

AN EXPERIMENTAL TEST OF PUBLIC RELATIONS MESSAGES:  
SIDEDNESS, AND CORPORATE GOODWILL AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

By

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By

Jangyul Robert Kim

This work is dedicated to Eunsug Kwag, Jeewon Kim and Jaeheon Kim for their love, support, sacrifice, and steadfast trust that I could accomplish this task. They have made it possible to fulfill a dream that seemed impossible.

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This study examined the effect of message sidedness in public relations messages and its interaction effect with source credibility, in particular, with source trustworthiness and source goodwill, on the message recipients' attitude toward the message, the public relations issue, and toward the company. Specifically, this study attempted to use a new public relations message tool, weblogs, to situate this communication paradigm in the Internet era.

A 3 x 2 x 2 (message sidedness: supporting one-sided vs. nonrefutational two-sided vs. refutational two-sided) x (source trustworthiness: high vs. low) x (source goodwill: high vs. low) experimental design was used. A MANOVA was used to analyze these main and interaction effects.

Results indicate that there was no three-way interaction effect among message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and source goodwill. There was a main effect of source trustworthiness and a two-way interaction effect between message sidedness and source

goodwill on the recipients' attitude toward the company. However, additional test results showed that there were two three-way interactions: (a) among message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and involvement on the recipients' attitude toward the company, and (b) among source goodwill, source trustworthiness, and involvement on the attitude toward the message.

These findings provide a theoretical and practical background for public relations activities. In particular, this study highlights why it is important for a corporation to be perceived as a responsible corporate citizen by its target publics in its community, and how and when a company may use various types of message sidedness to make a public relations message more effective, depending on their perceived goodwill and trustworthiness among target publics.

Finally, this study acknowledged the use of modern public relations tools by utilizing a weblog in the experiment. Certainly, in the Internet era, public relations should not only be dependent on traditional mass media, but should find and develop relevant new public relations tools that can reach target publics or stakeholders directly and more effectively.

## CHAPTER1 INTRODUCTION

### **Message Sidedness**

One of the important goals of public relations is to persuade target audiences. Whether it is an organization or an individual, persuasion is undertaken through communication. Many believe that people will say good things about themselves and blame others if they are in a disadvantageous situation. The same is true for an organization or an industry. However, saying only good things about ourselves does not always bring the desired results. On the contrary, sometimes, in persuading target audiences it is more effective to speak of negative things voluntarily about ourselves, our organizations or our products or services than only speaking about positive aspects. Scholars noticed this phenomenon a very long time ago. Even Aristotle said in *The Rhetoric* (1932) that any good communicator should be able to handle opposing arguments.<sup>1</sup>

This has come to be called a “message-sidedness effect,” and it has been a major topic in persuasion research since Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield (1949) conducted experiments on message sidedness. Since, a plethora of research on the effects of message sidedness has been conducted by psychology, marketing and advertising scholars. However, as O’Keefe (1999) pointed out in his meta-analysis, researchers have failed to reach a singular conclusion on the construction of persuasive messages, but

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle’s argument is focused on interactive aspects such as how a speaker should refute the counter arguments of an opponent (Allen, 1991).

instead, as in other social science theories, “it depends” on situations, conditions, and moderating and mediating variables. Although there is no single principle that can be adapted to all problems, some of the findings in the message-sidedness research have been actively utilized by persuasion scholars, as well as by marketing and advertising scholars and other communication professionals. In spite of its popularity in many of these scholarly fields, research that analyzed the effect of message sidedness from a public relations perspective is relatively rare. This dissertation will attempt to add to our understanding of the importance of decisions about message sidedness when constructing public relations persuasion messages.

### **Source Credibility**

Source credibility is another important concept that, along with message sidedness, affects persuasion effectiveness and has been actively researched for over half a century. In general, source credibility is believed to be composed of three major constructs: expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill (McCroskey & Teven, 1999; Perloff, 2003). Other research has added other factors such as source attractiveness (McCracken, 1989; Yoon, Kim, & Kim, 1998); safety, qualification and dynamism (Berlo, Lemaert, & Mertz, 1969); competency and objectivity (Whitehead, 1968); and authoritative and character (McCroskey, 1966) as important constructs of source credibility.

