the timeline of the posts, i.e., the chronological development of the conversation in the blogosphere.
3. A qualitative analysis of blog posts will classify each post as positive (P), negative (N), neutral (NT) or balanced (B).
4. A qualitative analysis of mainstream media articles will classify each article according to the same scale as blog posts.
5. Based on the carried out analysis, I will identify a set of blogs, which proved to be most influential in the context of the Edelman/Wal-Mart blog case.
6. Finally, I will examine all blog posts and mainstream media articles to identify specific negative themes. I will elaborate on each identified theme to demonstrate the details, as well as the scope of the negative publicity.



For convenience of reference, each blog is assigned an identification number (ID), which are consistent throughout this thesis.

### Quantitative Analysis of Blogs

The purpose of this analysis was to quantify the scale of the conversation, as well as to identify numerical criteria which may help determine the significance of each blog as a facilitator of the conversation, i.e., to identify the most influential blogs. Detailed statistical analysis of this data is outside of the scope of this research.

Blogs were analyzed quantitatively based on the following criteria:

- number of relevant posts per blog;
- number of comments per blog;
- number of inbound links from relevant blogs per blog;
- number of outbound links to relevant blogs per blog.

I believe that each of these criteria may be interpreted to some extent as a measure of a blog's participation in a given conversation. Multiple relevant posts demonstrate the blog author's considerable interest in the subject. Outbound links direct the blog's readers to other blogs participating in the conversation. Inbound links direct readers from other blogs participating in the conversation; and, most importantly, indicate a measure of trust extended from the linking blogs. Finally, the number of comments on a blog is a direct indication of the scale of the conversation.

This chapter provides tables with the top 20 results. Complete lists are available in Appendix B.

### Number of Relevant Posts per Blog

Most of the blogs contained only one relevant post. Only 16% of the blogs (25 out of 156) contained between 2 and 5 posts relevant to the subject. However, these results show a disproportional distribution of comments and links, with the top 25 blogs in this category (or 16% of all blogs) providing more than 1/3 (35%) of the total number of relevant posts, 45% of all comments (732 out of 1,623), 27% of all outbound links (210 out of 774) and 33% of all inbound links (255 out of 774). This observation suggests that blogs containing multiple posts, on the average, may be more influential than single-post blogs. A list of the top 20 blogs in this category is given in Table 1.

Table 1. *Top 20 Blogs with Multiple Posts*

#	blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
1	marketingvox.com	91	7	0	7	6	N
2	walmartwatch.com	153	5	127	23	15	B
3	webpronews.com	159	5	0	7	11	N
4	consumerist.com	114	4	46	1	11	N
5	mathewingram.com	93	4	61	22	16	N
6	pr-squared.com	37	4	21	13	19	N
7	deepjiveinterests.com	44	3	9	12	13	N
8	money.cnn.com	99	3	0	5	9	N
9	scobleizer.com	128	3	127	16	15	N
10	basturea.com	132	2	44	34	18	N
11	blogtorank.com	137	2	0	1	3	NT
12	blogworks.in	142	2	0	5	2	NT
13	businessweek.com	101	2	207	0	55	N
14	holmesreport.blogspot.com	108	2	9	8	1	N
15	intuitive.com	58	2	28	10	13	N
16	isabelwalcott.com	70	2	0	4	4	P
17	jaffejuice.com	73	2	2	3	9	N
18	mrwavetheory.blogspot.com	76	2	0	4	2	N
19	parmet.net	7	2	2	4	3	N
20	prblog.typepad.com	21	2	4	8	11	N

### Number of Comments per Blog

More than half of all blogs (58%) had comments. These blogs provided 59% (119) of the total number of relevant posts, 69% of all outbound links (531) and 66% of all inbound links (513). This data is, overall, proportional; however, it is noteworthy that the top five blogs in this category (or top 3% of all blogs), containing more than 100 comments each, are responsible for 52% of all comments, 7% of all outbound links and 20% of all inbound links, which is highly disproportional. A list of the top 20 blogs in this category is given in Table 2.

Table 2. *Top 20 Blogs with Comments*

#	blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
1	dailykos.com	41	1	278	3	1	N
2	businessweek.com	28	2	207	0	55	N
3	scobleizer.com	128	3	127	16	15	N
4	walmartwatch.com	153	5	127	23	15	B
5	edelman.com	48	1	102	11	67	B
6	mathewingram.com	93	4	61	22	16	N
7	micropersuasion.com	96	1	57	25	42	NT
8	consumerist.com	37	4	46	1	11	N
9	basturea.com	7	2	44	34	18	N
10	blogbar.de	13	1	41	13	2	N
11	buzzmachine.com	29	1	41	5	5	N
12	intuitive.com	70	2	28	10	13	N
13	nevillehobson.com	103	1	27	10	5	N
14	pr-squared.com	114	4	21	13	19	N
15	lostremote.com	89	1	18	0	0	N
16	sarahcarey.ie	126	1	18	1	0	N
17	threadwatch.org	143	1	18	4	1	NT
18	hyperorg.com	60	1	17	3	5	B
19	mpdailyfix.com	100	1	17	6	3	N
20	toprankblog.com	145	1	17	2	2	N

### Number of Outbound Links per Blog

Eighty-eight percent of blogs contained outbound links (i.e., links to other relevant blog posts). These blogs also contained 85% of all comments and 81% of all inbound links (i.e., links from other relevant blog posts). A list of the top 20 blogs in this category is given in Table 3.

Table 3. *Top 20 Blogs with Outbound Links*

#	blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
1	basturea.com	7	2	44	34	18	N
2	bloggersblog.com	15	1	0	29	6	NT
3	micropersuasion.com	96	1	57	25	42	NT
4	chrisabraham.com	34	1	0	23	2	N
5	walmartwatch.com	153	5	127	23	15	B
6	mathewingram.com	93	4	61	22	16	N
7	kbcafe.com	81	1	0	16	5	P
8	scobleizer.com	128	3	127	16	15	N
9	sethf.com	129	1	1	15	5	NT
10	blogbar.de	13	1	41	13	2	N
11	newpersuasion.typepad.com	104	1	1	13	1	N
12	pr-squared.com	114	4	21	13	19	N
13	blogwriteforceos.com	24	1	9	12	14	N
14	cjack.wordpress.com	36	1	1	12	2	NT
15	deepjiveinterests.com	44	3	9	12	13	N
16	edelman.com	48	1	102	11	67	B
17	sparkplug9.com	135	1	13	11	18	N
18	blogpi.net	20	1	3	10	1	NT
19	businessblogwire.com	27	1	8	10	4	N
20	intuitive.com	70	2	28	10	13	N

### Number of Inbound Links per Blog

Seventy-three percent of blogs contained inbound links. These blogs also contained 95% of all comments and 89% of all inbound links. That is in sharp contrast with the previous category where a greater percentage of blogs (88% vs. 73%) contained less

comments (85% vs. 95%). This may suggest that blogs with a large number of inbound links are likely to have more comments, whereas more outbound links does not necessarily imply more comments. A list of the top 20 blogs in this category is given in Table 4.

Table 4. *Top 20 Blogs with Inbound Links*

#	blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
1	edelman.com	48	1	102	11	67	B
2	businessweek.com	28	2	207	0	55	N
3	publications.mediapost.com	118	1	0	0	54	N
4	micropersuasion.com	96	1	57	25	42	NT
5	holtz.com	59	1	0	2	35	P
6	pr-squared.com	114	4	21	13	19	N
7	basturea.com	7	2	44	34	18	N
8	sparkplug9.com	135	1	13	11	18	N
9	mathewingram.com	93	4	61	22	16	N
10	scobleizer.com	128	3	127	16	15	N
11	walmartwatch.com	153	5	127	23	15	B
12	blogwriteforceos.com	24	1	9	12	14	N
13	zdnet.com	122	1	0	0	14	N
14	deepjiveinterests.com	44	3	9	12	13	N
15	intuitive.com	70	2	28	10	13	N
16	washingtonpost.com	154	1	0	0	13	NT
17	consumerist.com	37	4	46	1	11	N
18	prblog.typepad.com	115	2	4	8	11	N
19	publishing2.com	119	1	0	10	11	N
20	wagnercomm.blogspot.com	151	1	11	4	11	B

### Chronological Analysis of the Conversation in Blogs and Mainstream Media

The purpose of a chronological analysis is to quantitatively describe the timeline of the entire conversation – both in the blogosphere and in mainstream media

### Analysis of Blog Posts

The data shows that the conversation started on October 9, 2006 and was actively carried on until the end of the month. The conversation was triggered by the story published on *businessweek.com* (Gogoi, 2006a), which created 200 comments and was followed on October 10, 2006 by a post on *walmartwatch.com* (Jack, 2006) with 65 comments and a post on *dailymkos.com* (JR Monsterfodder, 2006) with 278 comments. However, the blogosphere truly “exploded” on October 16, 2006 with 37 posts – the day when Edelman’s CEO Richard Edelman posted an apology to his own blog, which caused even more controversy than the original story.

Sixty-six percent of all posts appeared in the period between October 12, 2006 and October 20, 2006, which means that the main part of the conversation lasted a little over a week. Figure 3 illustrates the progress of the conversation in terms of the number of posts for each day in October.

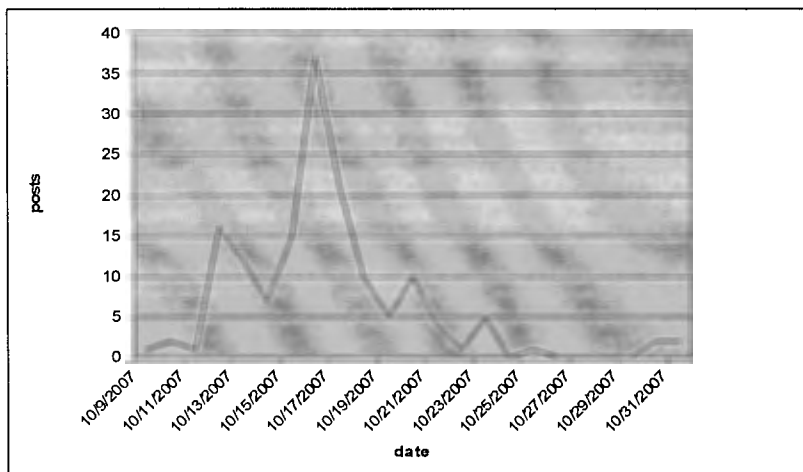
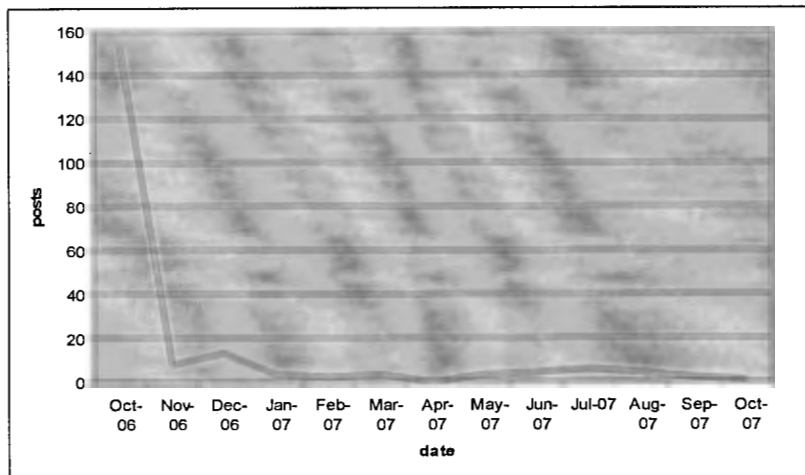
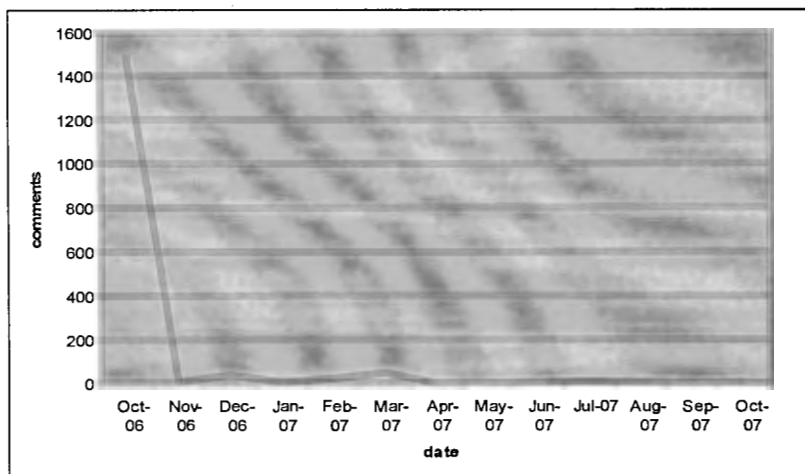


Figure 3. Blog Posts for October 2006

The data in Figure 4 and Figure 5 demonstrates the timeline of both – posts and comments – as observed from October 2006 until November 2007. Seventy-six percent of all blog posts appeared in October 2006; 92% of all comments were made for blog posts which appeared in October 2006. Therefore, the data shows that the bulk of the conversation took place within the first three weeks after the situation occurred.



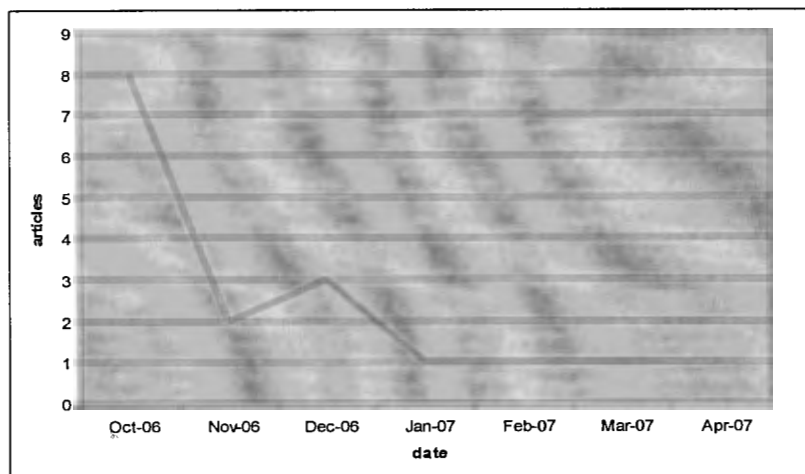
*Figure 4. Blog Posts for 2006 - 2007*



*Figure 5. Blog Comments for 2006 - 2007*

### Analysis of Mainstream Media Articles

The mainstream media data is by far less interesting than that of the blogosphere. Only 18 relevant articles were discovered, 50% of which were published in October 2006. The rest were published from November 2006 to April 2007. Figure 6 illustrates this data.



*Figure 6. Mainstream Media Articles for 2006 - 2007*

### Qualitative Analysis of Blog Posts and Mainstream Media Articles

All blog posts and mainstream media articles were classified as positive, negative, neutral or balanced. There was no specific criteria for this classification and it was carried out by one person only, therefore the results cannot be considered absolutely reliable in terms of exact numbers. However, in terms of demonstrating the main trends of the conversation and the scale of negative publicity, I consider these results to be accurate.



### Classification Criteria

When classifying a post, I analyzed all the relevant content available on the web page. A reader who visits the web page with the post is exposed to all the content on the page, so I did not distinguish between the post itself, the comments, the trackback and pingback sections.

A blog post often contained extensive quotations, or even “reprints” of other posts. In a few cases, posts were digests of other blogs. In all such cases a post was analyzed based on the available content, not the content’s authorship. The same principle was applied to mainstream media articles.

I did not estimate the degree to which a post or an article was negative or positive, because it was irrelevant for the purpose of this research. What mattered was whether the content in question contributed to negative publicity or not.

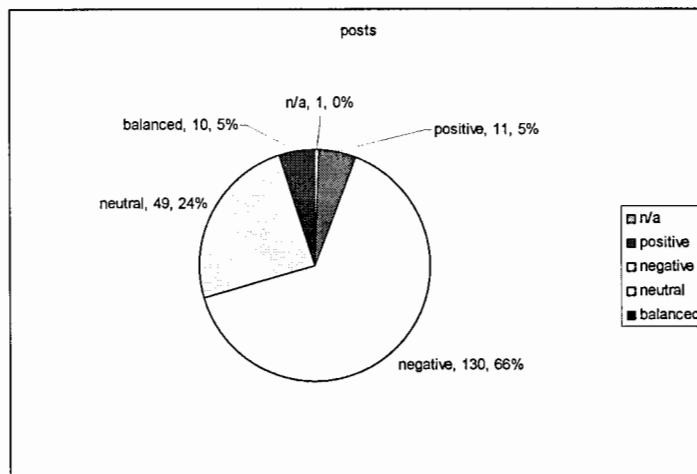
The following criteria were used for classifying the results:

1. Posts and articles were classified as positive if they did not contain any negative opinion, and the information was presented from a positive perspective.
2. Posts and articles were classified as negative if there was some negative opinion (for online sources – in the content itself or in comments) or if the information was presented from a negative perspective.
3. Posts and articles were classified as neutral when the coverage of the situation was minimal, did not include the author’s (or editorial) opinion, and, therefore, did not create any significant negative publicity.

4. Post and articles were classified as balanced if both, negative and positive opinions, were expressed. With blog posts, in some cases a post was positive, but a significant part of the comments was negative, in which case the post was classified as balanced.
5. One blog post was unavailable at the time of the coding. That post was classified as not available (n/a).

### Classification Results of Blog Posts

According to the results of this classification, 66% of the posts were negative, 11.5% were positive, 24% were neutral, and 10.5% were balanced. Therefore, 76.5% of the posts (negative and balanced combined) provided access to negative information or opinions. Figure 7 demonstrates the quantitative results of this classification.



*Figure 7. All Blog Posts Displayed by Type*

Figure 8 demonstrates the chronological development of the conversation during the most important period: October 2006, arranged by the type of posts.

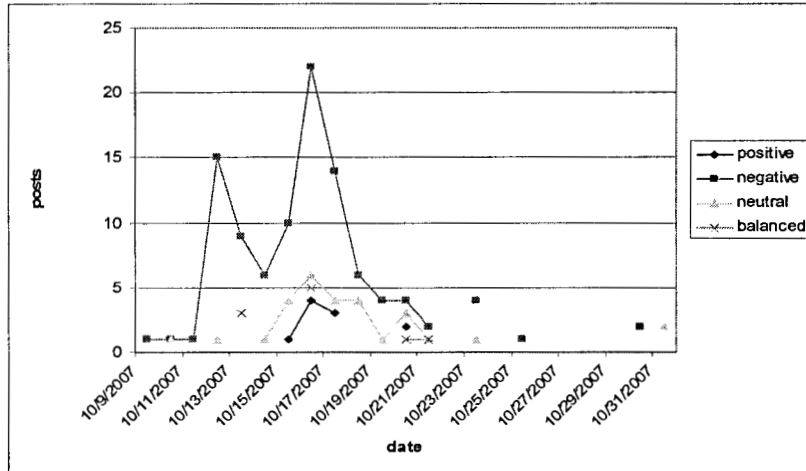


Figure 8. Blog Posts for October 2006 Displayed by Type

### Classification Results of Mainstream Media Articles

According to the results of this classification, 78% of the posts were negative and 22% were neutral. Figure 9 demonstrates the quantitative results of this classification.

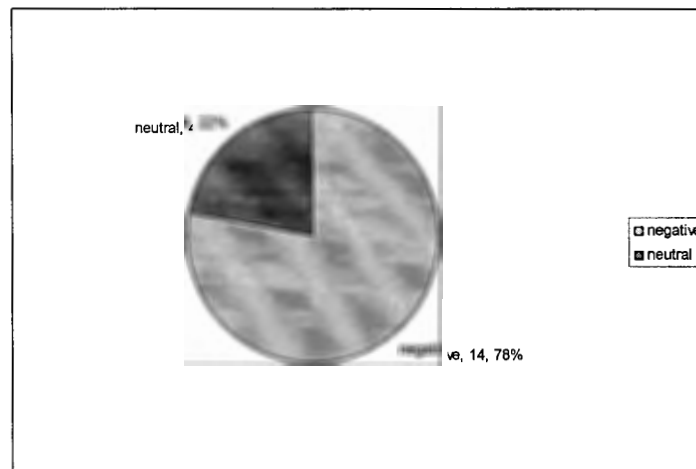


Figure 9. All Mainstream Media Articles Displayed by Type

### Selecting the Top Blogs

The purpose of the carried out analysis was to select a set of blogs, which were most influential in the context of the Edelman/Wal-Mart blog case. These blogs will be used to identify the individuals who had the most impact on the conversation. These individual authors or contributors represent the key data which may support or not support the main hypothesis of this study and will be examined in the next chapter.

As it has been noted in the previous chapter, the method of selecting the source data for this research has limitations. I cannot be sure that I have located all the blogs which participated in the conversation. However, I estimate that my method located most of them. Therefore, by selecting the most influential blogs from a data set which is incomplete, yet contains most of the existing relevant blogs, it is reasonable to assume that this sample will include most of the influential blogs on this topic.

#### Selection Criteria

I have analyzed each blog in terms of the number of relevant posts it contains, number of comments, number of outbound links to relevant blogs, and number of inbound links from relevant blogs. I have also classified each blog as positive, negative, neutral or balanced, and examined the timeline of the entire conversation.

There is no existing formula to calculate the degree to which each blog affected the conversation; therefore, the suggested selection criteria are only an attempt to identify the most influential blogs in this context. The most important criteria for a given blog, in my opinion, are comments left by readers, for they provide direct evidence that the blog had an impact on the conversation. The next important criteria are inbound links from other

relevant blogs: while there is no concrete evidence that these links have been used by readers, they signify a considerable endorsement from the linking blog, which implies a certain level of importance of the blog to which the link points. Although this is not the topic of this study, it is necessary to mention that determining “the importance,” or popularity of a web page based on the quantity and quality of its inbound links is a well researched concept in computer science and is the mathematical foundation of most Internet search engines. (Brin & Page, 1998) Outbound links provide connections between a blog and other blogs participating in the conversation. Finally, multiple relevant posts demonstrate the blog author’s considerable interest in the subject and, for that reason, may attract additional readership. Based on this reasoning, I have come up with the following selection process:

1. Select the top 50% of blogs with the most comments;
2. Add the top 25% of blogs with the most inbound links;
3. Add the top 10% of blogs with the most outbound links;
4. Add the top 5% of blogs with the most posts;
5. Add the blog which started the conversation;
6. Remove blogs which were positive or neutral in nature.

This study is focused on estimating negative consequences, which result from negative publicity. Therefore, positive and neutral blogs will be removed from the final set.

### List of Most Influential Blogs

The selection process was executed in the following steps:

1. 45 blogs were selected as the top 50% of blogs with comments.
2. 29 blogs were selected as the top 25% of blogs with inbound links (12 new blogs added)
3. 14 blogs were selected as the top 10% of blogs with outbound links (5 new blogs added)
4. 1 blog was selected as the top 5% of blogs with multiple posts (1 new blog added)
5. 1 blog was selected as the one that started the conversation (0 new blogs added)
6. 4 positive and 9 neutral blogs removed

As a result of this selection, the final set consists of 50 blogs. This set represents 32% of all blogs, 44% of all blog posts, 88% of all comments, 66% of all inbound links and 51% of all outbound links. Ninety percent of the set represents negative posts, the remaining 10% represent balanced posts. Table B5 in Appendix B displays the complete list of these blogs.

### Analysis of Negative Themes in Blogs and Mainstream Media

This research is focused on the subject of negative consequences and negative publicity caused for an organization by blogs. Positive or neutral themes in blogs or mainstream media have no effect in regards to supporting or not supporting the main hypothesis of this research. Therefore, I have examined only negative themes, both in

blog posts and mainstream media articles. The purpose of this analysis is to identify the main themes and, through examples, illustrate the specific content of the expressed opinions, as well as to estimate the extent to which these opinions were negative. The results of this analysis will help speculate on the scale of the negative consequences caused by the blogosphere.

The identified themes, however, are not exhaustive and mutually exclusive. Furthermore, blogs, identified as examples supporting each theme, are provided as a sample listing only: each blog was selected because a particular theme was expressed in its posts especially vividly. Creating a precise mapping of themes to blog posts is beyond the scope of this research.

#### Negative Themes in Blog Posts

After analyzing the 201 blog posts, I summarized the negative content, which constituted seven main themes:

1. Richard Edelman and/or Steve Rubel are not participating in the conversation;
2. Edelman's and/or Rubel's statements are inadequate;
3. Edelman is blamed for not being transparent;
4. Edelman is blamed for violating WOMMA Code of Ethics;
5. General negative comments on Edelman;
6. Public relations people know very little about the blogosphere and social media;
7. "Real world" negative consequences for Edelman and/or Wal-Mart.

Richard Edelman is the CEO of Edelman and a blogger himself. Like Richard Edelman, Steve Rubel is a prominent blogger; he works for Edelman. WOMMA is the Word of Mouth Marketing Association; whose Code of Ethics was crafted with Edelman's help.

Table 5 lists the blogs which contain posts supporting each theme. The blog details are available in Appendix B in Table B6.

Table 5. *Blogs Supporting Main Negative Themes*

Theme	Blogs
1	1, 7, 14, 24, 28, 35, 44, 48, 50, 59, 75, 93, 99, 114, 127, 137, 156
2	4, 39, 48, 50, 59, 70, 71, 75, 76, 77, 78, 91, 93, 95, 101, 114, 122, 137
3	1, 7, 14, 19, 23, 25, 27, 28, 44, 52, 53, 59, 70, 75, 85, 91, 93, 95, 115, 118, 121, 135, 153, 156
4	4, 7, 37, 48, 52, 70, 85, 121, 148, 153
5	3, 4, 7, 12, 13, 19, 24, 71, 87, 91, 135, 137
6	6, 10, 11, 16, 90, 135, 136, 137
7	1, 7, 11, 14, 20, 154

Following are brief descriptions of each theme together with selections of opinion examples supporting each theme.

1. Richard Edelman and/or Steve Rubel are not participating in the conversation.

The news about Edelman launching and operating *Wal-Marting Across America*, a blog for Wal-Mart without disclosing their involvement broke out on October 9, which instantly triggered a heated discussion in the blogosphere. However, the agency responsible for the blog kept silent until October 16, which might have caused even more



controversy. Edelman had been considered a leader in the field of public relations when it came to embracing new communication technologies and, in particular, the blogosphere. Richard Edelman, the agency's CEO, as well Steve Rubel, as a senior vice president, are both very prominent bloggers, who were considered experts on social media and the changing role of public relations in the online community:

Edelman is being held to a somewhat higher standard than another run-of-the-mill PR shop might be in a similar situation, but that is only fitting because they have put themselves out front on the blog transparency and "being part of the conversation" issue and they failed to uphold those commitments. (Ingram, 2006)

Naturally, the online community turned to them for an explanation of the situation. Despite the fact that the essence of the blogosphere is conversation, neither of them responded until a week later.

The following examples from blog posts and online news articles demonstrate to what extent the online community was surprised and alarmed by the agency's silence:

So where is Edelman in this particular conversation? Missing in action. As dismaying as this latest misstep is, it's even more dismaying to see Edelman's high-powered social media experts failing to walk the talk. (Holtz, as cited in Burn, 2006)

Now PR industry blogger Shel Holtz is laying it on thick, wondering why in this era of transparency Richard Edelman and his braintrust haven't stepped up with a mea culpa .... It's great stuff. There's nothing like a public spat between PR gurus. And it's particularly informative to learn what the PR kings do when their own scandal erupts: stay silent. (Ryan, 2006)

And what is the point of blogging if you're not participating in the conversation? .... Is not the whole point of public relations in this new social participatory medium to not control the conversation – but to become part of it? (Hung, 2006b)

[Edelman's and Rubel's] silence became more acidic than the original faux-pas. (Defren, 2006b)

Silence is not golden. Silence gives consent. (Defren, 2006a)

It seems like “shocked,” and “outraged” at the “utter hypocrisy” and “ongoing silence” is but skimming the top of this PR disaster (for, ironically, a Public Relations firm) (Hung, 2006a)

2. Edelman’s and/or Rubel’s statements are inadequate. On October 16 at

2:58 p.m. Richard Edelman posted a statement to his blog. Fourteen minutes later, Steve Rubel posted a statement as well. Both statements caused significant criticism; arguably, even more than the controversial blog itself. Both statements are presented below:

For the past several days, I have been listening to the blogging community discuss the cross-country tour that Edelman designed for Working Families for Wal-Mart .... I want to acknowledge our error in failing to be transparent about the identity of the two bloggers from the outset. This is 100% our responsibility and our error; not the client's .... Let me reiterate our support for the WOMMA guidelines on transparency, which we helped to write. Our commitment is to openness and engagement because trust is not negotiable and we are working to be sure that commitment is delivered in all our programs. (Edelman, 2006b)

As many of you know, over the past few days the blog community has been actively discussing the Working Families for Wal-Mart blog. As my CEO Richard Edelman explains on his blog, our firm failed to be completely transparent. I am sorry I could not speak about this sooner. I had no personal role in this project. There is a process in place that I had to let proceed through its course. This is why it took some time. Like Richard says, we are committed to the WOMMA guidelines on transparency. (Rubel, 2006)

To summarize, Edelman’s statement acknowledges an error in failing to disclose the identity of the two *Wal-Marting Across America* bloggers. Rubel, in his statement, denies all responsibility. The blogosphere’s response was mixed: there were some bloggers (mostly public relations practitioners) who felt that these statements were sufficient. However, the overwhelming reaction was negative:

Edelman PR's mea culpas for creating a blatantly fake Wal-Mart blog ring hollow because Richard Edelman apologizes for getting caught, not for the agency generating yet another unethical Wal-Mart social media campaign. (BL Ochman as cited in MarketingVOX, 2006a)

The PR industry is out there working on a PR cover-up of this event. In the news and on the blogs now, the dominant headline is “Edelman apologizes”, and PR industry folks are out there, busy writing babble about how they don’t think Edelman or Wal-Mart did anything wrong. They’re saying that the lies were just an “omission”. (Wood, 2006)

But the key words I really wanted to see in their posts – particularly in Richard's – were buried just below the rather slick surface, alas. Five simple words: “We were wrong. I’m sorry”. I was concerned that Richard’s very carefully worded “mea culpa” was rather too polished – a commitment to transparency, without a clear, succinct, and direct apology. (O'Connor Clarke, 2006)

Edelman screwed up, big time. Not just because of the blog and the lack of full disclosure – which may have happened because Wal-Mart ignored their advice, or didn’t ask for it – but because of their lack of response, and the relative inadequacy of that response when it did come. (Market Sentinel, 2006)

Those are perhaps the saddest words about the matter. It is boilerplate old-school PR and disregards everything that Web 2.0 and the blogosphere has championed about all of us as individuals. This is the people's revolution. If you don't understand the ground rules and the speed at which things move by now, it's time to take yourself out of the game. Their apology is empty. OK, they admit to screwing up but there's an even bigger problem now. It's time to explain how this could even happen. (Astor, 2006)

3. Edelman is blamed for not being transparent. A very common theme was the

lack of transparency in Edelman’s actions:

It lacks transparency – the very thing Wal-Mart's PR agency likes to trumpet. (Burn, 2006)

The effort, launched in part to redefine the often-pejorative term “Walmarting,” which can refer to the obliteration of small businesses when big-box retailers come to town, may yet come to stand for the obliteration of trust in the authentic voice of blogs when big marketers and PR firms settle in the blogosphere. (MarketingVOX, 2006b)

Moral of the story: It’s not nice to fool the blogosphere. Just be upfront, honest, and authentic. (Hussey, 2006)

Koetsier (2006) summarizes the principles of transparency, quoting Robert Scoble, a prominent blogger, “who humanized Microsoft while being honest about the fact that Microsoft paid his mortgage:”

1. You want to start a corporate blog? Great. Be upfront about it.
  2. You want to start a marketing blog and get paid for it? Great. Be honest about who you are.
  3. You want to start a PR blog for your client? Great. Tell us who you are and who your client is.
- You want to do that fake stuff? Keep it where it belongs, in mainstream media. (Koetsier, 2006)

It is necessary to mention, that the scale of Edelman’s criticism by bloggers can be explained, in part, by Richard Edelman’s own commitment to transparency, which he expressed on multiple occasions in his own blog:

Bloggers can take care of themselves in this evolving world. They should be careful to disclose receipt of product samples, membership on advisory boards or any other financial consideration that might affect their impartiality. (Edelman, 2006a)

We cannot tolerate any arrangement that envisages payment for placement. To do otherwise completely undermines the essence of our position as honest advocate and eliminates the separation of church and state for the media. Why bother reading the editorial copy if it is purchased in the same way as the advertising? (Edelman, 2005)

A company just has to take a look at the blogosphere to see that its customers are now clearly and firmly in charge of the conversation. So, companies need to establish relationships, based on mutual respect, continuous dialogue and transparency. (Edelman, as cited in Jack, 2007)

These statements were brought up by bloggers in multiple posts and comments.

4. Edelman is blamed for violating WOMMA Code of Ethics. Edelman was not only a member of the Word Of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA), the agency also helped create the association’s Code of Ethics. Multiple blogs mention the issue of

Edelman violating this code of ethics; Constantin Basturea's blog offers the most detailed discussion. The post offers an explanation of exactly what principles Edelman violated:

Wal-Marting Across America campaign/blog was obviously breaking the Honesty of Identity guidelines:

- Clear disclosure of identity is vital to establishing trust and credibility. We do not blur identification in a manner that might confuse or mislead consumers as to the true identity of the individual with whom they are communicating, or instruct or imply that others should do so.
- Campaign organizers should monitor and enforce disclosure of identity ... Explicit disclosure ... would be required for [a] corporate representative that could be mistaken for an average consumer. (Basturea, 2006)

The same goes for Honesty of Relationship:

- We practice openness about the relationship between consumers, advocates, and marketers. We encourage word of mouth advocates to disclose their relationship with marketers in their communications with other consumers...
- We stand against shill and undercover marketing, whereby people are paid to make recommendations without disclosing their relationship with the marketer. (Basturea, 2006)

The post speculates on the possibility of WOMMA sanctioning Edelman for violating its Code of Ethics:

There is a chance to have a positive outcome for this story. If WOMMA's willingness to keep his members accountable will meet with Edelman's willingness to accept publicly a sanction, then marketers will get a clear signal that their engagement in social media has to follow clear rules, and that breaking these rules will have consequences ... If not... – then we're back to the world of Old PR: we have nice ethical codes, but there's no way to enforce them. (Basturea, 2006)

5. General negative comments on Edelman. In addition to being blamed for the discussed issues, Edelman was accused of dishonesty, unethical behavior and professional incompetence. The agency, as well as its top management, also became the target of numerous negative comments in general:

Hard to believe that the Edelman team would then give Wal-Mart such bad advice, as in: Here's how to behave in the corporate blogosphere: fake it. (Weil, 2006)

[Edelman] screwed up royally .... Edelman was being duplicitous and tricking people. (Taylor, 2006)

To use the blog to shamelessly push your own agenda, not smart. (Hussey, 2006)

Covert websites and blogs are 100% bad. (Jones, 2006)

Wal-Mart blogging exercise that appears to have broken every unwritten rule in the book. (Holmes, 2006)

Pity it reads just like typical PR rubbish. Hold on a minute, it is PR rubbish! It turns out that this idea was cooked up by the Edelman agency - the same Edelman whose boss writes a blog, and that hired a slew of PR bloggers. (Fraser, 2006)

#1, if Wal-Mart had insisted on opacity rather than transparency, shouldn't Edelman have simply resigned the account? #2, if Edelman originally had the idea, shouldn't the firm have known better? #3, Edelman's silence after all this is absolutely intolerable. There's no question about that point; it just is. (Defren, as cited in Lystrup, 2006)

Edelman, ostensibly in the vanguard of the social media revolution, has betrayed the very principles it has been espousing. Moreover, it failed to subsequently join the heated online conversation for several days. (MarketingVOX, 2006a)

They've tarred the whole PR industry, humiliated themselves, and worse still, they've soiled the blogosphere, which the corporate world shouldn't be involved in unless they are completely transparent and honest. (Arnott, 2006)

Not that it's shocking or unheard of, but it is surprising coming from Edelman. It's hard to respect a hypocrite. (Huyse, 2006)

We call it as we see it: Wal-Mart lied. Photographer Jim Thresher lied. Edelman helped them engineer the lie. (Wood, 2006)

#### 6. Public relations people know very little about the blogosphere and social media.

It was not just Edelman who became the target of criticism: public relations as a field received its own share of criticism and ridicule in regards to its incompetence in all matters concerning the blogosphere and social media in general:

But what do the people on the inside of PR firms really know about blogging and social media? If the recent Edelman/Walmart fiasco is any indication I'd say that they know very little .... Sounds like a company that knows how to talk but hasn't yet learned how to walk. (Jones, 2006)

Lots of companies and organizations are starting to cautiously participate in the blogosphere without really understanding it. Many are participating using an old school PR/advertising mindset. Meaning they are trying to manipulate people instead of trying to talk to them. (Zeigler, 2006a)

Edelman f-ed up, but the problem is we gave them too much credit in the first place. Not to use a terrible cliché, but it reminds me of the scorpion and the frog crossing the river. Edelman is a PR firm. It manufactures image. (Aarons, 2006)

[Richard Edelman and his team] are still thinking in old media terms: This was a typical 'broadcast media' stunt, an attempt to change the way people think about Wal-Mart by playing up the warm fuzzy angles and neglecting to mention that the whole thing was set up from the start. (Charman, 2006)

Big media trying to adapt blogs to their business model instead of adapting their business to blogs, and Edelman are making exactly the same mistake – trying to use blogs for PR, instead of trying to adapt PR to blogs. (Charman, 2006)

Blogging is not something you can learn in an afternoon, or a day – it's as complex and alien to PR people as Chinese culture is complex and alien to me. (Charman, 2006)

If you simply employ PR people who happen to blog, all you'll get is the same old PR attitudes, but with comments and trackbacks. (Charman, 2006)

These opinions on public relations as a field in general were triggered not only by Edelman's role in the situation (as well as Edelman's silence in the aftermath), but also by Edelman's CEO eventually participating in conversations on a few prominent blogs. Edelman left comments which, in fact, supported opinions about the incompetence of public relations people in the field of social media. The following discussion is a good example:

I do believe that PR can participate in a substantive and positive manner in the blogosphere. I agree that it means we have to change PR to be transparent, genuine, two-way (so we listen, not just talk). [This] Wal-Mart program ... was a publicity stunt aimed at the mainstream media with a new media component. We failed to be open about the identity of the photographer--our mistake whether in new or old media. (Edelman, 2006d)

In this comment, Edelman states that “PR can participate ... in the blogosphere,” and that it has to change to transparent and genuine. However, almost one sentence later he admits that the blog his agency operated was “a publicity stunt aimed at the mainstream media.” (Edelman, 2006d) In my opinion, it is a given that a publicity stunt is the opposite of transparent and genuine. The blogosphere responds with the following:

This is more than just a disclosure issue, this goes right to the heart of what blogging and social media is about...i.e., conversation versus publicity stunts. (Puschmann, 2006)

Repeat after me: "the message" is dead, gone and not coming back. Blogs are conversations, conversations are social interaction and social interaction is about your relationship to a person, not a statement. (Puschmann, 2006)

What this is really about is an error of judgment: choosing control of the message over the credibility of those who deliver it .... The medium is not the message. The medium is the messenger. (Puschmann, 2006)

And finally, an inevitable conclusion about the role of Edelman in educating the field of public relations on the blogosphere:

They have misled countless other PR practitioners into believing the public relations industry has a role to play in the blogosphere, when all the empirical evidence shows that the blogosphere utterly rejects PR, and becomes immediately suspicious whenever a seemingly independent blog appears that promotes the cause of a corporation, candidate or issue. The fact is, in an environment where the public only trusts ‘people like me,’ public relations professionals have zero role to play. The sooner the industry admits it, the better for everyone (Chapel, as cited in Astor, 2006)



7. “Real world” negative consequences for Edelman and/or Wal-Mart. In addition to negative publicity, there were “real world” consequences for Edelman, Wal-Mart and the two sponsored bloggers. These consequences became another theme in the online conversation. Some bloggers discussed the consequences of the agency losing its reputation:

Suffice it to say that Edelman's reputation has taken a deserved hit and they should be embarrassed. Publicity and high profile hires to the contrary, they just don't seem to "get it," and also seem determined to prove that at every turn. (Getgood, 2006)

Frankly, I think this is hurting Edelman worse than it is hurting Wal-Mart. They release their Technorati blog research and instead everyone is talking about Wal-Mart. (Zeigler, 2006b)

Could [Edelman] recover by hiring another blogger? Doubt it. I don't know a blogger who would work for them. Talk about deep-sixing your credibility in a heartbeat. (Hussey, 2006)

If this keeps up, I don't see how Walmart will continue to retain Edelman. (Bruni, 2006)

Others mentioned repercussions for the two sponsored bloggers. The couple lost their privacy; besides, Jim Thresher, the *Washington Post* photographer was accused of breaking his employer's policy about freelancing and had to repay his share of the covered expenses:

Thanks to an organized Wal-Mart opposition group, the whole world now knows who Jim and I are, where we live, what our home life is like and where we work. (St.Claire, as cited in Burn, 2006)

A photographer for the *Washington Post*, who shot photos during a cross-country trip for a pro-Wal-Mart web site, broke the paper's policy about freelancing and has been ordered to remove the photos. (Burn, 2006)

Thresher agreed ... to repay about \$2,200 for his share of vacation expenses to Working Families for Wal-Mart, an advocacy group that was launched and is financially supported by the retail chain. (Kurtz, 2006)

Wood (2006) offers a good summary of the consequences for all the parties involved:

So, Edelman wins the lame-o PR firm of the year award, because now people like me who never even heard of the WalMartingAcrossAmerica blog have heard about how Wal-Mart couldn't find any real honest-to-goodness Wal-Mart lovers to make a blog. No, what Edelman has shown us is that Americans have grown to hate Wal-Mart so much that they had to hire people to make a fake blog. Fake blog. Fake trip. Fake couple. Fake everything. (Wood, 2006)

### Negative Themes in Mainstream Media Articles

The negative content of the mainstream media articles can be summarized into the following three themes:

1. Real identities of the bloggers revealed;
2. Nondisclosure of Wal-Mart and/or Edelman covering the bloggers' expenses;
3. Discussion of fake corporate blogs.