In the practice of public relations, source credibility has been identified as an important factor that affects the results of public relations messages. To increase the credibility of the public relations message, corporations and organizations endeavor to utilize credible external sources such as doctors, healthcare specialists, accountants, and

academics,<sup>2</sup> under such names as a “third-party endorsement” strategy or a “public relations ambassador.”<sup>3</sup>” In spite of public relations practitioners’ attempts to increase the credibility of their messages with the use of expert sources, studies of the perception of public relations and its practitioners are more inclined to negative than positive (Newsom, Ramsey, & Carrel, 1993). Most of these research studies have not explored these negative perceptions in terms of their effects on the trustworthiness or goodwill constructs of source credibility. Perhaps the reason why public relations and its practitioners are perceived as negative or less credible is not because the message sources lack expertise, but because public relations practitioners fail to demonstrate that their organization is trustworthy enough and has goodwill toward the receivers or toward the society to which the receivers belong.

This dissertation study focuses on the effect of the sidedness of public relations messages with source credibility (specifically source trustworthiness and source goodwill), and their interaction effects on the attitude change of the target audiences. This study expects to contribute to the development of public relations research by identifying message sidedness in interactions with source trustworthiness and goodwill as important variables that should be considered in public relations research, as well as for public relations professionals when planning public relations strategy in various situations for various publics.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the 2006 Edelman Trust Barometer, doctors and healthcare specialists were reported as the most credible spokespersons followed by accountants, academics, NGOs, and financial/industry analysts (Edelman, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> In public relations industry, a “public relations ambassador” refers to a celebrity or any external person who supports the public relations activities of an organization, an association or an industry by representing and speaking of positive things about them, basically thanks to their friendly image.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### Message Sidedness

#### Definition

In his meta-analysis of one-sided and two-sided studies, Allen (1991) defined a *one-sided message* as “a message that presents only those arguments in favor of the conclusion advocated by the communicator” and a *two-sided message* as “a message including both the arguments in favor of and opposed to the conclusion advocated by the communicator” (p. 393). Scholars (Allen, 1991; O’Keefe, 1999) further divided the two-sided message into two types: refutational and nonrefutational. Allen (1991) defined a *refutational two-sided message* as “(a) message that mention(s) counterarguments to the position advocated and then refute(s) them . . . to introduce the contrary position and demonstrate why this position is inferior to the position advocated by the communicator,” and a *nonrefutational two-sided message* as “a message that only mentioned the counterarguments without offering a refutation of them” (p. 393).

#### Types of Message Sidedness

For the past five to six decades, scholars have analyzed message sidedness from many different perspectives. Some studies (Golden & Alpert, 1978, 1982, 1987; Settle & Golden, 1974; Smith & Hunt, 1978) divided message types into simply a one-sided message and a two-sided message, whereas other studies further divided a two-sided message into a refutational two-sided message and a nonrefutational two-sided message

(O’Keefe, 1999). Some studies distinguished one-sided messages as either a supportive defensive message versus a refutational defensive message (McGuire, 1961), or as a strong-then-weak argument and a weak-then-strong argument according to the order of argument strength (Igou & Bless, 2003). Some studies used implicit and explicit conclusions instead of using refutational and nonrefutational conclusions. (Martin, Lang, & Wong, 2003; Sawyer & Howard, 1991). An explicit conclusion is similar to a refutational two-sided message whereas an implicit conclusion is similar to a nonrefutational two-sided message.

In this study, based on the most general criteria by Allen (1991) and O’Keefe (1999), message sidedness was divided into a supporting one-sided message, a non-refutational two-sided message and a refutational two-sided message.

### **Studies that Support Each Topic of Message Sidedness from Different Perspectives**

Studies showed that the effectiveness of message sidedness varies depending on the conditions of the communication situation such as education level and initial position (Hovland, Janis, & Kelly, 1953), receiver’s prior attitude (McGuire, 1961), availability of counter argument (Hovland et al., 1949), degree of counter argumentation (Crowley & Hoyer, 1994), argumentation order (Jackson & Allen, 1987), and expectation (McGuire, 1969; Igou & Bless, 2003).

Some studies stressed the superiority of a one-sided message to a two-sided message (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949; Hovland et al., 1953; Lang, Lee, & Zwick, 1999; O’Keefe, 1999) whereas other studies supported a two-sided message over a one-sided message (Golden & Alpert, 1978, 1982, 1987; Settle & Golden, 1974; Smith & Hunt, 1978); a nonrefutational two-sided message over a one-sided message (Kamins,

1984; Kamins & Assael, 1987; Kamins, Brand, Hocke, & Moe, 1989); or a refutational two-sided message over a one-sided message or a non-refutational two-sided message (Allen, 1991; Bohner, Einwiller, Erb & Siebler, 2003; Hale Mongeau, & Thomas, 1991; O’Keefe, 1999; Sorrentino, Bobocel, Gitta, & Olson, 1988).