Table 6 lists the articles supporting each theme. The article details are available in Appendix B in Table B7.

Table 6. *Mainstream Media Articles Supporting Main Negative Themes*

Theme	Articles
1	1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 12, 17
2	1, 3, 17
3	2, 3, 4, 5, 11, 14, 15, 16

The first two themes are mostly descriptive. However, the theme of fake corporate blogs is presented in detail and offers additional insight, this time from the perspective of mainstream media:

A "flog" is a fake weblog that purports to chronicle an ordinary consumer's passion for a business or product, typically without the company behind it declaring an interest. It is a scandalously dishonest practice. (Rowan, 2006)

The lesson for the PR community is to use blogs with care. Monitor them carefully, and encourage an open dialogue between organizations and stakeholders, but never fake a blog because in cyberspace, there really is nowhere to hide. (Rogers, 2006)

It's time PR goes on the offensive in supporting truth and justice in the blogosphere. If we hope to embrace - rather than alienate - the better part of humanity and its growing choice of communication, we have to put an end to the ham-handed attempts of some to pull a fast one on the blogosphere. (Jones, 2007)

Look no further than Edelman's now legendary attempts to punk the blogosphere on behalf of Wal-Mart with its recent Wal-Marting Across America campaign. The public and professional outcry was deafening, and Edelman was contrite in response. (Jones, 2007)

But a lack of transparency has backfired on some businesses - most notably Wal-Mart and its PR agency Edelman in the US, where sponsored spinning has given the retail giant a burst of publicity that it certainly was not seeking. (Faithfull, 2007)

Faithfull (2007) provides a summary explaining the scale of negative publicity caused by the blogosphere:

OK, some PR companies are getting slapped on the wrist at the moment, but truth on the internet is going to become a massive issue. Bloggers might be the ones to expose a con, but you then risk that negative publicity being highlighted to a completely different and much larger audience. Then you have a real problem (Faithfull, 2007)

## Summary of Results

In this study I conducted quantitative and qualitative analysis of 201 blog posts and 18 mainstream media articles. Following is a summary of the results.

1. Quantitative analysis of blogs. Blogs were analyzed in regards to the following numerical data: number of relevant posts per blog, number of comments per blog, number of inbound links from relevant blogs per blog, and number of outbound links to relevant blogs per blog. The results of this analysis were used in selecting the top influential blogs. Detailed results are presented in Appendix B.

2. Chronological analysis of the conversation in blogs and mainstream media. The purpose of this analysis was to quantitatively describe the timeline of the conversation – both in the blogosphere and in mainstream media. The results show that, although some posts appeared as late as in October 2007, most of the conversation lasted not more than a month, with 66% of all posts appearing within two weeks. It is important to underscore that the blogosphere “exploded” with controversy and criticism (37 posts) on October 16, 2006 – the day when Edelman’s CEO Richard Edelman posted an apology to his own blog. 50% of the mainstream media articles published in October 2006.

3. Qualitative analysis of blog posts and mainstream media articles. All blog posts and mainstream media articles were classified as positive, negative, neutral or balanced. According to the results of this classification, 66% of the posts were negative, 11.5% were positive, 24% were neutral, and 10.5% were balanced. Therefore, 76.5% of the posts (negative and balanced combined) provided access to negative information or

opinions. Seventy-eight percent of mainstream media articles were negative and 22% were neutral.

4. Selecting the top blogs. The purpose of the carried out analysis was to prepare the data which will help select a set of blogs, which were most influential in the context of the Edelman/Wal Mart blog case. These blogs represent the key data which may or may not support the main hypothesis of this study. To identify these blogs, I designed a selection process and applied to the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis. The final set consisted of 50 blogs, which represented 32% of all blogs, 44% of all blog posts, 88% of all comments, 66% of all inbound links and 51% of all outbound links. Ninety percent of the set represented negative posts, the remaining 10% represented balanced posts.

5. Analysis of negative themes in blogs and mainstream media. The purpose of this analysis was to identify the main negative themes and, through examples, illustrate the specific content of the expressed opinions, as well as to estimate the extent to which these opinions were negative. The results of this analysis will help speculate on the scale of the negative consequences caused by the blogosphere.

For blog posts, I identified the following seven negative themes:

1. Richard Edelman and/or Steve Rubel are not participating in the conversation;
2. Edelman's and/or Rubel's statements are inadequate;
3. Edelman is blamed for not being transparent;
4. Edelman is blamed for violating WOMMA Code of Ethics;
5. General negative comments on Edelman;

6. Public relations people know very little about the blogosphere and social media;
7. “Real world” negative consequences for Edelman and/or Wal-Mart.

For mainstream media articles, I identified the following three negative themes:

1. Real identities of the bloggers revealed;
2. Nondisclosure of Wal-Mart and/or Edelman covering the bloggers’ expenses;
3. Discussion of fake corporate blogs.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

In this chapter I will discuss the results of the data analysis carried out in Chapter 4, their implications for this study's hypothesis, as well as for some of the reviewed theories in Chapter 2.

The research hypothesis of this study stated that new communication technologies have given the general public the power to cause direct negative consequences for organizations. Evidence supporting this hypothesis can be divided into four parts, supporting the following consecutive statements about the Edelman/Wal-Mart communication crisis examined in this study:

Statement 1. The organization suffered significant negative consequences.

Statement 2. These consequences were caused primarily by blogs.

Statement 3. The consequences cannot be isolated on a "per blog" basis: i.e., they have an impact only as collective action.

Statement 4. The individuals and groups behind these blogs represent multiple publics and cannot be defined as one specific public according to existing theory. A mix of multiple publics can be also described as the general public.

After providing a brief review of the case, augmenting it with findings described in Chapter 4, I will discuss the negative consequences for all parties – Wal-Mart, Edelman and the two "fake" bloggers – which resulted from their involvement in this case. This discussion will demonstrate evidence supporting Statement 1.

To support Statement 2, I will show that these negative consequences were caused by the blogosphere.

To support Statement 3, I will elaborate on the blogosphere's unique ability to facilitate conversation. I will explain how this characteristic is instrumental in shaping the impact of the blogosphere as a whole, as opposed to individual blog posts and comments.

After examining the identities of the bloggers who were the main, or most influential, participants in the conversation, I will map these individuals to specific publics, which can be identified through existing public segmentation approaches, described in Chapter 2. The results of this mapping will support Statement 4, thus, supporting the main hypothesis of this thesis.

I will conclude with discussing the results of this study and their implications for some of the theories described in Chapter 2, as well as the practice of public relations in general.

### Summary of the Case

On September 27, 2006, a couple known only as Jim and Laura started a blog, *Wal-Marting Across America*, where they described their cross-country trip in an RV. The couple parked for the night in Wal-Mart parking lots. The blog contained regular interviews with Wal-Mart employees, "who were dependably happy about the company and their working conditions." (Gogoi, 2006a) The blog web page contained a disclaimer, according to which it was sponsored by Working Families for Wal-Mart – an advocacy group, launched and financially supported by Wal-Mart.



Within a week, activist blogs dedicated to investigating and covering Wal-Mart-related issues started raising questions about the authenticity of the blog and the bloggers' identities. There were many issues with the blog which raised such concerns:

1. The posts and interviews with Wal-Mart employees were all positive, which suggested that the writers might have been not entirely objective. However, Laura, later identified as Laura St. Claire, "doesn't feel like she's misleading anyone. In the week that they've been traveling, Laura also found it refreshing that she didn't run into a single disgruntled employee in the many Wal-Mart stops that she has made." (Gogoi, 2006a)
2. The photos published on the blog were of high quality and taken with an expensive camera; besides, the blog itself featured a high quality custom web design, which made it different from a traditional blog. However, these concerns can be explained by the Working Families for Wal-Mart sponsorship of the blog; although, the blog mentions no details about the type and amount of sponsorship received.
3. The blog did not have a comments feature, which prevented readers from participating in the conversation. A comments feature is not a prerequisite for a blog. However, a blog is first and foremost a dialogue, or a conversation. A blog without comments turns into a monologue. A monologue which praises a company known for its controversial employee policy (Gogoi, 2006a) and sounds "like a roll call of happy Wal-Mart workers paraded for the blog" (Gogoi, 2006a) inevitably raises suspicions of its authenticity.

On October 9, *Business Week* (businessweek.com) published an article revealing the truth behind the blog:

1. Laura was identified as Laura St. Claire, a freelance writer and an employee at the U.S. Treasury department.
2. Wal-Mart provided the RV, covered the couple's trip-related expenses, and paid the fees for writing the blog. This was done indirectly through Edelman, the public relations agency which was responsible for planning and launching the blog.

The next day, on October 10, walmartwatch.com revealed that Jim was Jim Thresher, a *Washington Post* photographer. (Jack, 2006)

What followed were 76 blog posts (according to the data I was able to collect), out of which 77% were negative. The discussion mainly focused on Edelman: it appears that most bloggers did not have any expectations about Wal-Mart behaving in an ethical manner. However, bloggers were alarmed by Edelman not disclosing the identities and the true motives of the bloggers, as well as coming up with the idea to launch a fake blog in general, thus tricking its readers into believing that the posts they were reading were authentic and unbiased. This concern was amplified by Edelman maintaining silence for a whole week – until October 16, when Richard Edelman, the agency's CEO, together with Steve Rubel, a prominent blogger and a senior vice president at Edelman, finally posted statements about the incident to their blogs. These statements triggered even more controversy: bloggers were not satisfied with Edelman's acknowledgement that the agency failed to be fully transparent (as opposed to an expected apology for unethical

practices) and Rubel's statement that he had nothing to do with the situation (which was highly unlikely given the fact that Rubel was the agency's top expert on blogging).

The main discussion lasted until the end of October, however, a year later, related posts still appeared in the blogosphere. The incident was also covered in mainstream media, which, in addition to *Business Week*, included online articles in *CNN Money*, *Washington Post*, and 18 articles in various print publications.

### Summary of Negative Consequences

The following section will demonstrate evidence supporting Statement 1, according to which the organization, affected by the situation, suffered significant negative consequences.

All the parties involved in the case suffered negative consequences. The two bloggers lost their privacy and were accused of unethical behavior. In addition to that, Jim Thresher was accused of breaking his employer's policy about freelancing and was ordered to remove his photos from the blog and repay his share of expenses initially covered by his sponsors. Wal-Mart suffered the least consequences: the company's reputation, most likely, was not affected by the incident: Wal-Mart's ethics had been continuously questioned before the case, so an incident with a publicity stunt presented as a blog could not have affected public opinion on Wal-Mart significantly. In other words, in terms of reputation, the company did not have much to lose.

The negative consequences for Edelman were the most significant. The results described in Chapter 4 clearly show that the case generated a large amount of negative publicity – both in the blogosphere and mainstream media. However, what makes these

consequences especially significant is not the scale of the publicity, but its implications.

Prior to this case, Edelman was positioned as a leader in the public relations community in regards to online communication technology, social networks and new media. In a way, the agency served as the profession's advocate to the blogosphere. Edelman was known for making statements about transparency and corporate blogging and was, to some extent, an example for other public relations agencies and practitioners. However, after the agency and, specifically, its CEO, were exposed attempting to trick the blogosphere with a publicity stunt, their reputations might have suffered permanent damage, at least among those who participated in the conversation, both as readers or contributors.

Chapter 4 describes the negative publicity themes in detail, both in the blogosphere and in mainstream media. The following statement summarizes the consequences for Edelman's reputation:

To position oneself as the world's guru on corporate blogging and blog ethics/transparency, and then to dive head-first into this cesspool puts an irreversible stain on Richard Edelman's and his firm's reputation and blows to bits any claims the agency might have of being a pioneer in corporate blogging. All the vainglorious pronouncements Edelman has made in the past on transparency and integrity are exposed for what they are - empty phrases. (Richard, 2006)

It may be concluded that the negative consequences for Edelman, both the agency and its top management, were far more significant than consequences for the other parties involved in the case. Therefore, I will use Edelman as the organization, which suffered significant negative consequences, in discussing the main hypothesis of this study.

### The Blogosphere as the Primary Cause of Negative Consequences

The following section will discuss the evidence supporting both, Statement 2, according to which negative consequences resulting from this case were caused for Edelman primarily by blogs, and Statement 3, according to which these consequences cannot be isolated on a “per blog” basis and have a significant only as a collective action.

In my opinion, these negative consequences can be interpreted in two ways. One, and the most obvious, is negative publicity – both in the blogosphere and mainstream media. The negative publicity was started by the article published in *Business Week*, which is a mainstream media publication. Most of the articles on this case published in mainstream media could have appeared as a direct consequence of the story published in *Business Week*. However, considering that the first suspicions were voices on activist blogs, it might be speculated that without the blogosphere *Business Week* might not have picked up the story at all.

Most importantly, without the blogosphere, the *Business Week* story, most likely, would not have circulated on 156 web sites (which is only the number of discovered blogs which covered the case; the true numbers can be higher). Besides, if the story were picked up and discussed by multiple web sites, that would be, in fact, another version of the blogosphere, or a very similar concept: a network of web sites engaged in a mutual discussion, or even simply sharing the same news. However, the blogosphere, most certainly, spreads negative publicity on the Internet much faster than regular web sites, which is demonstrated by the chronological analysis of the conversation in Chapter 4.

However, negative publicity was only a partial, if not minor, negative consequence

for Edelman caused by the blogosphere. The other negative consequence is directly related to the blogosphere's ability to facilitate a conversation. This characteristic, which supports both, Statement 2 and Statement 3, is instrumental in shaping the impact of the blogosphere as a whole, as opposed to individual blog posts and comments.

The blogosphere is more than a collection of web sites providing information. One indication of that is the practice of commenting and elaborating on other blog posts, linking the text of a post to those other posts, which connects individual posts and forms a discussion, spanning multiple web sites. The posts examined in this study were connected by 1,548 links (or 774 connections between posts), which not only provided readers with access to more information and/or opinions, but also facilitated a conversation. The other, most obvious indication of the uniqueness of the blogosphere as a conversation facilitator, is the comments feature, which enables both readers and other bloggers to carry on the conversation on the post's web page. The examined posts contained 1,623 comments, most of which were an integral part of the conversation.

John Dewey considered that knowledge required for the formation of public opinion was generated through ideas being "communicated, shared and reborn in expression" (Dewey, 1927) – i.e., through conversation. In the words of Dewey, "there is no limit to the intellectual endowment which may proceed from the flow of social intelligence when it circulates by word of mouth... That and only that gives reality to public opinion." (Dewey, 1927) Knowledge generated through conversation – that is what makes the blogosphere so unique as compared to other web sites, and so powerful – even in comparison to traditional mainstream media – in regards to fostering the

formation of public opinion. I suggest that the conversation about Edelman, Wal-Mart and the “fake” blog caused the shaping of a new public opinion, most importantly, on Edelman; an opinion shaped through a massive online discussion, carried out by hundreds and listened to by thousands.

I conclude that Edelman suffered significant negative consequences, which were caused primarily by blogs. And, while the initial negative publicity component of these consequences can be analyzed, to some extent, for each blog or comment individually, the publicity that followed as a result of the developing conversation, as well as the more significant component – the formation of a distinctly negative public opinion of Edelman – can be described only as a result of collective action on behalf of all blogs participating in the conversation.

#### Identities of the Most Influential Bloggers

This section describes the individuals who were responsible for the conversation in the blogosphere, which caused the negative consequences.

The blogs examined in this section cannot be easily classified into a set of predefined groups. Some of these blogs are maintained by one individual, others have multiple contributing authors. Blogs can be personal, with one or more authors; they can also be operated by an organization, in which case they can not be considered personal. However, a blog operated by a company can publish posts from multiple authors, some of them – not members of the company operating the blog. A business blog can post movie reviews, a personal blog can advertise the owner’s skills or business. A public relations consultant can write about technology, while a programmer can cover topics on public

relations. Some blogs do not allow comments, whereas *Business Week* publishes a story, followed by more than 200 comments. To conclude, the boundaries between personal and business, mainstream media and online diary, employee and independent consultant, communicator and technologist are hopelessly blurred.

To describe these blogs, I provide a very brief summary of each blog, including the author's name (or the company operating the blog), the author's occupation and background, where applicable (or the company's profile), and, in some cases, a sample of the topics the blog covers. This information is sufficient for mapping these authors and organizations to specific publics.

It is necessary to note that there is no guarantee that the names of the authors are real. For example, Amanda Chapel, the author of *strumpette.com* (42), is known to be a fictional character, protecting the anonymity of the real authors (which may be explained by the critical nature of the blog).

Following are descriptions of several blogs, which demonstrate the diversity of the individuals and organizations who run the top 50 blogs which proved to be most influential in the context of the Edelman/Wal-Mart case. The complete list of the top blogs is provided in Appendix C.

*Basturea.com* is a blog by Constantin Basturea, who works at a communications agency specializing in business blog consulting. Constantin writes about blogging, public relations, journalism, social media and other topics.

*Buzzmachine.com* is a blog by Jeff Jarvis. Jeff is an associate professor and director of the interactive journalism program at the City University of New York's Graduate



School of Journalism. He is also consulting editor of a news startup, writes a new media column for The Guardian and consults for media companies. He writes about blogs, journalism, media, news, politics, etc.

*Dailykos.com* is a collective blog “with political analysis on US current events from a liberal perspective.” (Dailykos.com, 2007). The writer who wrote the related post covers two subjects: Wal-Mart and the politics of food, and is affiliated with the Writing on the Wal, an activist blog covering issues related to Wal-Mart.

*Intuitive.com* is a blog by Dave Taylor, a book author, speaker, programmer and consultant. In his blog, Dave focuses on business and industry analysis.

*Scobleizer.com* is a blog by Robert Scoble, a prominent blogger, technical evangelist and book author. Robert is famous for “humanizing” the image of Microsoft through corporate blogging.

*Walmartwatch.com* is a blog operated by Wal-Mart Watch, a joint project of The Center for Community and Corporate Ethics, a non-profit organization studying the impact of large corporations on society and its advocacy arm, Five Stones. The blog covers issues related to Wal-Mart.

#### Mapping the Bloggers to Publics

This section will describe the process of mapping the individuals and organizations, representing the most influential blogs, to specific publics, which can be identified through existing public segmentation approaches, described in Chapter 2. The results of this mapping will support Statement 4, thus supporting the hypothesis of this study.

The previous sections demonstrated that the negative consequences were caused by collective action on behalf of all blogs participating in the conversation. If these blogs can be described as one public, which could have been identified through existing public relations approaches prior to the consequences it caused, it will be possible to conclude that the general public had no consequences for the organization in this case. Therefore, the purpose of this mapping is to attempt to identify this public. However, if that proves to be impossible, Statement 4 will be confirmed: the individuals and groups behind these blogs represent multiple publics and cannot be defined as one specific public according to existing theory. And, since a mix of multiple publics can be also described as the general public, I will draw a conclusion that the empirical data supports the hypothesis of this study.

To assign bloggers to publics, I will examine and apply, where possible, the public segmentation approaches, described in Chapter 2.

### Situational Approach

According to situational theory, people are grouped into publics based on their perceptions of a specific situation or problem. Four types of publics are defined: latent publics, whose members do not detect the problem they are facing; aware publics for groups who recognize the problem; active publics – groups that organize to discuss and do something about the problem; and nonpublics for groups which have no consequences for the organization.

The individuals and groups representing the top blogs, certainly, can be classified as an active public: all bloggers were aware of the problem and were actively “doing

something” about it. However, situational theory attempts to predict when people will think and communicate purposively about situations, when they will develop opinions and attitudes about situations, and when they will act. Based on such predictions, an organization can attempt to prevent negative consequences which may be caused by an active public. Preventing negative consequences, as mentioned in Chapter 1, is the underlying purpose of public relations.

But is it possible to identify all participating bloggers as an active public prior to them causing the damage? I suppose, before the Internet and the blogosphere, such an approach worked: a new active public simply did not have the time or the chance to cause significant negative consequences before the organization’s PR people reacted. However, today the situation is different: the data described in Chapter 4 shows that such consequences happen immediately, sometimes within hours. Moreover, with the blogosphere, these consequences are the indicator of the degree to which a public is involved in a situation; therefore, it is impossible to identify bloggers as an active public before they cause the damage.

Therefore, I conclude that the situational approach, as a method of identifying publics in order to prevent negative consequences, does not work in the context of the blogosphere.

### Stakeholder Approach

The stakeholder approach is based on defining a public based on its linkage to the organization, i.e., on the public and the organization having mutual consequences for each other. Chapter 2 described several ways to segment the general public into

individual publics, or stakeholder groups. Scholars suggest various sets of these groups: some offer a simple enumeration of very general groups, such as employees, media, investors, community, etc.; others define primary and secondary stakeholders based on the scale of the consequences they may have for an organization. Some scholars take a very detailed approach and try to create a multi-level hierarchy, enumerating all possible groups affecting the organization, including such categories as specialists, clerical personnel and drivers. (Hendrix, as cited in Newsom, et al., 2004. p. 91) Needless to say, this categorization is too specific to be useful in this study.

The common trend in the described approaches is abstraction: it seems that any group that can be linked to an organization can be generalized into a category and defined as a specific stakeholder; and even if does not fit any reasonable description, some of these sets contain generic categories like “special publics” or “other publics” created precisely for such cases. In other words, any individual or group can be labeled as a public, as long as there is some linkage with the organization (which is also a very flexible concept).

### Mapping Results

I used the stakeholder approach to map each blogger to a public. As the criteria for mapping, I tried to identify the possible linkage between each blogger and Edelman. As a result, I was able to define the following publics:

- media (both, mainstream and specialized)
- employees
- competitors (consultants and agencies specializing in any type of

communication, as well as agency employees)

- activist groups
- bloggers who write about communication topics (PR, marketing, blogging, etc.)

Certainly, a more specific list can be generated; however, since the point of this experiment is to map the bloggers to one common public, I made the public descriptions as general as possible. The last category is a borderline-reasonable way to generalize: identifying members of such a public is almost impossible due to the size of the blogosphere.

Table 7 displays the results of this mapping.

Table 7. *Mapping Results*

Public	Blogs
Media	9, 12, 18, 23, 24, 26, 36, 37, 43, 48
Employees	15
Competitors	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 17, 20, 22, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 41, 42, 44, 49, 50
Activist Groups	13, 45
Bloggers who write about communication	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 41, 42, 43, 44, 48, 49, 50
Not identified as a public	2, 16, 21, 38, 39, 40, 46, 47

The results of this mapping clearly demonstrate that the top 50 bloggers cannot be assigned to one public. Even when the most general category is used – “bloggers who write about communication” – there are still 8 bloggers left out (16%), which do not fit

this description. Moreover, these 16% do not fit any suggested public, which means that the organization cannot identify them as a public prior to them causing negative consequences, which supports Statement 4 and concludes the analysis of the evidence supporting the hypothesis of this study.

### Hypothesis Supported

The hypothesis of this study stated that new communication technologies have given the general public the power to cause direct negative consequences for organizations. The organization was represented by Edelman. New communication technologies were represented by the blogosphere.

It has been shown that Edelman suffered significant negative consequences which were caused by the blogosphere. It has been also demonstrated that the consequences cannot be isolated on a “per blog” basis and were caused by collective action on behalf of all the blogs involved in the conversation. Finally, it has been shown that the individuals and groups behind these blogs represent multiple publics and cannot be defined as one specific public according to existing theory.

Public relations theory provides no specific definition of the general public, other than describing it as containing multiple publics, varying in the degree to which they may affect an organization. Based on this description, I conclude that a mix of multiple publics, including individuals and groups who cannot be classified as a key public, can be described in the context of this study as the general public. Therefore, the hypothesis of this study is supported: new communication technologies, such as the blogosphere, have,

indeed, given the general public the power to cause direct negative consequences for organizations.

### Implications of the Results for Existing Theory

This section will discuss some implications the results of this study may have for existing public relations theory.

#### Revisiting Segmentation Approaches: Blogosphere as Media or a Separate Public

After applying existing public segmentation approaches, I reached the following conclusions:

1. The situational approach, as a method of identifying publics in order to prevent negative consequences, does not work in the context of the blogosphere. Identifying publics based on their perceptions of a situation can be done by either analyzing every blogger's posts, which is impossible due to the size of the blogosphere, or identifying only those bloggers who have already expressed their perceptions of the situation through their posts – which defeats the purpose of segmenting, since negative posts are the negative consequences the organization is trying to avoid.

2. The stakeholder approach can be applied to segmenting the blogosphere public into smaller, more specific publics. However, it has been shown that this approach does not offer specific guidelines in regards to the criteria (other than linkage to an organization) according to which a public can be defined. In other words, any group, linked to the organization, can be defined as a public. Following this logic, the blogosphere can be described as “the new media” or “the bloggers” public, or even as a type of media, which makes the blogosphere part of the media public. If this were a valid

case, it would have an implication for the hypothesis of this study: since all bloggers are assigned to one public, prior to the situation which triggered the negative consequences, the study's hypothesis would not be supported.

The obvious way to contend such an argument is by observing that the descriptions of the suggested publics are too general. Since I was not able to find any specific guidelines in existing theory on how general a public description may be, I will try to prove this point by using common sense.

Can the blogosphere be considered a separate public? No, because there is no linkage between bloggers and the organization except when a blogger is a member of another public. Table 8 shows that 16% of the top blogs cannot be identified as a public.

Can the blogosphere be considered part of the media? There has been much debate on this topic and there is no clear consensus yet. Despite significant differences, both are mediums for mass communication, which separates the two from most other publics defined by existing theory, such as employees or investors (in which case, the linkage between blogs and the organization can be defined as the blogosphere's potential to reach a mass audience with content related to the organization). However, there is one characteristic of the blogosphere which makes it fundamentally different from traditional media in a public relations context: even a single blogger can have a significant impact.

Public relations attempts to prevent negative consequences from the media by communicating with and building relationships with key publications through the people who represent them. However, with the blogosphere, every blogger can be treated as a, potentially, "key publication." Some blogs have a readership comparable to leading



mainstream media publications, others do not – but the data from Chapter 4 demonstrates that blogs may have a significant impact regardless of their popularity. In the words of Peter Shankman, “Ordinary people can have extraordinary voices in the daily life of Earth instead of a few media elite.” (White, 2006)

Therefore, even if the blogosphere is identified as part of the media public, the way to contend its potential negative consequences is through building relationships with all bloggers. But that is impossible due to the size of the blogosphere. I conclude that Statement 4 holds true and the study’s hypothesis is supported.

#### Building Relationships with the Blogosphere

Based on the discussion in Chapter 2, public relations can be described, without loss of generality, as a function that “establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center, and Broom, 2000. p. 6). This study has shown that the success or failure of organizations depends, in part, on the general public. That might lead to a conclusion, that, in order to prevent or minimize the negative consequences from this public, organizations should establish and maintain “mutually beneficial relationships” with the general public.

I will show that it is impossible to build a relationship with the blogosphere. And, since the blogosphere has been shown to represent the general public, at least in the context of this study, the following argumentation may be applied, possibly, with some limitations, to the concept of the general public as well.

The size of the blogosphere is not the only reason why a relationship-building approach which might work with any other public will fail when applied to the blogosphere. Building a relationship with every blogger is, clearly, impossible. However, what if one identifies the key players and communicates with them, or through them – with the rest of the blogosphere? It may be speculated, that Richard Edelman attempted to do precisely that:

1. He commented on several influential blogs, including his own: 24, 29, 48, 135 (blog details are given in Appendix B);
2. He called Robert Scoble (blog ID 128), who is one of the most prominent bloggers in the blogosphere, to personally apologize.

Calling Scoble, actually worked to some extent. Scoble wrote: “Richard Edelman, head of Edelman, just called... He says ‘this should not have happened....’ Richard also apologized for his firm’s error. That’s enough for me.” (Scoble, 2006). Being an influential blogger, Scoble, most likely, had a considerable impact on his readers with his positive post about Edelman acknowledging his agency’s mistake.

I further speculate that Edelman’s approach to the blogosphere can be explained by his assumption that key players, or leaders, play an important role in shaping the blogosphere’s public opinion. That is why, seeking to apologize to the entire blogosphere, he personally calls a prominent blogger. That is why he comments only on a select number of the most influential blogs. That is why he wants to see his agency as “a leader” on the blogosphere:

I can tell you that our determination to be leaders in the blogosphere is undiminished. We are taking this as an important lesson, that we have not done sufficient education of our team on the proper way to interact with new media. Our Me2Revolution team is doing three company wide mandatory training sessions next week to ensure that the WOMMA guidelines are strictly applied. We are establishing a 24/7 social media hotline which will vet programs before they are presented to clients. We will participate in development of best practices outside of the US and will comply with the rules in each country. We will do better. Count on it. We are listening. (Edelman, 2006c)

However, the data from Chapter 4 shows that even the most prominent bloggers cannot shape the blogosphere's public opinion. While speaking about leadership, transparency training and complying with other countries' rules, Edelman misses the point of the blogosphere, which is best described in the following reply to his previous comment:

It's that kind of hubris that leads to "do anything to win" reckless behavior and got you in trouble in the first place... This is the blogosphere, we're not looking for "leaders...." I really hope the lesson is learned but that comment hints otherwise. We're all the same. Think flat. Stop worrying about the A-list, the tops, the bottoms, the midlands, etc. Just treat everyone with the same amount of respect as you would a friend [emphasis added; A-list referrers to a list of most popular blogs]. (Krucoff, 2006)

Indeed, the blogosphere is "flat" and communicating with a select number of bloggers based on their perceived "importance" may not have the same effect as, for example, building a relationship with a major national publication while ignoring a local paper.

By communicating with key bloggers, one sends a message that other bloggers are not important (or less important). But that goes against the fundamental concepts behind the blogosphere, according to which "everyone will be heard." It is true that some are heard better than others due to their social or professional status, writing ability, or initial

popularity (there is a mathematical explanation to that, based on the concept of power law distribution, which is beyond the scope of this research). However, the data described in Chapter 4 supports the notion that the blogosphere is a means for people to communicate, and anyone willing to participate in the conversation is given an opportunity to speak up and be heard by the community. Like in a small town hall meeting in the XIX century: one might convince a select group of prominent citizens to support a cause, but if the cause is not beneficial for the town, the rest would oppose it. Scoble defended Edelman's position, but it didn't affect others bloggers' opinions in any visible way, and the damage to Edelman was not prevented.

I conclude, that, although the results of this study suggest that the traditional assumption about the general public being powerless and insignificant might have been wrong, the concept of communicating and/or building relationships with specific publics, rather than dealing with the general public, was correct. Grunig and Hunt (1984) argued that if an organization has no consequences for a public and if that public had no consequences for the organization, there was no need for public relations. (p. 139) It has been shown that the general public may have negative consequences for organizations. Nevertheless, while there may be a need for public relations in some other form, a traditional relationship-building approach will no longer resolve the situation.

#### Revisiting Public Relations and Community

Based on the results of this study, together with the arguments presented in the final sections of Chapter 2, it may be suggested that the general public is reclaiming its role in society, in part, through a global community, facilitated by the blogosphere. In that case,

there is a question, which has remained unanswered from the discussion in Chapter 2: what is the role of public relations in this new community?

I will not speculate on how public relations might adapt to the changed social environment, for this was not the object of this study, and there is no data to support such speculation. However, the results of this study may be applied to some of the community-related theories of public relations discussed in the literature review.

Kruckeberg and Starck (1988), in their Community-building theory, suggested that the field of public relations appeared as a result of the loss of traditional community. This study has shown that such an assumption may be true. An overview of the history of public relations made in Chapter 2 has demonstrated that the primary focus of public relations has been and still remains the influencing of public opinion through the use of mass media. However, as it has been argued in Chapter 2, this practice would have been impossible in a traditional community, due to the simple fact that there were no secrets in the small town: “engineering public consent” by sending different messages to different groups became possible once the community was gone.

This study has shown that there are no secrets on the blogosphere either: “Today, there's nowhere to run and nowhere to hide ... The moment you hide something, you will end up being exposed and picked apart.” (Gogoi, 2006b) That leads to a conclusion, that, if public relations in its traditional form could not have existed in a traditional community, and if the blogosphere is, indeed, a form of traditional community being restored, the traditional form of public relations may have to undergo some changes in order for the field to remain relevant.

Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) argued, that public relations practitioners should use their communication skills to help restore and maintain a sense of community, which exists through communication. That may be a possible direction for the field, although, the results of this study have demonstrated, that, at least in one particular case, the communication skills of public relations practitioners, represented by one of the most prominent agencies and its top management, were questionable. The following opinion about the role of public relations in the new community, expressed on one of the examined blogs, may serve as a reasonable suggestion for the profession:

The fact is that the smartest people in social media do not lie within public relations ... The smart people in the room are the bloggers ... and other long time practitioners of this new medium. So the bottom line is that public relations firms can't control the message and they shouldn't try. They should assist their clients with relating to the public in an honest, intelligent and entertaining manner. They can also assist their clients in monitoring the conversations so that these firms can take part and reap the benefits of community. But before [they] can do this they must reach out to get some education from the people who long ago made the choice to make social communication a part of their daily lives. (Safuto, 2006)

However, Kruckeberg and Starck's (1988) assertions still may be valid in theory. In this respect, the Organic model of public relations, which, in a way, has been supported by the results of this study, deserves to be mentioned: the organization is, indeed, an organic part of the whole social system of society, it's only a member of the community, and its responsibility should extend to all members of this community, which is also the general public, or, as envisioned by John Dewey, the Great Community, restored by the public itself through communication and conversation, which was made possible by the blogosphere.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### Summary of the Study

The focus of this study has been the general public and its significance for organizations in a public relations context. The study questioned one of the fundamental principles of public relations, according to which organizations are advised to communicate only with those publics which have the potential to cause negative consequences. The general public, according to this principle, is considered insignificant and even nonexistent.

This study's hypothesis was that new communication technologies have given the general public the power to cause direct negative consequences for organizations. To evaluate this hypothesis, I examined the October 2006 Edelman/Wal-Mart crisis caused by the "Wal-Marting Across America" blog. The new communication technologies component of my research were represented by the blogosphere. The organization which suffered negative consequences was represented by Edelman.

I designed a methodology for collecting, analyzing and identifying the most influential blog posts related to this case. The method involved both computational and manual approaches. The empirical part of the study involved automatically processing 11,935 web pages and 36,694 links, followed by quantitative and qualitative analysis of the collected relevant data. As a result, this study examined 156 blogs containing 201 relevant posts, connected by 1,548 links.

The results of the study demonstrated that Edelman suffered significant negative consequences which were caused by the blogosphere. The negative consequences included significant negative publicity in the blogosphere and mainstream media, as well as a negative public opinion on Edelman, formed through the discussion on the blogosphere.

It has been also demonstrated that the consequences cannot be isolated on a “per blog” basis and were caused by collective action on behalf of all the blogs involved in the conversation. It has been argued that the individuals and groups behind these blogs represent multiple publics and cannot be defined as one specific public according to existing theory. It has been shown that this mix of multiple publics can be described in the context of this study as the general public. Therefore, the hypothesis of this study was supported: new communication technologies, such as the blogosphere, have, indeed, given the general public the power to cause direct negative consequences for organizations. Chapter 5 described some implications these results may have for existing public relations theory.

#### Possibilities for Further Research

##### The Role of Public Relations on the Blogosphere

The results of this study offer a rather pessimistic view of the role of public relations in the blogosphere’s community. However, these results were based on a single case. An examination of the field’s participation in the blogosphere through analyzing other conversations might offer additional insight. However, identifying such instances



may be not as straightforward due to the transparency problem, demonstrated in this study.

### Completeness of Source Data

As it has been noted in Chapter 3, the main limitation of the method was the incompleteness of the source data. Collecting all relevant blog posts might be possible by expanding the set of search terms used to determine web page relevance. However, that might cause the initial result set to be too large to process manually. Therefore, a possibility for further studies involves improving the computation of the relevance of each post. If a better solution is found, it will be possible to automatically process much larger data sets. That would lead to the possibility of examining other conversations of the same type on more general topics, possibly, involving thousands, or even more blog posts.

### Completeness of the Conversation Model

This study constructed a model of the conversation by representing all relevant blog posts as nodes in a connected graph, with the links between posts represented as graph edges. However, it has been shown that the conversation consists not only of blog posts, but, to a large extent, of comments the readers leave under some posts. Due to the size of this data, the solution, again, lies in a computational approach. Developing a program which might automatically extract all comment-related content from each web page and parse out the relevant data for each comment, would enable the generation of a much more complete and interesting model of a conversation – a model including both

posts and comments. That would provide possibilities for analyzing the conversation in numerous ways.

### Improving the Computation of the Set of Most Influential Blogs

The designed formula for calculating the set of most influential blogs used in this study may be improved. Considering that the set of all relevant blogs is represented as a graph, the same type of approach may be applied as that used to compute the relevance of web pages in a set of search results. In other words, the same principle, which is used to determine the order in which search results are displayed on Google, can be applied to determining the most influential blogs in a given collection of blogs. This approach could be based on the PageRank algorithm (Brin and Page, 1998), although its description is beyond the scope of this study.

Finally, this study, as well as the suggested improvements, can be used to develop a methodology for conducting research on blog conversations in general.

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## APPENDIX A

## SCREENSHOT OF THE WAL-MARTING ACROSS AMERICA BLOG

The Wal-Marting Across America blog was taken down in October 2006. However, I was able to obtain a screenshot of one of its posts from October 3, 2006. The screenshot, displayed as Figure C1, was retrieved from a German news web site (Puscher, 2006).



Figure A1. Screenshot of the Wal-Marting Across America Blog

## APPENDIX B

## DATA TABLES

Table B1. *Blogs with Multiple Posts*

#	blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
1	marketingvox.com	91	7	0	7	6	N
2	walmartwatch.com	153	5	127	23	15	B
3	webpronews.com	159	5	0	7	11	N
4	consumerist.com	114	4	46	1	11	N
5	mathewingram.com	93	4	61	22	16	N
6	pr-squared.com	37	4	21	13	19	N
7	deepjiveinterests.com	44	3	9	12	13	N
8	money.cnn.com	99	3	0	5	9	N
9	scobleizer.com	128	3	127	16	15	N
10	basturea.com	132	2	44	34	18	N
11	blogtorank.com	137	2	0	1	3	NT
12	blogworks.in	142	2	0	5	2	NT
13	businessweek.com	101	2	207	0	55	N
14	holmesreport.blogspot.com	108	2	9	8	1	N
15	intuitive.com	58	2	28	10	13	N
16	isabelwalcott.com	70	2	0	4	4	P
17	jaffejuice.com	73	2	2	3	9	N
18	mrwavetheory.blogspot.com	76	2	0	4	2	N
19	parmet.net	7	2	2	4	3	N
20	prblog.typepad.com	21	2	4	8	11	N
21	simonwakeman.com	22	2	2	5	4	P
22	strumpette.com	28	2	13	5	7	N
23	thewritingonthewal.net	115	2	3	0	0	N
24	weblogs.macromedia.com	156	2	15	5	6	N
25	webomatica.com	158	2	12	8	2	N
Total			70	732	210	255	
			35%	45%	27%	33%	

Table B2. *Blogs with Comments*

#	blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
1	dailykos.com	41	1	278	3	1	N
2	businessweek.com	28	2	207	0	55	N
3	scobleizer.com	128	3	127	16	15	N
4	walmartwatch.com	153	5	127	23	15	B
5	edelman.com	48	1	102	11	67	B
6	mathewingram.com	93	4	61	22	16	N
7	micropersuasion.com	96	1	57	25	42	NT
8	consumerist.com	37	4	46	1	11	N
9	basturea.com	7	2	44	34	18	N
10	blogbar.de	13	1	41	13	2	N
11	buzzmachine.com	29	1	41	5	5	N
12	intuitive.com	70	2	28	10	13	N
13	nevillehobson.com	103	1	27	10	5	N
14	pr-squared.com	114	4	21	13	19	N
15	lostremote.com	89	1	18	0	0	N
16	sarahcarey.ie	126	1	18	1	0	N
17	threadwatch.org	143	1	18	4	1	NT
18	hyperorg.com	60	1	17	3	5	B
19	mpdailyfix.com	100	1	17	6	3	N
20	toprankblog.com	145	1	17	2	2	N
21	blogher.org/node/11792	19	1	16	1	1	N
22	weblogs.macromedia.com	156	2	15	5	6	N
23	sparkplug9.com	135	1	13	11	18	N
24	strumpette.com	137	2	13	5	7	N
25	webomatica.com	155	2	12	8	2	N
26	web-strategist.com	74	1	12	3	2	NT
27	wagnercomm.blogspot.com	151	1	11	4	11	B
28	prdifferently.com	116	1	10	9	0	N
29	blogwriteforceos.com	24	1	9	12	14	N
30	deepjiveinterests.com	44	3	9	12	13	N
31	holmesreport.blogspot.com	58	2	9	8	1	N
32	strange.corante.com	136	1	9	8	4	N
33	blogbusinesssummit.com	14	1	8	7	7	N
34	businessblogwire.com	27	1	8	10	4	N
35	overtonecomm.blogspot.com	107	1	7	8	4	B
36	blog-relations.com	12	1	6	3	6	N
37	intopr.prblogs.org	68	1	6	4	1	N
38	pop-pr.blogspot.com	112	1	6	4	3	N

(table continued)