### **Studies that show a two-sided message is more effective**

There are a plethora of studies that show that a two-sided message is more effective than a one-sided message in advertising research (Golden & Alpert, 1978, 1982, 1987; Settle & Golden, 1974; Smith and Hunt, 1978). Based on attribution theory, Golden and Alpert (1987) reported that two-sided messages achieved higher purchase intentions as well as higher advertising evaluation (p. 18). Golden and Alpert (1978) found that two-sided messages resulted in higher copy believability and stronger perceptions of important product features. Golden and Alpert (1982) argued that two-sided messages are more effective in persuading highly educated persons. Settle and Golden (1974) reported that beliefs about important positive features are improved by advertisements that disclaim superiority for unimportant features. Smith and Hunt (1978) added that two-sided messages let audiences perceive the claim as more valid than one-sided advertising. Lang et al. (1999) argued that the enhanced effectiveness of these two-sided messages is due to “reinforced source credibility” (p. 485).

### **Studies that show a one-sided message is more effective**

While not many studies argued that a one-sided message is superior to a two-sided message, in general, some studies showed that depending on the experimental conditions, a one-sided message is more effective than a two-sided message. For instance, Hovland et al. (1949, 1953) argued that a one-sided message is more effective for less

educated receivers and those who are initially favorable toward to the communicator's position. Lang et al. (1999) argued that a one-sided message is more effective for advertising inexpensive products. O'Keefe (1999) also found in his meta-analysis of message sidedness that one-sided messages are more persuasive than two-sided messages if audiences have an initial attitude regardless of whether it be favorable or unfavorable.

### **Studies that show a nonrefutational two-sided message is more effective**

There are also studies that argued that a non-refutational two-sided message is more effective in increasing credibility than a refutational two-sided communication (Kamins & Assael, 1987; Kamins et al., 1989), and more effective in increasing copy believability than one-sided messages (Golden & Alpert 1978, 1987; Settle & Golden 1974; Smith & Hunt, 1978; Swinyard, 1981).

O'Keefe (1999) divided the message sidedness research effects by message topics such as advertising messages and nonadvertising messages.<sup>1</sup> He found that non-refutational two-sided messages are more effective than both one-sided messages and refutational two-sided messages for advertising messages, arguing that it might be due to the receiver's different initial expectations about the communicator, i.e., "general skepticism" (p. 237) about the communicator. However, there was no such message sidedness effect for nonadvertising messages.

### **Studies that show a refutational two-sided message is more effective**

Among the message sidedness studies, the most predominant conclusion is that refutational two-sided messages are more effective than nonrefutational two-sided messages and one-sided messages (O'Keefe, 1999). Bohner et al. (2003) argued that a

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<sup>1</sup> *Advertising topics* were the ones in which the advocacy concerned products or services such as advertisements for consumer products, business products or services. *Nonadvertising topics* were the ones involved with sociopolitical topics such as public policy questions and other controversial issues.

two-sided advertisement provides higher source credibility than a one-sided advertisement. Based on the cognitive response theory, Hale et al. (1991) argued that a refutational two-sided message is more effective in generating positive cognitive responses than a one-sided message. Sorrentino et al. (1988) argued that a refutational two-sided message is more effective if recipients are motivated to process the arguments thoughtfully. Allen (1991) reported in his meta-analysis of message sidedness that a refutational two-sided message is the most persuasive strategy, followed by a one-sided message and a nonrefutational two-sided message.

### **Moderators of Message Sidedness**

In his meta-analysis that analyzed 107 persuasion effect sizes based on 20,111 respondents, O'Keefe (1999) attempted to identify moderators that were supposed to affect the persuasiveness of message sidedness. He identifies four major moderators, such as (1) the audience's initial attitude, (2) audiences' level of education, (3) audience's likely availability of counterarguments, and (4) the order of materials in the two-sided message.

#### **Initial attitude**

The study on the audience's initial attitude was first conducted by Hovland et al. (1949). In their experiment about how long World War II would last, they found that a one-sided message is more effective to an audience who had a prior favorable attitude whereas a two-sided message was more effective to the audience who had a prior negative attitude toward an issue.

On the other hand, Cowley and Hoyer (1994) argued that even though audiences have a positive prior attitude, two-sided messages could be effective if the audience is

already aware of the negative information on the subject. Some studies found that a two-sided message is not only effective to an audience with an initial negative attitude, but also to those with “no” prior attitude (Etgar & Goodwin, 1982; Golden and Alpert, 1987; Kamins et al., 1989; Stayman, Hoyer & Leone, 1987).