#	blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
39	twopointouch.com	147	1	6	6	4	P
40	bloombergmarketing.blogs.com	25	1	5	3	4	N
41	evans.blogware.com	50	1	5	7	1	N
42	getgood.typepad.com	53	1	5	7	5	N
43	jon8332.typepad.com	79	1	5	0	1	NT
44	stuartbruce.biz	138	1	5	0	3	P
45	ericrice.com	49	1	4	0	1	NT
46	listics.com	86	1	4	2	2	N
47	prblog.typepad.com	115	2	4	8	11	N
48	unicashare.typepad.com	148	1	4	2	0	N
49	webmetricsguru.com	64	1	4	7	1	N
50	advertising-for-success.blogspot.com	2	1	3	0	1	NT
51	bivingsreport.com	11	1	3	8	5	N
52	bloggingstocks.com	16	1	3	1	2	N
53	blogpi.net	20	1	3	10	1	NT
54	cincomsmalltalk.com	35	1	3	2	0	N
55	dcist.com	43	1	3	5	1	N
56	iaocblog.com	61	1	3	1	0	NT
57	i-boy.com	62	1	3	6	6	N
58	jonquil.livejournal.com	80	1	3	2	0	NT
59	ketcheson.net	82	1	3	7	4	N
60	moblogsmoproblems.blogspot.com	98	1	3	1	0	NT
61	thewritingonthewal.net	142	2	3	0	0	N
62	betterbusinessblogging.com	8	1	2	3	0	N
63	blogher.org/node/11579	18	1	2	2	2	NT
64	brianoberkirch.com	26	1	2	1	0	N
65	irregulartimes.com	71	1	2	0	1	N
66	irwebreport.com	72	1	2	1	2	N
67	jaffejuice.com	76	2	2	3	9	N
68	joeduck.wordpress.com	78	1	2	2	1	NT
69	kullin.net	83	1	2	5	2	NT
70	loosewireblog.com	88	1	2	6	4	N
71	parmet.net	108	2	2	4	3	N
72	planetrelations.com	111	1	2	2	0	N
73	robertrosenthal.typepad.com	124	1	2	4	1	P
74	simonwakeman.com	132	2	2	5	4	P
75	socialmediagroup.ca	133	1	2	2	2	N
76	surfette.typepad.com	139	1	2	8	0	N
77	wakeupwalmart.com	152	1	2	2	1	NT

(table continued)

#	blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
78	assign-me.blogspot.com	5	1	1	3	0	NT
79	awakenedvoice.com	6	1	1	2	0	N
80	beyondpr.blogspot.com	9	1	1	5	1	NT
81	blogher.org/node/11571	17	1	1	3	3	B
82	cjack.wordpress.com	36	1	1	12	2	NT
83	dustinbryson.typepad.com	47	1	1	4	1	NT
84	guardian.co.uk	54	1	1	3	7	NT
85	learfield.typepad.com	84	1	1	5	2	P
86	newpersuasion.typepad.com	104	1	1	13	1	N
87	paulgillin.com	109	1	1	1	3	N
88	sethf.com	129	1	1	15	5	NT
89	thenewmarketing.com	141	1	1	6	4	N
90	threeminds.organic.com	144	1	1	0	0	NT
	Total		119	1623	531	513	
			59%	100%	69%	66%	



Table B3. *Blogs with Outbound Links*

#	blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
1	basturea.com	7	2	44	34	18	N
2	bloggersblog.com	15	1	0	29	6	NT
3	micropersuasion.com	96	1	57	25	42	NT
4	chrisabraham.com	34	1	0	23	2	N
5	walmartwatch.com	153	5	127	23	15	B
6	mathewingram.com	93	4	61	22	16	N
7	kbcafe.com	81	1	0	16	5	P
8	scobleizer.com	128	3	127	16	15	N
9	sethf.com	129	1	1	15	5	NT
10	blogbar.de	13	1	41	13	2	N
11	newpersuasion.typepad.com	104	1	1	13	1	N
12	pr-squared.com	114	4	21	13	19	N
13	blogwriteforceos.com	24	1	9	12	14	N
14	cjack.wordpress.com	36	1	1	12	2	NT
15	deepjiveinterests.com	44	3	9	12	13	N
16	edelman.com	48	1	102	11	67	B
17	sparkplug9.com	135	1	13	11	18	N
18	blogpi.net	20	1	3	10	1	NT
19	businessblogwire.com	27	1	8	10	4	N
20	intuitive.com	70	2	28	10	13	N
21	nevillehobson.com	103	1	27	10	5	N
22	publishing2.com	119	1	0	10	11	N
23	prdifferently.com	116	1	10	9	0	N
24	bivingsreport.com	11	1	3	8	5	N
25	cbrayton.wordpress.com	33	1	0	8	1	N
26	holmesreport.blogspot.com	58	2	9	8	1	N
27	overtonecomm.blogspot.com	107	1	7	8	4	B
28	prblog.typepad.com	115	2	4	8	11	N
29	strange.corante.com	136	1	9	8	4	N
30	surfette.typepad.com	139	1	2	8	0	N
31	webomatica.com	74	2	12	8	2	N
32	blogbusinesssummit.com	14	1	8	7	7	N
33	evans.blogware.com	50	1	5	7	1	N
34	getgood.typepad.com	53	1	5	7	5	N
35	ketcheson.net	82	1	3	7	4	N
36	marketingconversation.com	90	1	0	7	1	N
37	marketingvox.com	91	7	0	7	6	N
38	webmetricsguru.com	64	1	4	7	1	N

(table continued)

#	blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
39	webpronews.com	75	5	0	7	11	N
40	i-boy.com	61	1	3	6	6	N
41	intranetblog.blogware.com	69	1	0	6	0	N
42	loosewireblog.com	88	1	2	6	4	N
43	mpdailyfix.com	100	1	17	6	3	N
44	open.typepad.com	105	1	0	6	7	N
45	psfk.com	117	1	0	6	1	N
46	redplanetblog.typepad.com	121	1	0	6	0	N
47	ringmar.net	123	1	0	6	3	N
48	thenewmarketing.com	141	1	1	6	4	N
49	twopointouch.com	147	1	6	6	4	P
50	beyondpr.blogspot.com	9	1	1	5	1	NT
51	blogworks.in	22	2	0	5	2	NT
52	buzzmachine.com	29	1	41	5	5	N
53	convergenceculture.org	38	1	0	5	4	n/a
54	ctbizblogs.com	39	1	0	5	4	NT
55	dcist.com	43	1	3	5	1	N
56	kullin.net	83	1	2	5	2	NT
57	learfield.typepad.com	84	1	1	5	2	P
58	marketsentinel.com	92	1	0	5	2	N
59	michaelocc.com	95	1	0	5	1	N
60	money.cnn.com	99	3	0	5	9	N
61	peterdawson.typepad.com	110	1	0	5	3	N
62	simonwakeman.com	132	2	2	5	4	P
63	strumpette.com	137	2	13	5	7	N
64	weblogs.macromedia.com	156	2	15	5	6	N
65	dustinbryson.typepad.com	47	1	1	4	1	NT
66	hemartin.blogspot.com	56	1	0	4	0	N
67	intopr.prblogs.org	68	1	6	4	1	N
68	isabelwalcott.com	73	2	0	4	4	P
69	mrwavetheory.blogspot.com	101	2	0	4	2	N
70	parmet.net	108	2	2	4	3	N
71	pop-pr.blogspot.com	112	1	6	4	3	N
72	robertrosenthal.typepad.com	124	1	2	4	1	P
73	sanjaysahay.wordpress.com	125	1	0	4	0	NT
74	simoncollister.typepad.com	131	1	0	4	4	N
75	threadwatch.org	143	1	18	4	1	NT
76	wagnercomm.blogspot.com	151	1	11	4	11	B
77	assign-me.blogspot.com	5	1	1	3	0	NT

(table continued)

#	blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
78	betterbusinessblogging.com	8	1	2	3	0	N
79	blogher.org/node/11571	12	1	1	3	3	B
80	blog-relations.com	17	1	6	3	6	N
81	bloombergmarketing.blogs.com	25	1	5	3	4	N
82	cymfony.com	40	1	0	3	0	NT
83	dailykos.com	41	1	278	3	1	N
84	guardian.co.uk	54	1	1	3	7	NT
85	hyperorg.com	60	1	17	3	5	B
86	jaffejuice.com	76	2	2	3	9	N
87	opinionatedmarketers.blogspot.com	106	1	0	3	0	N
88	poynter.org	113	1	0	3	7	N
89	web-strategist.com	155	1	12	3	2	NT
90	whatsnextblog.com	94	1	0	3	10	N
91	awakenedvoice.com	6	1	1	2	0	N
92	blogher.org/node/11579	18	1	2	2	2	NT
93	canadian-cybrarian.blogspot.com	32	1	0	2	0	N
94	cincomsmalltalk.com	35	1	3	2	0	N
95	duncanriley.com	46	1	0	2	9	NT
96	hoipolloi.typepad.com	57	1	0	2	1	N
97	holtz.com	59	1	0	2	35	P
98	joannapenabickley.typepad.com	77	1	0	2	0	N
99	joeduck.wordpress.com	78	1	2	2	1	NT
100	jonquil.livejournal.com	80	1	3	2	0	NT
101	lindsaysprblog.blogspot.com	85	1	0	2	0	N
102	listics.com	86	1	4	2	2	N
103	mk2010comm.blogspot.com	97	1	0	2	0	NT
104	planetrelations.com	111	1	2	2	0	N
105	ragan.com	120	1	0	2	2	N
106	scalefree.info	127	1	0	2	1	N
107	socialmediagroup.ca	133	1	2	2	2	N
108	theblogconsultancy.typepad.com	140	1	0	2	4	N
109	toprankblog.com	145	1	17	2	2	N
110	toughsledging.wordpress.com	146	1	0	2	2	N
111	unicashare.typepad.com	148	1	4	2	0	N
112	vestaldesign.com	150	1	0	2	0	N
113	wakeupwalmart.com	152	1	2	2	1	NT
114	adpulp.com	1	1	0	1	5	NT
115	apessoptimistsview.blogspot.com	3	1	0	1	0	N

(table continued)

#	blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
116	askdavetaylor.blogspot.com	4	1	0	1	1	N
117	birdahonk.com	10	1	0	1	0	P
118	bloggingstocks.com	16	1	3	1	2	N
119	blogher.org/node/11792	19	1	16	1	1	N
120	blogtorank.com	21	2	0	1	3	NT
121	blogworks.org	23	1	0	1	2	N
122	brianoberkirch.com	26	1	2	1	0	N
123	caessars.blogspot.com	30	1	0	1	0	N
124	cafeinemarketing.com	31	1	0	1	1	N
125	consumerist.com	37	4	46	1	11	N
126	davidbinkowski.blogspot.com	42	1	0	1	4	N
127	excelsior7.blogspot.com	51	1	0	1	0	NT
128	iaocblog.com	62	1	3	1	0	NT
129	iiimarketing.com	63	1	0	1	0	NT
130	insightgrrls.blogspot.com	67	1	0	1	0	NT
131	irwebreport.com	72	1	2	1	2	N
132	lockergnome.com	87	1	0	1	0	N
133	moblogsmoproblems.blogspot.com	98	1	3	1	0	NT
134	paulgillin.com	109	1	1	1	3	N
135	sarahcarey.ie	126	1	18	1	0	N
136	shopfloorblog.com	130	1	0	1	0	NT
137	vaspersthegrate.blogspot.com	149	1	0	1	0	N
			180	1375	774	627	
			88%	85%	100%	81%	

Table B4. *Blogs with Inbound Links*

#	blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
1	edelman.com	48	1	102	11	67	B
2	businessweek.com	28	2	207	0	55	N
3	publications.mediapost.com	118	1	0	0	54	N
4	micropersuasion.com	96	1	57	25	42	NT
5	holtz.com	59	1	0	2	35	P
6	pr-squared.com	114	4	21	13	19	N
7	basturea.com	7	2	44	34	18	N
8	sparkplug9.com	135	1	13	11	18	N
9	mathewingram.com	93	4	61	22	16	N
10	scobleizer.com	128	3	127	16	15	N
11	walmartwatch.com	153	5	127	23	15	B
12	blogwriteforceos.com	24	1	9	12	14	N
13	znet.com	122	1	0	0	14	N
14	deepjiveinterests.com	44	3	9	12	13	N
15	intuitive.com	70	2	28	10	13	N
16	washingtonpost.com	154	1	0	0	13	NT
17	consumerist.com	37	4	46	1	11	N
18	prblog.typepad.com	115	2	4	8	11	N
19	publishing2.com	119	1	0	10	11	N
20	wagnercomm.blogspot.com	151	1	11	4	11	B
21	webpronews.com	75	5	0	7	11	N
22	whatsnextblog.com	94	1	0	3	10	N
23	duncanriley.com	46	1	0	2	9	NT
24	jaffejuice.com	76	2	2	3	9	N
25	money.cnn.com	99	3	0	5	9	N
26	blogbusinesssummit.com	14	1	8	7	7	N
27	guardian.co.uk	54	1	1	3	7	NT
28	open.typepad.com	105	1	0	6	7	N
29	poynter.org	113	1	0	3	7	N
30	strumpette.com	137	2	13	5	7	N
31	bloggersblog.com	12	1	0	29	6	NT
32	blog-relations.com	15	1	6	3	6	N
33	i-boy.com	61	1	3	6	6	N
34	marketingvox.com	91	7	0	7	6	N
35	weblogs.macromedia.com	156	2	15	5	6	N
36	adpulp.com	1	1	0	1	5	NT
37	bivingsreport.com	11	1	3	8	5	N

(table continued)

#	blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
38	buzzmachine.com	29	1	41	5	5	N
39	getgood.typepad.com	53	1	5	7	5	N
40	hyperorg.com	60	1	17	3	5	B
41	kbcafe.com	81	1	0	16	5	P
42	nevillehobson.com	103	1	27	10	5	N
43	sethf.com	129	1	1	15	5	NT
44	bloombergmarketing.blogs.com	25	1	5	3	4	N
45	businessblogwire.com	27	1	8	10	4	N
46	convergenceculture.org	38	1	0	5	4	n/a
47	ctbizblogs.com	39	1	0	5	4	NT
48	davidbinkowski.blogspot.com	42	1	0	1	4	N
49	informationweek.com	66	1	0	0	4	NT
50	isabelwalcott.com	73	2	0	4	4	P
51	ketcheson.net	82	1	3	7	4	N
52	loosewireblog.com	88	1	2	6	4	N
53	overtonecomm.blogspot.com	107	1	7	8	4	B
54	simoncollister.typepad.com	131	1	0	4	4	N
55	simonwakeman.com	132	2	2	5	4	P
56	strange.corante.com	136	1	9	8	4	N
57	theblogconsultancy.typepad.com	140	1	0	2	4	N
58	thenewmarketing.com	141	1	1	6	4	N
59	twopointouch.com	147	1	6	6	4	P
60	blogher.org/node/11571	17	1	1	3	3	B
61	blogtorank.com	21	2	0	1	3	NT
62	mpdailyfix.com	100	1	17	6	3	N
63	parmet.net	108	2	2	4	3	N
64	paulgillin.com	109	1	1	1	3	N
65	peterdawson.typepad.com	110	1	0	5	3	N
66	pop-pr.blogspot.com	112	1	6	4	3	N
67	ringmar.net	123	1	0	6	3	N
68	stuartbruce.biz	138	1	5	0	3	P
69	blogbar.de	13	1	41	13	2	N
70	bloggingstocks.com	16	1	3	1	2	N
71	blogher.org/node/11579	18	1	2	2	2	NT
72	blogworks.in	22	2	0	5	2	NT
73	blogworks.org	23	1	0	1	2	N
74	chrisabraham.com	34	1	0	23	2	N
75	cjack.wordpress.com	36	1	1	12	2	NT
76	irwebreport.com	72	1	2	1	2	N

(table continued)

#	blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type	
77	kullin.net	83	1	2	5	2	NT	
78	learfield.typepad.com	84	1	1	5	2	P	
79	listics.com	86	1	4	2	2	N	
80	marketsentinel.com	92	1	0	5	2	N	
81	mrwavetheory.blogspot.com	101	2	0	4	2	N	
82	ragan.com	120	1	0	2	2	N	
83	socialmediagroup.ca	133	1	2	2	2	N	
84	toprankblog.com	145	1	17	2	2	N	
85	toughsledding.wordpress.com	146	1	0	2	2	N	
86	webomatica.com	155	2	12	8	2	N	
87	web-strategist.com	74	1	12	3	2	NT	
88	advertising-for-success.blogspot.com	2	1	3	0	1	NT	
89	askdavetaylor.blogspot.com	4	1	0	1	1	N	
90	beyondpr.blogspot.com	9	1	1	5	1	NT	
91	blogher.org/node/11792	19	1	16	1	1	N	
92	blogpi.net	20	1	3	10	1	NT	
93	caffeinemarketing.com	31	1	0	1	1	N	
94	cbrayton.wordpress.com	33	1	0	8	1	N	
95	dailykos.com	41	1	278	3	1	N	
96	dcist.com	43	1	3	5	1	N	
97	dustinbryson.typepad.com	47	1	1	4	1	NT	
98	ericrice.com	49	1	4	0	1	NT	
99	evans.blogware.com	50	1	5	7	1	N	
100	hoipolloi.typepad.com	57	1	0	2	1	N	
101	holmesreport.blogspot.com	58	2	9	8	1	N	
102	intopr.prblogs.org	68	1	6	4	1	N	
103	irregulartimes.com	71	1	2	0	1	N	
104	joeduck.wordpress.com	78	1	2	2	1	NT	
105	jon8332.typepad.com	79	1	5	0	1	NT	
106	marketingconversation.com	90	1	0	7	1	N	
107	michaeloc.com	95	1	0	5	1	N	
108	newpersuasion.typepad.com	104	1	1	13	1	N	
109	psfk.com	117	1	0	6	1	N	
110	robertrosenthal.typepad.com	124	1	2	4	1	P	
111	scalefree.info	127	1	0	2	1	N	
112	threadwatch.org	143	1	18	4	1	NT	
113	wakeupwalmart.com	152	1	2	2	1	NT	
114	webmetricsguru.com	64	1	4	7	1	N	
Total				158	1547	692	774	
				73%	95%	89%	100%	

Table B5. *Most Influential Blogs*

#	Blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
1	basturea.com	7	2	44	34	18	N
2	blogbar.de	13	1	41	13	2	N
3	blogbusinesssummit.com	14	1	8	7	7	N
4	blogher.org/node/11792	19	1	16	1	1	N
5	blog-relations.com	12	1	6	3	6	N
6	blogwriteforceos.com	24	1	9	12	14	N
7	bloombergmarketing.blogs.com	25	1	5	3	4	N
8	businessblogwire.com	27	1	8	10	4	N
9	businessweek.com	28	2	207	0	55	N
10	buzzmachine.com	29	1	41	5	5	N
11	chrisabraham.com	34	1	0	23	2	N
12	consumerist.com	37	4	46	1	11	N
13	dailykos.com	41	1	278	3	1	N
14	deepjiveinterests.com	44	3	9	12	13	N
15	edelman.com	48	1	102	11	67	B
16	evans.blogware.com	50	1	5	7	1	N
17	getgood.typepad.com	53	1	5	7	5	N
18	holmesreport.blogspot.com	58	2	9	8	1	N
19	hyperorg.com	60	1	17	3	5	B
20	intopr.prblogs.org	68	1	6	4	1	N
21	intuitive.com	70	2	28	10	13	N
22	jaffejuice.com	76	2	2	3	9	N
23	lostremote.com	89	1	18	0	0	N
24	marketingvox.com	91	7	0	7	6	N
25	mathewingram.com	93	4	61	22	16	N
26	money.cnn.com	99	3	0	5	9	N
27	mpdailyfix.com	100	1	17	6	3	N
28	nevillehobson.com	103	1	27	10	5	N
29	newpersuasion.typepad.com	104	1	1	13	1	N
30	open.typepad.com	105	1	0	6	7	N
31	overtonecomm.blogspot.com	107	1	7	8	4	B
32	pop-pr.blogspot.com	112	1	6	4	3	N
33	prblog.typepad.com	115	2	4	8	11	N
34	prdifferently.com	116	1	10	9	0	N
35	pr-squared.com	114	4	21	13	19	N
36	publications.mediapost.com	118	1	0	0	54	N
37	publishing2.com	119	1	0	10	11	N
38	sarahcarey.ie	126	1	18	1	0	N

(table continued)



#	Blog	id	posts	comments	outbound	inbound	type
39	scobleizer.com	128	3	127	16	15	N
40	sparkplug9.com	135	1	13	11	18	N
41	strange.corante.com	136	1	9	8	4	N
42	strumpette.com	137	2	13	5	7	N
43	toprankblog.com	145	1	17	2	2	N
44	wagnercomm.blogspot.com	151	1	11	4	11	B
45	walmartwatch.com	153	5	127	23	15	B
46	weblogs.macromedia.com	156	2	15	5	6	N
47	webomatica.com	158	2	12	8	2	N
48	webpronews.com	159	5	0	7	11	N
49	whatsnextblog.com	160	1	0	3	10	N
50	zdnet.com	161	1	0	0	14	N
Total			88	1426	394	509	
			44%	88%	51%	66%	

Table B6. *All Posts Arranged by Blog Number*

Blog ID:	1
Post Title:	Caught In The PR Crossfire
Post URL:	<a href="http://www.adpulp.com/archives/2006/10/good_pr_men_cau.php">http://www.adpulp.com/archives/2006/10/good_pr_men_cau.php</a>
Posted:	Oct 15 2006 8:40AM
Blog ID:	2
Post Title:	Some Crow to Go with the Humble Pie?
Post URL:	<a href="http://advertising-for-success.blogspot.com/2006/10/some-crow-to-go-with-humble-pie.html">http://advertising-for-success.blogspot.com/2006/10/some-crow-to-go-with-humble-pie.html</a>
Posted:	Oct 21 2006
Blog ID:	3
Post Title:	Blog 10: Edelman Worldwide
Post URL:	<a href="http://apessoptimistsview.blogspot.com/2006/12/blog-10-edleman-worldwidei-didnt.html">http://apessoptimistsview.blogspot.com/2006/12/blog-10-edleman-worldwidei-didnt.html</a>
Posted:	Dec 4 2006 6:10PM
Blog ID:	4
Post Title:	Edelman sponsors bogus Wal-Mart blog: no-one cares?
Post URL:	<a href="http://askdavetaylor.blogspot.com/2006/10/edelman-sponsors-bogus-wal-mart-blog.html">http://askdavetaylor.blogspot.com/2006/10/edelman-sponsors-bogus-wal-mart-blog.html</a>
Posted:	Oct 23 2006 8:36PM
Blog ID:	5
Post Title:	Corporate blog or flog: Can you measure it?
Post URL:	<a href="http://assign-me.blogspot.com/2007/05/blog-or-flog-can-you-measure-it.html">http://assign-me.blogspot.com/2007/05/blog-or-flog-can-you-measure-it.html</a>
Posted:	May 6 2007 6:28PM
Blog ID:	6
Post Title:	Controlling The Message
Post URL:	<a href="http://blog.awakenedvoice.com/2006/11/04/controlling-the-message">http://blog.awakenedvoice.com/2006/11/04/controlling-the-message</a>
Posted:	Nov 4 2006
Blog ID:	7
Post Title:	Edelman/Wal-Mart blog campaign revisited by Journal of Mass Media Ethics
Post URL:	<a href="http://blog.basturea.com/archives/2007/08/05/edel-mart-journal-media-ethics">http://blog.basturea.com/archives/2007/08/05/edel-mart-journal-media-ethics</a>
Posted:	Aug 5 2007
Blog ID:	7
Post Title:	Edelman, Wal-Mart, and WOMMA's Code of Ethics
Post URL:	<a href="http://blog.basturea.com/archives/2006/10/13/edel-mart-womma-ethics-code">http://blog.basturea.com/archives/2006/10/13/edel-mart-womma-ethics-code</a>
Posted:	Oct 13 2006
Blog ID:	8
Post Title:	Trust: The Final Frontier
Post URL:	<a href="http://www.betterbusinessblogging.com/better-client-relationships/trust-the-final-frontier">http://www.betterbusinessblogging.com/better-client-relationships/trust-the-final-frontier</a>
Posted:	Oct 30 2006

(table continued)

- Blog ID: 9  
 Post Title: Wal-marting across America  
 Post URL: <http://beyondpr.blogspot.com/2006/10/wal-marting-across-america.html>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 6:23PM
- Blog ID: 10  
 Post Title: Your Brand Has No Clothes  
 Post URL: [http://birdahonk.com/home/archives/2007/08/your\\_brand\\_has.html](http://birdahonk.com/home/archives/2007/08/your_brand_has.html)  
 Posted: Aug 19 2007 12:34PM
- Blog ID: 11  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart Funded Blog Exposed  
 Post URL: <http://www.bivingsreport.com/2006/pro-wal-mart-blog-exposed>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006
- Blog ID: 12  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart Edelman Blog Blunder  
 Post URL: <http://www.blog-relations.com/2006/10/13/wal-mart-edelman-blog-blunder>  
 Posted: Oct 13 2006
- Blog ID: 13  
 Post Title: Edelman goes Ekelman: Bloggertäuschen mit heisser Nadel  
 Post URL: <http://blogbar.de/archiv/2006/10/19/edelman-goes-ekelman-bloggertauschen-mit-heisser-nadel>  
 Posted: Oct 19 2006 12:03AM
- Blog ID: 14  
 Post Title: Wow, the Walmarting blog has really blown up in Edelman's face  
 Post URL: [http://blogbusinesssummit.com/2006/10/wow\\_the\\_walmart.htm](http://blogbusinesssummit.com/2006/10/wow_the_walmart.htm)  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006
- Blog ID: 15  
 Post Title: Walmart's Travel Flog  
 Post URL: <http://www.bloggersblog.com/cgi-bin/bloggersblog.pl?bblog=1015062>  
 Posted: Oct 15 2006
- Blog ID: 16  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart blog fiasco -- a lesson for retailers on ethics  
 Post URL: <http://www.bloggingstocks.com/2006/10/16/wal-mart-blog-fiasco-a-lesson-for-retailer-on-ethics>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 12:17PM
- Blog ID: 17  
 Post Title: Wal-Marting RVers Outed as Corporate Bloggers  
 Post URL: <http://www.blogher.org/node/11571>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 11:05PM

(table continued)

Blog ID: 18  
 Post Title: Wal-Marting Across America: Blogging in the Discount Aisles of Good vs. Evil  
 Post URL: <http://blogher.org/node/11579>  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006 9:39AM

Blog ID: 19  
 Post Title: Edelman, Wal-Mart and fake blogging  
 Post URL: <http://blogher.org/node/11792>  
 Posted: Oct 23 2006 8:41AM

Blog ID: 20  
 Post Title: IPDI/Edelman on Political Blogging (and Wal-Mart)  
 Post URL: <http://www.blogpi.net/ipdi-edelman-on-political-blogging-and-wal-mart>  
 Posted: Nov 18 2006

Blog ID: 21  
 Post Title: Richard Edelman discusses the Wal-Mart blog - ITworld.com blog ping tag  
 Post URL: <http://blogs.blogtorank.com/18153/richard-edelman-discusses-the-wal-mart-blog-itworldcom-blog-ping-tag/>  
 Posted: Oct 31 2006 5:15PM

Blog ID: 21  
 Post Title: Richard Edelman discusses the Wal-Mart blog  
 Post URL: <http://www.itworld.com/Tech/5046/061031edelman/pfindex.html>  
 Posted: Oct 31 2006

Blog ID: 22  
 Post Title: Transparent is the promise  
 Post URL: <http://indeverbum.blogspot.com/2006/11/transparent-is-promise.html>  
 Posted: Nov 1 2006 8:26PM

Blog ID: 22  
 Post Title: Transparent is the promise  
 Post URL: [http://www.blogworks.in/blog/blogs\\_social\\_media/transparent\\_is\\_the\\_promise.php](http://www.blogworks.in/blog/blogs_social_media/transparent_is_the_promise.php)  
 Posted: Nov 1 2006 11:22AM

Blog ID: 23  
 Post Title: Another strike for Wal-Mart media  
 Post URL: [http://www.blogworks.org/archives/2006/10/another\\_strike.html](http://www.blogworks.org/archives/2006/10/another_strike.html)  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006 4:33PM

Blog ID: 24  
 Post Title: Flogging, Wal-Marting and Edelman's non-response  
 Post URL: [http://www.blogwriteforceos.com/blogwrite/2006/10/flogging\\_walmar.html](http://www.blogwriteforceos.com/blogwrite/2006/10/flogging_walmar.html)  
 Posted: Oct 14 2006

(table continued)

Blog ID: 25  
 Post Title: Defending and Defining The Blog Culture  
 Post URL: [http://bloombergmktg.blogs.com/bloomberg\\_marketing/2006/10/blogs\\_social\\_me.html](http://bloombergmktg.blogs.com/bloomberg_marketing/2006/10/blogs_social_me.html)  
 Posted: Oct 13 2006

Blog ID: 26  
 Post Title: MicroPersuasion is No Mo  
 Post URL: <http://www.brianoberkirch.com/?p=775>  
 Posted: Dec 29 2006

Blog ID: 27  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart Corporate Blogging Mess: Lessons Learned  
 Post URL: [http://www.businessblogwire.com/2006/10/walmart\\_corporate\\_blogging\\_mes.html](http://www.businessblogwire.com/2006/10/walmart_corporate_blogging_mes.html)  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006

Blog ID: 28  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart's Jim and Laura: The Real Story  
 Post URL: [http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/content/oct2006/db20061009\\_579137.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/content/oct2006/db20061009_579137.htm)  
 Posted: Oct 9 2006 8:40PM

Blog ID: 28  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart vs. the Blogosphere  
 Post URL: [http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/content/oct2006/db20061018\\_445917.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/content/oct2006/db20061018_445917.htm)  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006 12:10AM

Blog ID: 29  
 Post Title: Corrupting blogs  
 Post URL: <http://www.buzzmachine.com/index.php/2006/10/19/corrupting-blogs>  
 Posted: Oct 19 2006 9:47PM

Blog ID: 30  
 Post Title: The 20 21 Biggest Technology Mistakes of 2006  
 Post URL: <http://caessars.blogspot.com/2006/12/20-21-biggest-technology-mistakes-of.html>  
 Posted: Dec 26 2006

Blog ID: 31  
 Post Title: Wal Marting Across America  
 Post URL: <http://www.caffeinemarketing.com/online-marketing/wal-marting-across-america>  
 Posted: Oct 13 2006

Blog ID: 32  
 Post Title: Flogging: a lesson from Sony and WalMart  
 Post URL: <http://canadian-cybrarian.blogspot.com/2006/12/flogging-lesson-from-sony-and-walmart.html>  
 Posted: Dec 13 2006 8:05AM

(table continued)

Blog ID: 33  
 Post Title: Prince of Dorkiness Sinks in the Flog Bog  
 Post URL: <http://cbrayton.wordpress.com/2006/11/21/prince-of-dorkiness-sinks-in-the-flog-bog>  
 Posted: Nov 21 2006 11:56AM

Blog ID: 34  
 Post Title: Edelman Needs a PR Rep  
 Post URL: [http://www.chrisabraham.com/2006/11/edelman\\_needs\\_a.html](http://www.chrisabraham.com/2006/11/edelman_needs_a.html)  
 Posted: Nov 4 2006 11:07AM

Blog ID: 35  
 Post Title: Trying to Game PR  
 Post URL: <http://www.cincomsmalltalk.com/blog/blogView?showComments=true&entry=3338379223>  
 Posted: Oct 15 2006 3:33PM

Blog ID: 36  
 Post Title: Case Study: Edelman and Wal-Marting  
 Post URL: <http://cjack.wordpress.com/2007/05/09/edelman-and-astroturf-an-analysis>  
 Posted: May 9 2007

Blog ID: 37  
 Post Title: Announcing The Floggies  
 Post URL: <http://consumerist.com/consumer/contests/announcing-the-floggies-223196.php>  
 Posted: Dec 20 2006 10:03AM

Blog ID: 37  
 Post Title: Spinning Walmart: Astroturfing, Edelman, And Why Walmart's TVs Are Tuned To Fox News  
 Post URL: <http://consumerist.com/consumer/walmart/spinning-walmart-astroturfing-edelman-and-why-walmarts-tvs-are-tuned-to-fox-news-247475.php>  
 Posted: Mar 27 2007 1:59PM

Blog ID: 37  
 Post Title: Wash Post Photog Bitchslapped For Sucking Off Walmart  
 Post URL: <http://www.consumerist.com/consumer/walmart/wash-post-photog-bitchslapped-for-sucking-off-walmart-206833.php>  
 Posted: Oct 11 2006 1:22PM

Blog ID: 37  
 Post Title: Edelman Apologizes For Fake Walmart Blog  
 Post URL: <http://consumerist.com/consumer/walmart/edelman-apologizes-for-fake-walmart-blog-208116.php>  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006 11:38AM

(table continued)

Blog ID: 38  
 Post Title: Edelman/Wal-Mart Fiasco--The Changing Face of Public Relations  
 PostURL: [http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/10/edelmanwalmart\\_fiascothe\\_chang.html?sub=nscosmos](http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/10/edelmanwalmart_fiascothe_chang.html?sub=nscosmos)  
 Posted: Oct 22 2006 11:19PM

Blog ID: 39  
 Post Title: The Wal-Mart blogging boo-boo; Edelman responds  
 Post URL: <http://www.ctbizblogs.com/2006/10/18/the-wal-mart-blogging-boo-boo-edelman-responds>  
 Posted: Oct 18 2006 8:34PM

Blog ID: 40  
 Post Title: 2007 Prognostications  
 Post URL: [http://blog.cymfony.com/2007/01/2007\\_prognostic.html](http://blog.cymfony.com/2007/01/2007_prognostic.html)  
 Posted: Jan 2 2007 9:49AM

Blog ID: 41  
 Post Title: Washington Post Photographer Blogged for Wal-Mart Incognito [Updated]  
 Post URL: <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2006/10/10/191158/56>  
 Posted: Oct 10 2006 4:11PM

Blog ID: 42  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart Flogging Its Way Around the Blogosphere  
 Post URL: <http://davidbinkowski.blogspot.com/2006/10/wal-mart-flogging-its-way-around.html>  
 Posted: Oct 12 2006 10:54PM

Blog ID: 43  
 Post Title: WaPo Photog Leases Soul to Wal-Mart for RV Trip (Updated)  
 Post URL: [http://www.dcist.com/archives/2006/10/12/wapo\\_photog\\_lea.php](http://www.dcist.com/archives/2006/10/12/wapo_photog_lea.php)  
 Posted: Oct 12 2006

Blog ID: 44  
 Post Title: Edelman Gaming Blogosphere. With Walmart. Again.  
 Post URL: <http://www.deepjiveinterests.com/2006/10/14/edelman-gaming-blogosphere-with-walmart-again>  
 Posted: Oct 14 2006 7:33PM

Blog ID: 44  
 Post Title: Edelman SockPuppet Shennanigans Known to PR Community, Little Else  
 Post URL: <http://www.deepjiveinterests.com/2006/10/15/edelman-sockpuppet-shennanigans-known-to-pr-community-little-else>  
 Posted: Oct 15 2006 9:17AM

(table continued)

Blog ID: 44  
 Post Title: Steve Rubel Finds Google Maps More Important Than Edelman Fiasco. Blogosphere speechless.  
 Post URL: <http://www.deepjiveinterests.com/2006/10/16/steve-rubel-finds-google-maps-more-important-than-edelman-fiasco-blogosphere-speechless>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 12:10PM

Blog ID: 45  
 Post Title: Working Families for Wal-Mart May Be Dying  
 Post URL: <http://www.disobey.com/ghostsites/2007/07/working-families-for-wal-mart-may-be.html>  
 Posted: Jul 23 2007 5:50PM

Blog ID: 46  
 Post Title: An open post to Steve Rubel  
 Post URL: <http://www.duncanriley.com/2006/10/16/an-open-post-to-steve-rubel>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006

Blog ID: 47  
 Post Title: Bloggers Get FREE Laptop  
 Post URL: [http://dustinbryson.typepad.com/spitbox/2006/12/bloggers\\_get\\_fr.html](http://dustinbryson.typepad.com/spitbox/2006/12/bloggers_get_fr.html)  
 Posted: Dec 28 2006 6:00AM

Blog ID: 48  
 Post Title: A Commitment  
 Post URL: [http://www.edelman.com/speak\\_up/blog/archives/2006/10/a\\_commitment.html](http://www.edelman.com/speak_up/blog/archives/2006/10/a_commitment.html)  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 2:58PM

Blog ID: 49  
 Post Title: Walmart, Edelman, and my trademark brand of snark and insight  
 Post URL: <http://www.ericrice.com/blog/?p=154>  
 Posted: Oct 18 2006

Blog ID: 50  
 Post Title: Forget About Waldo, Where's Rubel?  
 Post URL: [http://evans.blogware.com/blog/\\_archives/2006/10/16/2420449.html](http://evans.blogware.com/blog/_archives/2006/10/16/2420449.html)  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 7:45AM

Blog ID: 51  
 Post Title: Wal-Marting Across America: Blog Adventure or Money-Making Scheme?  
 Post URL: <http://excelsior7.blogspot.com/2006/10/wal-marting-across-america-blog.html>  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006 12:04PM

Blog ID: 52  
 Post Title: Richard Edelman  
 Post URL: <http://www.geeksonsteroids.com/blog-geeks/?p=79>  
 Posted: Oct 25 2006

(table continued)



Blog ID: 53  
Post Title: Wal-Mart and another lesson from Science Fiction  
Post URL: [http://getgood.typepad.com/getgood\\_strategic\\_marketi/2006/10/walmart\\_and\\_ano.html](http://getgood.typepad.com/getgood_strategic_marketi/2006/10/walmart_and_ano.html)  
Posted: Oct 13 2006 5:10PM

Blog ID: 54  
Post Title: What's a flog -- a fake blog?  
Post URL: [http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/technology/archives/2006/10/16/whats\\_a\\_flog\\_a\\_fake\\_blog.html](http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/technology/archives/2006/10/16/whats_a_flog_a_fake_blog.html)  
Posted: Oct 16 2006 11:15AM

Blog ID: 55  
Post Title: Branding in the Blogosphere  
Post URL: <http://www.hellskitchen.bz/blog/?p=14>  
Posted: Nov 6 2006 12:36PM

Blog ID: 56  
Post Title: PR Edelman or PR Badman?  
Post URL: <http://hemartin.blogspot.com/2006/10/pr-edelman-or-pr-badman.html>  
Posted: Oct 12 2006

Blog ID: 57  
Post Title: The fake Walmart blog reopens a can of worms  
Post URL: [http://hoipolloi.typepad.com/buzz/2006/10/the\\_fake\\_walmar.html](http://hoipolloi.typepad.com/buzz/2006/10/the_fake_walmar.html)  
Posted: Oct 12 2006

Blog ID: 58  
Post Title: Plague of Flogs  
Post URL: <http://holmesreport.blogspot.com/2007/01/plague-of-flogs-heres-my-hot-tip-for.html>  
Posted: Jan 2 2007 4:34AM

Blog ID: 58  
Post Title: The Wal-Mart Blog Fiasco  
Post URL: [http://holmesreport.blogspot.com/2006/10/wal-mart-blog-fiasco-blogosphere-has\\_20.html](http://holmesreport.blogspot.com/2006/10/wal-mart-blog-fiasco-blogosphere-has_20.html)  
Posted: Oct 20 2006 6:47AM

Blog ID: 59  
Post Title: Edelman-WalMart Update: Richard speaks up  
Post URL: [http://blog.holtz.com/index.php/weblog/edelman\\_walmart\\_update\\_richard\\_speaks\\_up](http://blog.holtz.com/index.php/weblog/edelman_walmart_update_richard_speaks_up)  
Posted: Oct 16 2006 12:11PM

Blog ID: 60  
Post Title: PR's steps and missteps into the Webby world  
Post URL: [http://www.hyperorg.com/blogger/mtarchive/prs\\_steps\\_and\\_missteps\\_into\\_th.html](http://www.hyperorg.com/blogger/mtarchive/prs_steps_and_missteps_into_th.html)  
Posted: Oct 21 2006 12:36PM

(table continued)

Blog ID: 61  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart sucks with Edelman's help  
 Post URL: <http://www.i-boy.com/weblog/2006/10/wal-mart-sucks-with-edelmans-help.html>  
 Posted: Oct 12 2006

Blog ID: 62  
 Post Title: How disclosing does a disclosure need to be?  
 Post URL: [http://www.iaocblog.com/blog/\\_archives/2007/10/16/3294890.html](http://www.iaocblog.com/blog/_archives/2007/10/16/3294890.html)  
 Posted: Oct 16 2007 3:29PM

Blog ID: 63  
 Post Title: How to Choose a Business Blog That is Right For You- Part II  
 Post URL: <http://www.iiimarketing.com/how-to-choose-a-business-blog-that-is-right-for-you-part-ii>  
 Posted: Sep 26 2007 2:41PM

Blog ID: 64  
 Post Title: Edelman's fake Walmart Blog  
 Post URL: [http://www.webmetricsguru.com/2006/10/edelmans\\_fake\\_walmart\\_blog.html](http://www.webmetricsguru.com/2006/10/edelmans_fake_walmart_blog.html)  
 Posted: Oct 14 2006

Blog ID: 65  
 Post Title: Corporates dip their toes in the blogging waters  
 Post URL: <http://indiancommunicators.blogspot.com/2007/06/corporates-dip-their-toes-in-blogging.html>  
 Posted: Jun 6 2007 9:49AM

Blog ID: 66  
 Post Title: Revenge Of The Suits: Companies Show How To Blog  
 Post URL: <http://www.informationweek.com/news/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=193400993>  
 Posted: Oct 23 2006

Blog ID: 67  
 Post Title: Keep your blogs transparent!  
 Post URL: <http://insightgrlls.blogspot.com/2006/10/keep-your-blogs-transparent-weve-been.html>  
 Posted: Oct 19 2006 2:20PM

Blog ID: 68  
 Post Title: Edelman, Wal-Mart: Keeping It Real  
 Post URL: <http://intopr.prblogs.org/2006/10/13/edelman-wal-mart-business-as-usual>  
 Posted: Oct 13 2006

Blog ID: 69  
 Post Title: Flog you  
 Post URL: [http://intranetblog.blogware.com/blog/\\_archives/2007/8/7/3145670.html](http://intranetblog.blogware.com/blog/_archives/2007/8/7/3145670.html)  
 Posted: Aug 7 2007 11:26PM

(table continued)