Considering these studies, it is likely that the prior attitude plays a critical role in two-sided message effectiveness. However, as was shown from several meta-analyses (Allen, 1991, 1994; Jackson & Allen, 1987; O’Keefe, 1999), there are no consistent findings about when and how initial or prior attitude affects the effectiveness of message sidedness.

### **Level of education**

Hovland et al. (1949) argued that a one-sided message is more effective to less educated receivers whereas a two-sided message is more effective to more educated receivers. However, several meta-analyses showed that their result cannot be supported (Allen, 1991, 1994; Jackson & Allen, 1987; O’Keefe, 1999). O’Keefe (1999) reported that of the 88 cases that have a distinctive level of audience education, 79 involved undergraduates, which made the measurement of message sidedness effect by education level unclear.

### **Availability of counterarguments**

Some studies (Chu, 1967; Hass & Linder, 1972; Pratkanis & Aronson, 1992) maintained that if the audience has more counterarguments available to them, a two-sided message is more effective, whereas a one-sided message is more effective when the audience has no or few counterarguments. However, O’Keefe (1999) argued that there is no such evidence to support this finding because “few studies have examined the

persuasive effects of sidedness variation under conditions in which the audience might be presumed to have relatively little access to counterarguments” (pp. 230-231).

### **Order of argument**

Jackson and Allen (1987) posited that the order of a two-sided message affects the persuasiveness of the message. Based on three types of argument order, such as supportive-then-opposing, opposing-then-supportive, and interweaving discussion of supportive and opposing argument, they argued that for refutational two-sided messages, supportive-then-opposing order is more effective than opposing-then-supportive order. Based on the optimum arousal theory (Berlyne, 1971), Crowley and Hoyer (1994) argued that if the “optimal” proportion of refutational information is placed early in the two-sided message but not in the beginning, it is the most effective.

On the other hand, McGuire (1969) argued that effects arise not because of the inconsistency per se, but because of the expectation of recipients. Igou and Bless (2003) also argued that order effects take place as audiences hold different expectations when they are exposed to one- and two-sided communications. From experiments that reversed the order of argument (pro/con versus con/pro) in the two-sided messages, they found that 70 percent of the participants expected that the supportive argument would appear at the end of the message (*recency effect*). On the other hand, from an experiment on a one-sided message that reversed the order of supportive argument tone (strong/weak versus weak/strong), they found that 70 percent of the participants expected that the strong arguments would appear at the beginning of the message (*primacy effect*). They said that this can be explained by a *conversation rule* (Krosnick et al. 1990; Schwarz, 1994, 1996), that is, message recipients would expect that communicators present their important

argument later in the case of two-sided communications, while they would expect important messages first in one-sided communications.

On the other hand, Hovland et al. (1953) argued that the primacy effect or “Law of Primacy” (p. 129) is not relevant in many situations. They contended that a message that comes out later is more effective than that which comes out first, thus supporting the recency effect. They explained that if audiences are exposed to the first supportive argument about which they do not agree, they would wait to refute it until an argument with which they agree comes out, and therefore, it naturally attenuates the effects of the argument that comes out first. On the contrary, if audiences are exposed to a message with which they agree, they would rely on the source and therefore, the message that comes out later from the same communicator would persuade the audiences more effectively regardless of whether it is supportive or refutational. Consequently, in a two-sided message, a message that comes out later is more effective than a message that comes out first. However, based on the “selective exposure” postulate, McGuire (1961) argued that there is no permutation effect between a supportive-only message and a refutational-only message. O’Keefe (1999) also found that there is no homogenous result to support that any particular order of message is more effective than others.

### **Other Moderators**

#### **Message relatedness**

Message relatedness is one of the moderators that affect credibility of message sidedness. From the perspective of attribution theory, Pechmann (1992) argued that a connection between the negative and positive product attributes is a critical factor for a two-sided advertising message to be effective. Bohner et al. (2003) also reported that a

two-sided related advertisement is more effective than a two-sided unrelated advertisement and a one-sided advertisement.<sup>2</sup>

### **Amount of negative information (degree of refutation)**

Bohner et al. (2003) also found that the amount of negative information is an important factor that leads to favorable evaluation. Other studies also argued that a two-sided message is more effective if less negative information is provided or relatively less important information is disclosed than positive information (Kamins & Assael, 1987; Pechmann, 1992).