Blog ID: 70  
 Post Title: Edelman screws up with duplicitous Wal-Mart blog, but it's okay?  
 Post URL: [http://www.intuitive.com/blog/edelman\\_screws\\_up\\_with\\_duplicitious\\_walmart\\_blog.html](http://www.intuitive.com/blog/edelman_screws_up_with_duplicitious_walmart_blog.html)  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 2:40PM

Blog ID: 70  
 Post Title: PayPerPost creates DisclosurePolicy, TechCrunch calls it absurd?  
 Post URL: [http://www.intuitive.com/blog/payperpost\\_creates\\_disclosurepolicy\\_techcrunch\\_calls\\_it\\_absurd.html](http://www.intuitive.com/blog/payperpost_creates_disclosurepolicy_techcrunch_calls_it_absurd.html)  
 Posted: Oct 30 2006 8:23AM

Blog ID: 71  
 Post Title: What PR Should The Edelman Firm Work On Next?  
 Post URL: <http://irregulartimes.com/index.php/archives/2006/10/17/walmart-edelman>  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006 7:08PM

Blog ID: 72  
 Post Title: A Timely Refresher on Corporate Credibility and the Web  
 Post URL: <http://www.irwebreport.com/daily/2006/10/17/a-timely-refresher-on-corporate-credibility-and-the-web>  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006

Blog ID: 73  
 Post Title: Edelman's Report Card  
 Post URL: [http://blog.isabelwalcott.com/2006/10/edelmans\\_report.html](http://blog.isabelwalcott.com/2006/10/edelmans_report.html)  
 Posted: Oct 20 2006

Blog ID: 73  
 Post Title: Edelman's Report Card  
 Post URL: [http://iz.typepad.com/isabel\\_walcott/2006/10/edelmans\\_report.html](http://iz.typepad.com/isabel_walcott/2006/10/edelmans_report.html)  
 Posted: Oct 20 2006

Blog ID: 74  
 Post Title: Blogs, Splogs, Flogs?  
 Post URL: <http://www.webomatica.com/wordpress/2006/10/15/blogs-splogs-flogs>  
 Posted: Oct 15 2006

Blog ID: 74  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart PR Firm Apologizes for Flog  
 Post URL: <http://www.webomatica.com/wordpress/2006/10/17/wal-mart-pr-firm-apologizes-for-flog>  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006

Blog ID: 75  
 Post Title: Payola Becomes Blogola, Courtesy of Microsoft  
 Post URL: <http://www.webpronews.com/topnews/topnews/wpn-60-20061227PayolaBecomesBlogolaCourtesyofMicrosoft.html>  
 Posted: Dec 27 2006 2:48PM

(table continued)

Blog ID: 75  
 Post Title: Edelman, Rubel Respond On Wal-Mart Flog  
 Post URL: <http://www.webpronews.com/topnews/topnews/wpn-60-20061016EdelmanRubelRespondOnWalMartFlog.html>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 9:37AM

Blog ID: 75  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart, Edelman Flogged For Blog  
 Post URL: <http://www.webpronews.com/insiderreports/marketinginsider/wpn-50-20061016WalMartEdelmanFloggedForBlog.html>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 10:11AM

Blog ID: 75  
 Post Title: Edelman-WalMart Update: Richard speaks up  
 Post URL: <http://www.webpronews.com/blogtalk/blogtalk/wpn-58-20061017EdelmanWalMartUpdateRichardspeaksup.html>  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006 9:18AM

Blog ID: 75  
 Post Title: Edelman, Karma's Not Just For Earl Anymore  
 Post URL: <http://www.webpronews.com/topnews/topnews/wpn-60-20061020EdelmanKarmasNotJustForEarlAnymore.html>  
 Posted: Oct 20 2006 1:51PM

Blog ID: 76  
 Post Title: Strike 2 for Edelman?  
 Post URL: [http://www.jaffejuice.com/2006/10/strike\\_2\\_for\\_ed.html](http://www.jaffejuice.com/2006/10/strike_2_for_ed.html)  
 Posted: Oct 12 2006

Blog ID: 76  
 Post Title: Edelman Exec apologizes  
 Post URL: [http://www.jaffejuice.com/2006/10/edelman\\_exec\\_ap.html#comments](http://www.jaffejuice.com/2006/10/edelman_exec_ap.html#comments)  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006

Blog ID: 77  
 Post Title: ON: Edelman's Sorry for getting caught statement.  
 Post URL: <http://joannapenabickley.typepad.com/on/2006/10/on.html>  
 Posted: Oct 19 2006

Blog ID: 78  
 Post Title: Wal-Marting Across America or RVs parking their blog ethics at the door?  
 Post URL: <http://joeduck.wordpress.com/2006/10/16/wal-marting-across-america-or-rvs-parking-their-blog-ethics-at-the-door>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006

(table continued)

Blog ID: 79  
 Post Title: Whole Foods' CEO Throws Ethics Out Window, Where is the Media and Blog Outrage?  
 Post URL: [http://jon8332.typepad.com/force\\_for\\_good/2007/07/whole-foods-ceo.html](http://jon8332.typepad.com/force_for_good/2007/07/whole-foods-ceo.html)  
 Posted: Jul 13 2007 11:35AM

Blog ID: 80  
 Post Title: The Microsoft laptop scandal  
 Post URL: <http://jonquil.livejournal.com/518741.html>  
 Posted: Dec 29 2006 8:15AM

Blog ID: 81  
 Post Title: Bloggers are such Assholes  
 Post URL: <http://www.kbcafe.com/iBLOGthere4iM/?guid=20061016144051>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 4:40PM

Blog ID: 82  
 Post Title: Taking my 'votes' away from Edelman over Wal-Mart issue  
 Post URL: <http://ketcheson.net/2006/10/15/edelman-needs-to-respond-to-wal-mart-issue>  
 Posted: Oct 15 2006

Blog ID: 83  
 Post Title: Edelman PR in fake blog controversy  
 Post URL: [http://www.kullin.net/arkiv/2006\\_10\\_01\\_mc.html#116119755990510521](http://www.kullin.net/arkiv/2006_10_01_mc.html#116119755990510521)  
 Posted: Oct 18 2006

Blog ID: 84  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart, Edelman, and the Echo Chamber  
 Post URL: [http://learfield.typepad.com/interaction/2006/10/walmart\\_edelman.html](http://learfield.typepad.com/interaction/2006/10/walmart_edelman.html)  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006 9:25AM

Blog ID: 85  
 Post Title: PR gone wrong  
 Post URL: <http://lindsaysprblog.blogspot.com/2007/09/pr-gone-wrong.html>  
 Posted: Sep 29 2007 6:23PM

Blog ID: 86  
 Post Title: Edelman and Wal-Mart and fake blogs? Oh my...  
 Post URL: <http://listics.com/20061015661>  
 Posted: Oct 15 2006 10:48AM

Blog ID: 87  
 Post Title: Bogus Wal-Mart Blog Raises Ruckus In Blogosphere!  
 Post URL: <http://www.lockergnome.com/nexus/news/2006/10/16/bogus-wal-mart-blog-raises-ruckus-in-blogosphere>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 7:54PM

(table continued)

Blog ID: 88  
 Post Title: The Real Conversation  
 Post URL: [http://www.loosewireblog.com/2006/10/the\\_real\\_conver.html](http://www.loosewireblog.com/2006/10/the_real_conver.html)  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006

Blog ID: 89  
 Post Title: Non-disclosed Wal-Mart blog uncovered by bloggers  
 Post URL: <http://www.lostremote.com/2006/10/18/non-disclosed-wal-mart-blog-uncovered-by-bloggers>  
 Posted: Oct 18 2006

Blog ID: 90  
 Post Title: Year of the Astroturfing Flog for Online Marketing  
 Post URL: <http://marketingconversation.com/2007/07/16/year-of-the-astroturfing-flog-for-online-marketing>  
 Posted: Jul 16 2007

Blog ID: 91  
 Post Title: A Peek into the Online Marketing Year That Was  
 Post URL: <http://www.marketingvox.com/archives/2006/12/19/a-peek-into-the-online-marketing-year-that-was>  
 Posted: Dec 19 2006

Blog ID: 91  
 Post Title: WOMMA Review Unlikely to Hurt Edelman  
 Post URL: <http://rentrvinfo.com/blog/218/womma-review-unlikely-to-hurt-edelman>  
 Posted: Dec 27 2006 11:00AM

Blog ID: 91  
 Post Title: WOMMA Review Unlikely to Hurt Edelman  
 Post URL: <http://www.marketingvox.com/archives/2006/11/28/womma-review-unlikely-to-hurt-edelman>  
 Posted: Nov 28 2006

Blog ID: 91  
 Post Title: The Walmarting of the Blogosphere  
 Post URL: [http://www.marketingvox.com/archives/2006/10/12/the\\_walmarting\\_of\\_the\\_blogosphere/index.php](http://www.marketingvox.com/archives/2006/10/12/the_walmarting_of_the_blogosphere/index.php)  
 Posted: Oct 12 2006

Blog ID: 91  
 Post Title: The Walmarting of the Blogosphere  
 Post URL: [http://www.mediabuyerplanner.com/2006/10/12/the\\_walmarting\\_of\\_the](http://www.mediabuyerplanner.com/2006/10/12/the_walmarting_of_the)  
 Posted: Oct 12 2006

(table continued)

Blog ID: 91  
 Post Title: After the Walmarting Comes the Edelmaning  
 Post URL: [http://www.marketingvox.com/archives/2006/10/18/after\\_the\\_walmarting\\_comes\\_the\\_edelmaning](http://www.marketingvox.com/archives/2006/10/18/after_the_walmarting_comes_the_edelmaning)  
 Posted: Oct 18 2006

Blog ID: 91  
 Post Title: More Fake Wal-Mart Blogs, Edelman Fesses up  
 Post URL: [http://www.marketingvox.com/archives/2006/10/20/more\\_fake\\_walmart\\_blogs\\_edelman\\_fesses\\_up](http://www.marketingvox.com/archives/2006/10/20/more_fake_walmart_blogs_edelman_fesses_up)  
 Posted: Oct 20 2006

Blog ID: 92  
 Post Title: Edelman fakes a blog  
 Post URL: <http://www.marketsentinel.com/blog/2006/10/edelman-fakes-a-blog>  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006 3:17PM

Blog ID: 93  
 Post Title: Why isn't this on Techmeme?  
 Post URL: <http://www.mathewingram.com/work/2006/10/15/why-isnt-this-on-techmeme>  
 Posted: Oct 15 2006 9:51AM

Blog ID: 93  
 Post Title: Edelman takes ownership of Wal-Mart blunder  
 Post URL: <http://www.mathewingram.com/work/2006/10/16/edelman-takes-ownership-of-wal-mart-blunder>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 3:50PM

Blog ID: 93  
 Post Title: Did Edelman drop the ball on Wal-Mart?  
 Post URL: <http://www.mathewingram.com/work/2006/10/16/did-edelman-drop-the-ball-on-wal-mart>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 11:55AM

Blog ID: 93  
 Post Title: A few more thoughts about Edelman/Wal-Mart  
 Post URL: <http://www.mathewingram.com/work/2006/10/18/a-few-more-thoughts-about-edelmanwal-mart>  
 Posted: Oct 18 2006 5:03PM

Blog ID: 94  
 Post Title: Strike Two for Edelman PR as Their Second Fake Wal-mart Blog is Revealed  
 Post URL: [http://www.whatsnextblog.com/archives/2006/10/strike\\_two\\_for\\_edelman\\_pr\\_as\\_their\\_second\\_fake\\_walmart\\_blog\\_is\\_revealed.asp](http://www.whatsnextblog.com/archives/2006/10/strike_two_for_edelman_pr_as_their_second_fake_walmart_blog_is_revealed.asp)  
 Posted: Oct 15 2006 8:06AM

(table continued)

Blog ID: 95  
 Post Title: Edelman & Wal-Mart: social media in the blast radius  
 Post URL: <http://michaeloc.com/2006/10/edelman-wal-mart-social-media-in-blast.html>  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006 5:50PM

Blog ID: 96  
 Post Title: On Edelman and Wal-Mart  
 Post URL: [http://www.micropersuasion.com/2006/10/on\\_edelman\\_and\\_.html](http://www.micropersuasion.com/2006/10/on_edelman_and_.html)  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 3:12PM

Blog ID: 97  
 Post Title: Don't Flog It On The Net  
 Post URL: <http://mk2010comm.blogspot.com/2007/05/disintermediation.html>  
 Posted: May 1 2007 4:51AM

Blog ID: 98  
 Post Title: Company Blog Checkup: Wal-Mart  
 Post URL: <http://moblogsmoproblems.blogspot.com/2007/06/company-blog-checkup-wal-mart.html>  
 Posted: Jun 27 2007 11:50AM

Blog ID: 99  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart PR firm pulls fake blog stunt, and runs for cover  
 Post URL: <http://money.cnn.com/blogs/browser/2006/10/wal-mart-pr-firm-pulls-fake-blog-stunt.html>  
 Posted: Oct 15 2006 11:15PM

Blog ID: 99  
 Post Title: Corporate blogging: Wal-Mart's fumbles  
 Post URL: [http://money.cnn.com/2006/10/17/technology/pluggedin\\_gunther\\_blog.fortune](http://money.cnn.com/2006/10/17/technology/pluggedin_gunther_blog.fortune)  
 Posted: Oct 18 2006 9:31AM

Blog ID: 99  
 Post Title: PR firm admits it's behind Wal-Mart blogs  
 Post URL: [http://money.cnn.com/2006/10/20/news/companies/walmart\\_blogs/?postversion=2006102011](http://money.cnn.com/2006/10/20/news/companies/walmart_blogs/?postversion=2006102011)  
 Posted: Oct 20 2006 11:44AM

Blog ID: 100  
 Post Title: Social Media Strike Two for Edelman PR and Wal-Mart  
 Post URL: [http://www.mpdailyfix.com/2006/10/social\\_media\\_strike\\_two\\_for\\_ed.html](http://www.mpdailyfix.com/2006/10/social_media_strike_two_for_ed.html)  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006

Blog ID: 101  
 Post Title: PROGS - Wal-Marting Across America  
 Post URL: <http://mrwavetheory.blogspot.com/2006/10/progs-wal-marting-across-america.html>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 4:26AM

(table continued)



Blog ID: 101  
 Post Title: Walmart Offers Free Flogs in Aisle Six  
 Post URL: <http://mrwavetheory.blogspot.com/2006/10/walmart-offers-free-flogs-in-aisle-six.html>  
 Posted: Oct 20 2006 10:31AM

Blog ID: 102  
 Post Title: Doing Social Media Well  
 Post URL: [http://www.mstonerblog.com/index.php/blog/comments/doing\\_social\\_media\\_well/#When:23:12:01Z](http://www.mstonerblog.com/index.php/blog/comments/doing_social_media_well/#When:23:12:01Z)  
 Posted: Jun 5 2007

Blog ID: 103  
 Post Title: Questionable judgment by Edelman in fake blog fiasco  
 Post URL: <http://www.nevillehobson.com/2006/10/13/questionable-judgment-by-edelman-in-fake-blog-fiasco>  
 Posted: Oct 13 2006 9:50PM

Blog ID: 104  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart, Edelman and Public Relations  
 Post URL: [http://newpersuasion.typepad.com/new\\_persuasion/2006/10/just\\_when\\_i\\_tho.html](http://newpersuasion.typepad.com/new_persuasion/2006/10/just_when_i_tho.html)  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 12:24AM

Blog ID: 105  
 Post Title: Edelman takes flak for Wal-Mart "flog"  
 Post URL: [http://open.typepad.com/open/2006/10/edelman\\_takes\\_f.html](http://open.typepad.com/open/2006/10/edelman_takes_f.html)  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006

Blog ID: 106  
 Post Title: A Cautionary Blogging Tale  
 Post URL: <http://opinionatedmarketers.blogspot.com/2006/10/cautionary-blogging-tale.html>  
 Posted: Oct 12 2006 3:55PM

Blog ID: 107  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart: On the Importance of Being Ernest  
 Post URL: <http://overtonecomm.blogspot.com/2006/10/wal-mart-on-importance-of-being-ernest.html>  
 Posted: Oct 13 2006 7:56PM

Blog ID: 108  
 Post Title: amming econo  
 Post URL: <http://www.parmet.net/pr/2007/01/01/jamming-econo>  
 Posted: Jan 1 2007

Blog ID: 108  
 Post Title: Public Relations and the "Conversation"  
 Post URL: <http://www.parmet.net/pr/2006/10/16/public-relations-and-the-conversation>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006

(table continued)

Blog ID: 109  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart still not getting it in social media  
 Post URL: <http://www.paulgilllin.com/2006/10/wal-mart-still-not-getting-it-in.html>  
 Posted: Oct 12 2006 11:00AM

Blog ID: 110  
 Post Title: "Bloggers are such Asshole" and Randys Right !!  
 Post URL: [http://peterdawson.typepad.com/blog/2006/10/bloggers\\_are\\_su.html](http://peterdawson.typepad.com/blog/2006/10/bloggers_are_su.html)  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 6:01PM

Blog ID: 111  
 Post Title: Is Green the New Pink (Ribbon)?  
 Post URL: <http://planetrelations.com/archives/44>  
 Posted: Dec 6 2006

Blog ID: 112  
 Post Title: The Ethics of the Blogosphere  
 Post URL: <http://pop-pr.blogspot.com/2006/12/ethics-of-blogosphere.html>  
 Posted: Dec 28 2006 3:23PM

Blog ID: 113  
 Post Title: Wal-Mart "Flog" Mea Culpa Raises Ethical Concerns for Journalists  
 Post URL: <http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=31&aid=112496>  
 Posted: Oct 18 2006 10:05PM

Blog ID: 114  
 Post Title: Strike Three for Edelman  
 Post URL: [http://www.pr-squared.com/2006/10/strike\\_three\\_for\\_edelman.html](http://www.pr-squared.com/2006/10/strike_three_for_edelman.html)  
 Posted: Oct 12 2006 10:57PM

Blog ID: 114  
 Post Title: Three Questions re: the Edelman/Wal-Mart Flap  
 Post URL: [http://www.pr-squared.com/2006/10/three\\_questions\\_for\\_edelman.html](http://www.pr-squared.com/2006/10/three_questions_for_edelman.html)  
 Posted: Oct 14 2006 6:21PM

Blog ID: 114  
 Post Title: Edelman's Apology: "Acknowledgement" vs. "Acceptance "  
 Post URL: [http://www.pr-squared.com/2006/10/edelmans\\_apology\\_acknowledgeme.html](http://www.pr-squared.com/2006/10/edelmans_apology_acknowledgeme.html)  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 8:15PM

Blog ID: 114  
 Post Title: On the Importance of Being a Navel-Gazer  
 Post URL: [http://www.pr-squared.com/2006/10/on\\_the\\_importance\\_of\\_being\\_a\\_n\\_1.html](http://www.pr-squared.com/2006/10/on_the_importance_of_being_a_n_1.html)  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006 12:32PM

(table continued)

Blog ID: 115  
Post Title: Will Edelman Walk the Talk?  
Post URL: [http://prblog.typepad.com/strategic\\_public\\_relation/2006/10/will\\_edelman\\_wa.html](http://prblog.typepad.com/strategic_public_relation/2006/10/will_edelman_wa.html)  
Posted: Oct 12 2006

Blog ID: 115  
Post Title: The Sound of Silence  
Post URL: [http://prblog.typepad.com/strategic\\_public\\_relation/2006/10/the\\_sound\\_of\\_si.html](http://prblog.typepad.com/strategic_public_relation/2006/10/the_sound_of_si.html)  
Posted: Oct 13 2006

Blog ID: 116  
Post Title: Edelman (STEVE RUBEL WORKS HERE!) Public Relations Apologizes for Fake Blog  
Post URL: [http://www.prdifferently.com/2006/10/edelman\\_steve\\_r.html](http://www.prdifferently.com/2006/10/edelman_steve_r.html)  
Posted: Oct 17 2006 8:51AM

Blog ID: 117  
Post Title: Flogvertising: Edelman Gets A Kicking  
Post URL: [http://www.psfk.com/2006/10/flogvertising\\_e.html](http://www.psfk.com/2006/10/flogvertising_e.html)  
Posted: Oct 16 2006

Blog ID: 118  
Post Title: Pro-Wal-Mart Travel Blog Screeches To A Halt  
Post URL: <http://publications.mediapost.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=Articles.san&s=49505>  
Posted: Oct 12 2006 6:00AM

Blog ID: 119  
Post Title: Edelman, Wal-Mart and the Loss of Control in Media  
Post URL: <http://publishing2.com/2006/10/15/edelman-wal-mart-and-the-loss-of-control-in-media>  
Posted: Oct 15 2006

Blog ID: 120  
Post Title: Flogging  
Post URL: <http://blog.ragan.com/contentmatters/2007/08/flogging.html>  
Posted: Aug 8 2007 12:47AM

Blog ID: 121  
Post Title: Wal-Mart corporate blogging debacle  
Post URL: [http://redplanetblog.typepad.com/blog/2006/10/walmart\\_corpora.html](http://redplanetblog.typepad.com/blog/2006/10/walmart_corpora.html)  
Posted: Oct 23 2006 1:40PM

Blog ID: 122  
Post Title: Does Edelman need a PR rep?  
Post URL: <http://blogs.zdnet.com/micro-markets/?p=553>  
Posted: Oct 17 2006 8:03PM

(table continued)

Blog ID: 123  
 Post Title: the Walmart flog  
 Post URL: <http://ringmar.net/imbloggingthis/?p=66>  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006 3:01PM

Blog ID: 124  
 Post Title: The Wal-Mart / Edelman Affair: Hardly a Crime Against Humanity  
 Post URL: [http://robertrosenthal.typepad.com/blog/2006/10/the\\_walmart\\_ede.html](http://robertrosenthal.typepad.com/blog/2006/10/the_walmart_ede.html)  
 Posted: Oct 15 2006

Blog ID: 125  
 Post Title: Leveraging Social Networks  
 Post URL: <http://sanjaysahay.wordpress.com/2006/10/17/leveraging-social-networks>  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006

Blog ID: 126  
 Post Title: Blog Awards  
 Post URL: <http://www.sarahcarey.ie/2007/02/11/blog-awards-2>  
 Posted: Feb 11 2007

Blog ID: 127  
 Post Title: Wal-mart, Edelman and transparency  
 Post URL: [http://www.scalefree.info/2006/10/links\\_for\\_2006-10-14.html](http://www.scalefree.info/2006/10/links_for_2006-10-14.html)  
 Posted: Oct 14 2006

Blog ID: 128  
 Post Title: Blog integrity is important  
 Post URL: <http://scobleizer.com/2006/10/15/blog-integrity-is-important>  
 Posted: Oct 15 2006 10:57AM

Blog ID: 128  
 Post Title: The Walmart RV'ers side of the story  
 Post URL: <http://scobleizer.wordpress.com/2006/10/16/the-walmart-rvers-side-of-the-story>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 8:27AM

Blog ID: 128  
 Post Title: Richard Edelman calls...  
 Post URL: <http://scobleizer.com/2006/10/16/richard-edelman-calls>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 12:27PM

Blog ID: 129  
 Post Title: "Wal-Marting Across America" - Did Googlewashing Work?  
 Post URL: <http://www.sethf.com/infothought/blog/archives/001080.html>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 9:54AM

(table continued)

Blog ID: 130  
 Post Title: Honesty Is Always the Best Policy  
 Post URL: [http://www.shopfloorblog.com/2007/06/honesty\\_is\\_alwa.html](http://www.shopfloorblog.com/2007/06/honesty_is_alwa.html)  
 Posted: Jun 15 2007

Blog ID: 131  
 Post Title: Walmart & Edelman... again  
 Post URL: [http://simoncollister.typepad.com/simonsays/2006/10/walmart\\_edelman.html](http://simoncollister.typepad.com/simonsays/2006/10/walmart_edelman.html)  
 Posted: Oct 14 2006

Blog ID: 132  
 Post Title: Jumping the gun?  
 Post URL: <http://www.simonwakeman.com/2006/10/14/jumping-the-gun>  
 Posted: Oct 14 2006 8:35PM

Blog ID: 132  
 Post Title: Edelman goes public on Wal-mart  
 Post URL: <http://www.simonwakeman.com/2006/10/16/edelman-goes-public-on-wal-mart>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 11:01PM

Blog ID: 133  
 Post Title: WalMart gets slapped  
 Post URL: <http://socialmediagroup.ca/2006/10/12/walmart-gets-slapped>  
 Posted: Oct 12 2006 9:18AM

Blog ID: 134  
 Post Title: The 4 Rules of Professional Social Media  
 Post URL: <http://socialmouth.blogspot.com/2007/07/4-rules-of-professional-social-media.html>  
 Posted: Jul 2 2007 3:54PM

Blog ID: 135  
 Post Title: Blogs, splogs, & flogs: Edelman & the Wal-Mart fiasco  
 Post URL: <http://www.sparkplug9.com/bizhack/2006/10/12/blogs-splogs-flogs-edelman-the-wal-mart-fiasco>  
 Posted: Oct 12 2006

Blog ID: 136  
 Post Title: Edelman: Must try harder  
 Post URL: [http://strange.corante.com/archives/2006/10/21/edelman\\_must\\_try\\_harder.php](http://strange.corante.com/archives/2006/10/21/edelman_must_try_harder.php)  
 Posted: Oct 21 2006

Blog ID: 137  
 Post Title: World's Most Ethical Grocer Caught in Serious Ethics Flap  
 Post URL: <http://strumpette.com/archives/468-Worlds-Most-Ethical-Grocer-Caught-in-Serious-Ethics-Flap.html>  
 Posted: Jul 12 2007

(table continued)

Blog ID: 137  
 Post Title: Call Goes Out for Edelman and Rubel to Resign  
 Post URL: <http://www.strumpette.com/archives/206-Call-Goes-Out-for-Edelman-and-Rubel-to-Resign.html>  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006

Blog ID: 138  
 Post Title: PR bloggers should give Edelman a break  
 Post URL: [http://www.stuartbruce.biz/2006/10/pr\\_bloggers\\_sho.html](http://www.stuartbruce.biz/2006/10/pr_bloggers_sho.html)  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 12:49PM

Blog ID: 139  
 Post Title: Women to Wal-Mart: We'll do the patronizing, thanks  
 Post URL: [http://surfette.typepad.com/surfette/2006/10/women\\_to\\_walmar.html](http://surfette.typepad.com/surfette/2006/10/women_to_walmar.html)  
 Posted: Oct 23 2006 12:03PM

Blog ID: 140  
 Post Title: Two more fake blogs from Edelman | Edelman's fall from blogosphere grace  
 Post URL: [http://theblogconsultancy.typepad.com/techpr/2006/10/two\\_more\\_fake\\_b.html](http://theblogconsultancy.typepad.com/techpr/2006/10/two_more_fake_b.html)  
 Posted: Oct 21 2006

Blog ID: 141  
 Post Title: Edelman/Wal-Mart aftermath: expect more PR blogging \*\*\* ups  
 Post URL: <http://thenewmarketing.com/blogs/thenewmarketing/archive/2006/10/13/442.aspx>  
 Posted: Oct 13 2006 11:53AM

Blog ID: 142  
 Post Title: Can Edelman manufacture its own clients?  
 Post URL: <http://thewritingonthewal.net/?p=2250>  
 Posted: Mar 28 2007 8:55PM

Blog ID: 142  
 Post Title: Edelman's Idea of "Transparency"  
 Post URL: <http://thewritingonthewal.net/?p=1513>  
 Posted: Oct 18 2006 8:24AM

Blog ID: 143  
 Post Title: Wal Mart Takes the Blogging Low Road  
 Post URL: <http://www.threadwatch.org/node/9340>  
 Posted: Oct 15 2006 5:24PM

Blog ID: 144  
 Post Title: Whole Foods & The Ethics of Anonymous Content  
 Post URL: [http://threeminds.organic.com/2007/07/whole\\_foods\\_the\\_ethics\\_of\\_anon.html](http://threeminds.organic.com/2007/07/whole_foods_the_ethics_of_anon.html)  
 Posted: Jul 12 2007

(table continued)

Blog ID: 145  
 Post Title: Basics of Online Reputation Management  
 Post URL: <http://www.toprankblog.com/2007/03/basics-of-online-reputation-management>  
 Posted: Mar 27 2007

Blog ID: 146  
 Post Title: Edelman fesses up in Walmart blog mess  
 Post URL: <http://toughsledging.wordpress.com/2006/10/16/edelman-fesses-up-in-walmart-blog-mess>  
 Posted: Oct 16 2006 8:18PM

Blog ID: 147  
 Post Title: Flogging a Dead Blog  
 Post URL: <http://twopointouch.com/2006/10/17/flogging-a-dead-blog>  
 Posted: Oct 17 2006 2:08AM

Blog ID: 148  
 Post Title: How Blogging Can Blow Up in Your Face  
 Post URL: [http://unicashare.typepad.com/share/2007/02/how\\_blogging\\_ca.html](http://unicashare.typepad.com/share/2007/02/how_blogging_ca.html)  
 Posted: Feb 9 2007

Blog ID: 149  
 Post Title: Eric Rice of Hipcast vs Walmart blogs  
 Post URL: <http://vaspersthegrate.blogspot.com/2006/10/eric-rice-of-hipcast-vs-walmart-blogs.html>  
 Posted: Oct 19 2006 4:10PM

Blog ID: 150  
 Post Title: Trust is Not Negotiable...  
 Post URL: <http://www.vestaldesign.com/blog/2006/10/trust-is-not-negotiable.html>  
 Posted: Oct 18 2006

Blog ID: 151  
 Post Title: Washing away in a tide of 'how could they?'  
 Post URL: <http://wagnercomm.blogspot.com/2006/10/washing-away-in-tide-of-how-could-they.html>  
 Posted: Oct 13 2006 7:25AM

Blog ID: 152  
 Post Title: Edelman Reveals Two More Wal-Mart 'Flogs'  
 Post URL: [http://blog.wakeupwalmart.com/ufcw/2006/10/edelman\\_reveals.html](http://blog.wakeupwalmart.com/ufcw/2006/10/edelman_reveals.html)  
 Posted: Oct 20 2006 10:31AM

Blog ID: 153  
 Post Title: Identity of &"Wal-Marting Across America" RV'er Revealed  
 Post URL: [http://walmartwatch.com/blog/archives/identity\\_of\\_wal\\_marting\\_across\\_america\\_rver\\_revealed](http://walmartwatch.com/blog/archives/identity_of_wal_marting_across_america_rver_revealed)  
 Posted: Oct 10 2006

(table continued)

Blog ID: 153  
Post Title: PR Bloggers Respond To Wal-Mart / Edelman Controversy  
Post URL: [http://walmartwatch.com/blog/archives/pr\\_bloggers\\_respond](http://walmartwatch.com/blog/archives/pr_bloggers_respond)  
Posted: Oct 13 2006

Blog ID: 153  
Post Title: Wal-Mart PR Firm's CEO Admits "Error" In Blog Controversy  
Post URL: [http://walmartwatch.com/blog/archives/wal\\_mart\\_pr\\_firms\\_ceo\\_admits\\_error\\_in\\_blog\\_controversy](http://walmartwatch.com/blog/archives/wal_mart_pr_firms_ceo_admits_error_in_blog_controversy)  
Posted: Oct 16 2006

Blog ID: 153  
Post Title: For Wal-Mart, PR = Public Revelations  
Post URL: [http://walmartwatch.com/blog/archives/friday\\_blog\\_roundup](http://walmartwatch.com/blog/archives/friday_blog_roundup)  
Posted: Oct 20 2006 9:47AM

Blog ID: 153  
Post Title: Ad Age: Edelman Eats Humble Pie  
Post URL: [http://walmartwatch.com/blog/archives/edelman\\_eats\\_humble\\_pie](http://walmartwatch.com/blog/archives/edelman_eats_humble_pie)  
Posted: Oct 20 2006

Blog ID: 154  
Post Title: Post Photographer Repays Group for Trip Expenses  
Post URL: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/11/AR2006101101658.html>  
Posted: Oct 12 2006

Blog ID: 155  
Post Title: Social Media not fully Adopted and Blowing the smoke away  
Post URL: <http://www.web-strategist.com/blog/2006/12/30/social-media-not-fully-adopted-by-mainstream-adopted>  
Posted: Dec 30 2006

Blog ID: 156  
Post Title: Edelman, WalMart  
Post URL: [http://weblogs.macromedia.com/jd/archives/2006/10/edelman\\_walmart.cfm](http://weblogs.macromedia.com/jd/archives/2006/10/edelman_walmart.cfm)  
Posted: Oct 15 2006 9:53AM

Blog ID: 156  
Post Title: Who's more credulous?  
Post URL: [http://weblogs.macromedia.com/jd/archives/2006/10/whos\\_more\\_credu.cfm](http://weblogs.macromedia.com/jd/archives/2006/10/whos_more_credu.cfm)  
Posted: Oct 16 2006 8:55PM



Table B7. *All Mainstream Media Articles Arranged by Article Number*

Article ID:	1
Title:	An RV That Runs On Wal-Mart
Publication:	Business Week
Published:	Oct 23 2006
Article ID:	2
Title:	At the bottom of the blog
Publication:	Sunday Times (South Africa)
Published:	Dec 10 2006
Article ID:	3
Title:	Marketing ploy for Wal-Mart gets egg on PR firm's smiley face
Publication:	The Philadelphia Inquirer
Published:	Oct 21 2006
Article ID:	4
Title:	Bloggers beware: conflicts of interest and diabetes
Publication:	The Lancet
Published:	Nov 17 2006
Article ID:	5
Title:	Bogus bloggers will always be found out
Publication:	The Leader
Published:	Oct 20 2006
Article ID:	6
Title:	Book of lists 2006
Publication:	PR Week (US)
Published:	Dec 18 2006
Article ID:	7
Title:	Hard Lessons - Always; Wal-Mart's Cybereducation
Publication:	INFORMATIONWEEK
Published:	Oct 30 2006
Article ID:	8
Title:	Industry must self-police flogging
Publication:	PR Week (US)
Published:	Mar 5 2007
Article ID:	9
Title:	Post Photographer Repays Group for Trip Expenses
Publication:	The Washington Post
Published:	Oct 12 2006

(table continued)

- Article ID: 10  
Title: Spinners try their moves on astroturf  
Publication: The Age (Melbourne, Australia)  
Published: Jan 30 2007
- Article ID: 11  
Title: The next big thing. Flogs  
Publication: The Times (London)  
Published: Nov 11 2006
- Article ID: 12  
Title: The truth will out  
Publication: Retail Week  
Published: Apr 13 2007
- Article ID: 13  
Title: Wal-Mart needs cleanup in Aisle 1 after blog turns into PR mess  
Publication: The Gazette (Montreal)  
Published: Oct 24 2006
- Article ID: 14  
Title: Year in Review - The Year of the Blog  
Publication: PR Week  
Published: Dec 8 2006
- Article ID: 15  
Title: Business turns to scanning blogs to check image  
Publication: The Toronto Star  
Published: Oct 31 2006
- Article ID: 16  
Title: Edelman apologizes for Wal-Mart blog fiasco  
Publication: DIGEST: Breaking News from AdAge.com  
Published: Oct 23 2006
- Article ID: 17  
Title: Edelman.com leads agency web ranking  
Publication: PR Week  
Published: Feb 9 2007
- Article ID: 18  
Title: Revenge Of The Suits: Companies Show How To Blog  
Publication: INFORMATIONWEEK  
Published: Oct 23 2006

## APPENDIX C

## DESCRIPTIONS OF THE 50 MOST INFLUENTIAL BLOGS

1. *Basturea.com* is a blog by Constantin Basturea, who works at a communications agency specializing in business blog consulting. Constantin writes about blogging, public relations, journalism, social media and other topics.

2. The post on *blogbar.de* was written by a German journalist. (No further information is available.)

3. *Blogbusinesssummit.com* is operated by The Blog Business Summit – a company specializing in business blog consulting through conferences and seminars. Topics include public relations, marketing, advertising, blogging, technology, etc.

4. *Blogher.org/node/11792* is a blog by Morra Aarons. Morra is a graduate student and a consultant; she works with clients to help build online communications programs; she is a columnist and a media commentator. In her blog, she writes about issues dealing with women, politics and the Internet.

5. *Blog-relations.com* is operated by Blog Relations, an online communications agency, with an expertise in business blog consulting. It is run by two British business journalists, Matthew Lynn and Hugh Fraser. Topics include public relations, marketing, blogging, technology, etc.

6. *Blogwriteforceos.com* is maintained by Debbie Weil, who is a corporate and CEO blogging consultant, a book author and a journalist. She writes about a wide array of issues relating to business blogging.

7. *Bloombergmarketing.blogs.com* is a blog maintained by Toby Bloomberg, a business blogging consultant. Topics include various aspects of blogging, marketing, social media, etc.

8. *Businessblogwire.com* is a blog by Easton Ellsworth, who is an editor for an online business news and information network. Easton writes mostly about business blogs and technology.

9. *Businessweek.com* is a mainstream media publication.

10. *Buzzmachine.com* is a blog by Jeff Jarvis. Jeff is an associate professor and director of the interactive journalism program at the City University of New York's Graduate School of Journalism. He is also consulting editor of a news startup, writes a new media column for The Guardian and consults for media companies. He writes about blogs, journalism, media, news, politics, etc.

11. *Chrisabraham.com* is a blog by Chris Abraham, who is president of a consulting company, specializing, among other things, in business blogging. Chris writes about a wide array of topics.

12. *Consumerist.com* is an online media publication devoted to the consumer: "We're biased towards the consumer. We favor bad company stories over happy customer tales." (Consumerist.com, n.d.)

13. *Dailykos.com* is a collective blog "with political analysis on US current events from a liberal perspective." (Dailykos.com, n.d.). The writer who wrote the related post covers two subjects: Wal-Mart and the politics of food, and is affiliated with the Writing on the Wal, an activist blog covering issues related to Wal-Mart.

14. *Deepjiveinterests.com* is a blog by Tony Hung. Tony writes about various topics, including media, the social web and marketing.
15. *Edelman.com* is Richard Edelman's blog.
16. *Evans.blogware.com* is a blog by Mark Evans, who works for a Canadian-based blogging company and writes mostly about technology.
17. *Getgood.typepad.com* is a blog maintained by Janeth Duque – a Colombia-based web designer and marketing consultant. Janeth writes about blogs, social media, technology, etc.
18. *Holmesreport.blogspot.com* is a blog by Paul Holmes, who is editor of The Holmes Report, a weekly electronic newsletter for the public relations industry.
19. *Hyperorg.com* is a blog by George Nimeh, a UK-based entrepreneur, who writes about a wide range of topics, including social media, marketing, technology, etc.
20. *Intopr.prblogs.org* is a blog by Owen Lystrup, who is an account coordinator at a public relations agency.
21. *Intuitive.com* is a blog by Dave Taylor, a book author, speaker, programmer and consultant. In his blog, Dave focuses on business and industry analysis.
22. *Jaffejuice.com* is a blog by Joseph Jaffe, a consultant, speaker and book author. Joseph writes on such topics as marketing, new media, creativity, etc.
23. *Lostremote.com* is an online media publication focused on media.
24. *Marketingvox.com* is an online media publication focused on online marketing.
25. *Mathewingram.com* is a blog by Mathew Ingram, a Canadian-based writer. His blogs covers topics on technology, blogging, journalism, social media, etc.

26. *Money.cnn.com* is a mainstream media publication.

27. *Mpdailyfix.com* is a blog by B.L. Ochman, who is a consultant specializing on Internet marketing strategy, social media participation and blog advertising.

28. *Nevillehobson.com* is a blog by Neville Hobson, a consultant based in the UK. Neville covers a wide range of topics, including business, communication, technology, etc.

29. *Newpersuasion.typepad.com* is a blog operated by New Persuasion, a communication consultancy. The blog covers a variety of topics, including marketing, public relations, social media and technology.

30. *Open.typepad.com* is a blog by Antony Mayfield, who works on new services and tools for PR, marketing and media professionals in the area of online communications, social media and content.

31. *Overtonecomm.blogspot.com* is a blog by Kami Huyse, who is a communications consultant.

32. *Pop-pr.blogspot.com* is a blog by Jeremy Pepper, who works in public relations and communications.

33. *Prblog.typepad.com* is a blog by Kevin Dugan, who works in public relations and marketing communications. Kevin writes about a variety of topics, including public relations, marketing and blogging.

34. *Prdifferently.com* is a blog by Peter Shankman, who is the CEO of a public relations and marketing company. Peter writes on a wide range of topics.

35. *Pr-squared.com* is a blog by Todd Defren, who is principle at a public relations and social media agency.

36. *Publications.mediapost.com* is an online media publication focused on online media and marketing.

37. *Publishing2.com* is an online media publication focused on media on the Web and in new digital technologies.

38. *Sarahcarey.ie* is a blog by Sarah Carey. Sarah describes her blog as social, political and domestic commentary.

39. *Scobleizer.com* is a blog by Robert Scoble, a prominent blogger, technical evangelist and book author. Robert is famous for “humanizing” the image of Microsoft through corporate blogging.

40. *Sparkplug9.com* is a blog by John Koetsier, who is a technology consultant.

41. *Strange.corante.com* is a blog by Suw Charman, a social software consultant and writer.

42. *Strumpette.com* is a blog, providing a critical view on public relations.

43. *Toprankblog.com* is a blog on marketing, blogs, social media and online public relations.

44. *Wagnercomm.blogspot.com* is a blog by John Wagner, who is a communications professional and writes about public relations, marketing and advertising.

45. *Walmartwatch.com* is a blog operated by Wal-Mart Watch, a joint project of The Center for Community and Corporate Ethics, a non-profit organization studying the impact of large corporations on society and its advocacy arm, Five Stones. The blog covers issues related to Wal-Mart.

46. *Weblogs.macromedia.com* is a blog by John Dowdell, who writes on business and technology.

47. *Webomatica.com* is a blog by Jason Kaneshiro, who is a web designer and works in online education. Jason writes mostly about technology.

48. *Webpronews.com* is an online media publication specializing on news for Internet and technology professionals.

49. *Whatsnextblog.com*, like *mpdailyfix.com* (27), is a blog by B.L. Ochman.

50. *Zdnet.com* is a blog by Donna Bogatin, who is a Web-based business development consultant.