### **Exposure time**

Bohner et al. (2003) also argued that the amount of exposure time moderates the effectiveness of message sidedness. They manipulated time into short exposure time and long exposure time, and found that “under high [long]-exposure time conditions, the two-sided message containing related negative and positive attributes was more effective than the two-sided message containing unrelated attributes” (p. 461). However, under a short-exposure time condition, i.e., when recipients do not have enough time to process the message content, there was no message-relatedness effect.

In addition, O’Keefe (1999) suggested other moderators that affect message sidedness, such as *product type* (a service versus a product and/or high versus low involvement product classes), *status of endorser* (expert, company president, typical consumer and celebrity), and *variation in importance* and *number of attributes* disclaimed. In addition, other studies found more moderating variables such as *perceived*

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<sup>2</sup> In their experiment, Bohner et al. (2003) used a one-sided message that mentioned only positive product attributes, and two versions of a two-sided message: (a) a two-sided unrelated message that contains negative product attributes that were *unrelated* to positive attributes, and (b) a two-sided related message that contains negative product attributes that were *related* to positive attributes (p. 455).

*source motivation* (Pechmann, 1990), *exposure to subsequent opposing communications* (Lumsdaine & Janis, 1953), *topic familiarity* (Allen, 1991), and *price* (Lang et al., 1999)

### **Explanations for Conflicting Results**

As indicated by this review, studies on message sidedness do not consistently support the superiority of any specific type of sidedness to others. Studies (Crowley & Hoyer, 1994; Lang et al. 1999) suggest several reasons of these nonconformities.

Crowley and Hoyer (1994) explained that it is because of “the lack of a theoretical framework that specifically addresses two-sided message effects” (p. 561). They argued that theories that explain message sidedness were typically borrowed from social psychology theories that were developed to explain more complex and comprehensive phenomena. Another reason for conflicting results is due to “methodological differences” between studies. As Crowley and Hoyer (1994) argued, “message structure variables, such as the *nature* and *amount* of negative information included are likely to be important determinants of two-sided message effects (i.e., one important negative attribute represents relatively more negative information than an unimportant negative attribute)” (p. 562). They argued that existing research has failed to pay attention to these variable issues. Lang et al. (1999) also argued that “the way message persuasiveness is measured” (p. 485) is one of the reasons for the conflicting results.

In addition, based on the optimal arousal theory, Crowley and Hoyer (1994) insisted that conflicting findings are due to variation in the proportion of negative information in the two-sided treatment in various studies (p. 564).

In general, as O'Keefe (1999) reported, refutational two-sided messages on nonadvertising topics turned out to be more effective than both one-sided messages and nonrefutational two-sided messages, in increasing credibility and persuasiveness. The superiority of a nonrefutational two-sided message was mainly confined to advertising topics such as comparative advertisements.

In public relations, there are many situations that a public relations professional has to handle or cope with both advertising and nonadvertising issues, such as issue management, crisis management, community relations, government relations, NGO relations, reputation management, and employee relations as well as marketing communications, event management, and promotions. In many cases, the criteria between advertising issues and nonadvertising issues are unclear. However, a few studies have been conducted on how public relations message-sidedness works in each of these situations. As O'Keefe (1999) summarized, if a refutational two-sided message on nonadvertising topics is more effective than a one-sided message or a nonrefutational two-sided message, it should be able to be adapted to public relations messages too. To this end, this study attempts to identify the effects of message sidedness between a one-sided message, a nonrefutational two-sided message, and a refutational two-sided message.

### **Related or Supporting Theories**

#### **Inoculation theory**

Inoculation theory (McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961; McGuire, 1961, 1985; Etgar & Goodwin, 1982) provides us with a theoretical basis for the effectiveness of refutational and nonrefutational two-sided messages. Borrowing a concept from the

public health practice of giving preventive shots, this theory says that if a moderate refutational message is exposed to audiences in advance (*having the flu shot*), they would resist change, and therefore, would be less persuaded than those who are not inoculated or who are only exposed to a supportive message, when they are exposed to a stronger refutational message (*attack of the flu*). Because pre-exposure makes the subsequent strong attacks “seem less believable” (McGuire, 1985, p. 294).

Inoculation theory was actively tested by advertising researchers in 1970s (Bither, Dolich, & Nell, 1971; Sawyer, 1973; Szybillo & Heslin, 1973). These studies showed that if favorable attitudes are formed based on two-sided refutational messages, it is more difficult to change the attitude with counter-attitudinal messages (Bither et al., 1971; Szybillo & Heslin, 1973). Also, a refutational message turned out to be more effective to those who have a negative initial attitude towards the advertised brand (Sawyer, 1973).

The contribution of inoculation theory to the message sidedness study is that it showed two-sided messages can reduce counterargument, if a refutational message is provided in advance. However, studies showed that even a two-sided message that contains a refutational message within itself is also effective.

### **Attribution theory**

Attribution theory (Bohner et al. 2003; Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1973; Lang et al., 1999) describes how people make causal explanations and how they develop answers for “why”-type questions. From the perspective of message sidedness research, this theory provides psychological background for how two-sided messages help increase the credibility of the message.

For instance, in the case of an advertising message, consumers may expect that the advertising message would only include positive information or supporting appeal of the products or services (*one-sided messages*) that they desire to sell. However, a plethora of empirical studies found that advertising messages that contain negative information about the products or services were more effective in enhancing their message source credibility because these two-sided messages lead receivers to perceive that the advertising is telling them the truth (Crowley & Hoyer, 1994; Golden & Alpert, 1987; Kamins & Marks, 1987; Kamins et al, 1989; Settle & Golden, 1974; Smith & Hunt, 1978; Stayman et al., 1987; Swinyard, 1981). In particular, in their study of consumer preference about providing competitors' price information, i.e., negative information in online store, Trifts and Haubl (2003) argued that the inclusion of negative information (*two-sided messages*) can increase 'believability' (Smith & Hunt, 1978; Swinyard, 1981), and therefore, positively affect consumers' purchase intention than one-sided messages (Etgar & Goodwin, 1982).

On the other hand, some studies maintained that there is a 'trade-off' between gains in credibility and the general persuasiveness of the message (Settle & Golden, 1974; Stayman et al., 1987). They reported that even though two-sided messages have increased source credibility, they did not affect the receivers' purchase intention positively (Stayman et al., 1987), or they curtailed the total expected benefits because the net effect of two-sided message is close to zero per se (Settle & Golden, 1974). Some studies showed that there is no significantly different effect between one- and two-sided messages (Sawyer, 1973; Swanson, 1987), or even reported that two-sided messages lead to lower purchase intention (Kanungo & Johar, 1975; Swinyard, 1981).

**Optimal arousal theory / fear appeal studies**

Optimal arousal theory (Berlyne, 1971; Crowley & Hoyer, 1994) assumes that stimuli that are moderately novel, surprising, or complex are more effective than stimuli that are too strong or too weak. From the perspective of message sidedness, this theory provides a theoretical background that the strength of refutational messages works on the effectiveness of persuasion. This theory shows that a two-sided message containing a moderate level of refutational message is more effective than a one-sided message or a two-sided message that contains refutational messages that are too strong or too weak.

In particular, optimal arousal theory provides a background about the conflicting findings in message sidedness research. This theory explains that conflicting findings are due to variations in the proportion of negative information included in the two-sided treatment in various studies (Crowley & Hoyer, 1994, p. 564). Furthermore, based on the experimental studies that vary the number of negative attributes in their two-sided message treatments (Golden & Alpert, 1987; Kamins & Assael, 1987; Settle & Golden, 1974; Stayman et al., 1987), Crowley and Hoyer (1994) argued that message sidedness is the most effective when the proportion of negative information is approximately 40 percent.

Optimal arousal theory shares the findings with fear appeal research, such as fear-as-acquired drive model (Janis, 1967), and two-factor theory (McGuire, 1968, 1969), in which both of them demonstrated an inverted U-shaped relationship between fear and message acceptance.

In his fear-as-acquired drive model, Janis (1967) argued that a certain degree of fear arousal is the most effective persuasion communication that could result in attaining

the proposed objectives of a message. Too much fear arousal would lead to maladaptive outcomes while fear appeal that was too weak would not arouse any reaction. Therefore, a moderate amount of fear arousal is believed to be the most effective strategy in changing people's attitude (Janis, 1967).

In his two-factor theory, McGuire (1968, 1969) argued that fear motivates people to accept the communicator's message (as a *drive*) while it could influence people's response to interfere with the acceptance or rejection of the message (as a *cue*). These two factors interacted to produce an overall inverted-U relationship between fear arousal and attitude change. Like the fear-as-acquired drive model, fear arousal was the most effective in a medium strength condition (McGuire, 1967, 1968; Witte, 1992).

### **Discounting hypothesis**

Based on the assumption that the persuasion effect is dependent on the type of reactions to content, the discounting hypothesis (Allen, 1991; Allen & Reynolds, 1989; Allen & Stiff, 1989; Smith, 1984) argues that a source who fails to meet an expectation or exceeds an expectation is reevaluated by an audience. The logical explanation of this hypothesis regarding message sidedness research is that this theory supports the effectiveness of a refutational two-sided message. For instance, if a communicator who is believed to be fair-minded fails to acknowledge the existence of opposing argument for a controversial issue, the audience would react negatively and 'discount' his or her messages. On the other hand, for a non-controversial topic, if a communicator acknowledges the existence of possible counterarguments, he or she would be perceived as more honest, fair-minded, and expert by the audience. In both cases, the discounting hypothesis argues that a two-sided message is more effective in persuading the audience.

When compared to inoculation theory, Allen (1991) argued that both theories explain the same process but from “either a static (*discounting*) or a dynamic (*inoculation*) view” (p. 399). It is clear that the discounting hypothesis describes immediate attitude change, while inoculation theory better explains attitude change over time.

### **Source Credibility**

For decades, credibility or source credibility, along with message sidedness, has been an important research topic in persuasion effectiveness research.<sup>3</sup>

Credibility is defined as “the judgments made by a message recipient concerning the believability of a communicator” (Callison, 2001, p. 220). Similarly, Tormala and Petty (2004) referred source credibility to “a message source’s perceived ability or motivation to provide accurate and truthful information” (p. 429). Anderson (1971) conceptualized source credibility as a “weight” that can enhance the value of information in a message.

### **Elements of Source Credibility**

Early research on source credibility perceived expertise and trustworthiness as two major factors of credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Hovand et al., 1953; Kelman & Hovland, 1953). Other scholars added components to credibility such as safety, qualifications, and dynamism (Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969); competency and

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<sup>3</sup> Some scholars (Newhagen & Nass, 1989; Kioussis, 2001) divided credibility research into two domains such as source credibility and medium credibility. They maintained that source credibility and medium credibility are differentiated such that *source credibility* focuses on “examining how different communicator characteristics can influence the processing of message” whereas *medium credibility* focuses more “on the channel through which content is delivered rather than the sender (or senders) of that content.” (Kioussis, 2001, p. 382). In this paper, credibility refers to source credibility.

objectivity (Whitehead, 1968); trustworthiness and competence (Browsers & Phillips, 1967; O’Keefe, 1990); and authoritativeness and character (McCroskey, 1966).

In general, scholars have argued that the source credibility is composed of three constructs such as (a) *expertise*, (b) *trustworthiness*, and (c) *goodwill* (McCroskey, 1999; Perloff, 2003). Expertise is the knowledge or ability ascribed to the communicator (Hovland et al., 1953; McCracken, 1989). Expertise also includes concepts such as expertness, competence, qualification, intelligence and authoritativeness (McCroskey, 1999). Trustworthiness is the communicator’s perceived honesty, sincerity, objectivity (McCracken, 1989), and safety and sagacity (McCroskey, 1999). Goodwill is perceived caring (Perloff, 2003) or intent toward receiver (McCroskey, 1999). Perloff (2003) maintained that a credible communicator is the “one who is seen as an expert, regarded as trustworthy and displays goodwill toward audience members” (p. 160). Also, he argued that credibility does not work exclusively, but is affected by context factors such as audience size, communicator role, and cultural dynamics. Some scholars (McCracken, 1989; Ohanian, 1990; Yoon et al., 1998) included attractiveness instead of goodwill. Attractiveness refers to the perceived familiarity, likeability, and similarity of the source to the receiver (McGuire, 1985). Yoon et al. (1998) identified the influence of each construct – expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness – and found that all three constructs affected involvement with the advertising message equally. They added that in terms of attitude toward the advertisement, “perceived attractiveness of the endorser was more important than expertise and trustworthiness.” (p. 154).

### **Effects of Source Credibility**

An abundance of research on source credibility reported that information provided by a highly credible source is more effective than information provided by a not highly credible source in causing positive attitude change and behavioral intentions (Cotlieb & Sarel, 1991; Homer & Kahle, 1990; Petty & Wegener, 1998; Ward & McGinnies, 1974; Woodside & Davenport, 1974).

Some scholars paid more attention to moderators and mediators of source credibility effects on persuasion rather than focusing on the basic effects (Tormala & Petty, 2004). As tested by the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999), it was demonstrated that source credibility influences persuasion, moderated by elaboration conditions. Under low elaboration conditions, source credibility affects the audience's attitude by invoking peripheral or heuristic cues (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). Under high elaboration conditions, credibility influences the confidence people have in their individual thoughts or cognitive responses (Brinol et al., 2004). Priester and Petty (2003) also reported that under a low elaboration likelihood condition, information provided by an untrustworthy endorser would be unthinkingly rejected.

In addition, it was shown that a message is more effective if a highly credible source is identified early (Greenberg & Miller, 1966; Ward & McGinnies, 1974). The effects of source credibility are moderated by receiver characteristics, such as locus of control, authoritarianism, involvement, and extremity of initial attitude (Haley, 1996; Yoon et al., 1998). Highly authoritarian people are more likely to be influenced by high

credibility sources (Bettinghaus, Miller, & Steinfatt, 1970). People with high involvement with the issue are less influenced by source credibility (Johnson & Scileppi, 1969).

### **Theoretical Background and Relationship with Message Sidedness Research**

Theoretically, a knowledge bias and a reporting bias, explained by attribution-based theory of source trustworthiness (Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978), provide a psychological background for source credibility effects. A *knowledge bias* is the assumption that a communicator has a biased view of an issue. A *reporting bias* is the perception that a communicator has opted not to report or disclose certain facts or points of view. Eagly et al. (1978) argued that if audiences infer that the communicators possess either a knowledge bias or a reporting bias, the perception of source credibility decreased. On the other hand, when audiences' inferences or expectations are violated, the communicator is regarded as credible and convincing. For instance, Warren Buffet and David Rockefeller Jr. gained their credibility by urging Congress not to repeal federal taxes on estates, even though they were among those most likely to benefit from its repeal (Johnston, 2001, p. A1).

This fits with the findings from majority of the message sidedness research. According to attribution theory (Bohner et al. 2003; Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1973; Lang et al., 1999), the reason why a two-sided message is more effective than a one-sided message in many cases, is because it violates the recipients' expectation that the communicator, who speaks on behalf of the organization to which he or she belongs, would only provide positive points regarding his or her organizations or supporting issues. By breaking these expectations, the communicator acquires credibility, and therefore, the message gains more effectiveness in persuading or keeping the

audience from being persuaded by counterarguments. Similarly, the discounting hypothesis (Allen, 1991; Allen & Reynolds, 1989; Allen & Stiff, 1989; Smith, 1984) describes why a two-sided message is more effective than a one-sided message. The difference is the characteristics of source credibility, which was treated as an independent variable in many source credibility researches, while it was treated as a dependent variable in many message-sidedness studies (Bohner et al., 2003; Kamins & Assael, 1987; Kanungo & Johar, 1975; Settle & Golden, 1974; Smith & Hunt, 1978).

### **Source Credibility in Public Relations**

From a public relations perspective, how to utilize credible sources has been a key issue that affects the results of public relations activities. However, the existing research reported that perceptions of public relations and its practitioners were skewed to the negative. This is true even for those who educate practitioners; Newsom, Ramsey, and Carrell (1993), surveyed 905 public relations educators and professors, and found that only 11 percent of the respondents agreed that the image of public relations and its practitioners is favorable. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) survey, conducted for five years with over 2,500 interviews supported by Rockefeller Foundation, reported that the credibility of public relations specialists ranked 42<sup>nd</sup> out of 44 public figures (O'Dwyer's PR service report, 1999).

With regard to the implication of the attribution-based theory of source trustworthiness (Eagly et al., 1978), Callison (2001) says, "the public associates public relations with bending the truth if necessary to make the client look positive or to facilitate a cover-up... it would seem that the public relations industry mandates its sources to maintain a reporting bias in favor of clients ("Behind the PRSA," 1999)" (p.

222). He pointed out four general aspects that can help public relations professionals understand their roles more objectively and to serve as quality sources:

First, receivers note credibility in messengers to determine the believability and accuracy of communication. Second, an audience relies on judgments concerning a source's trustworthiness and competence in evaluating credibility. Third, public relations practitioners, students, and the general public doubt the trustworthiness of public relations professionals. Finally, this image can be attributed in part to public relations practitioners who often try to appease receivers and to the tendency to believe that sources who speak to an audience's expectations in persuasive situations are not honest. (Callison, 2001, p. 222)

To overcome these unfavorable images, corporations and organizations endeavor to utilize credible sources either as their internal spokespersons or external endorsers. As an internal source, whereas public relations persons were the most frequently used, they engaged as sources engineers, financial specialists, and CEOs depending on an issue, its seriousness and urgency, in particular, in crisis situations. As an external source, they engaged other sources thought to be credible such as experts, celebrities, professors, industry professionals, and sports stars who can endorse their positions as their 'third party endorsers' or so-called 'public relations ambassadors.' Sometimes, they refrain from using the word "PR" or public relations, and instead use "corporate communication."

### **Source Trustworthiness and Source Goodwill**

However, in spite of these efforts by public relations practitioners to increase the credibility of their public relations messages, there still remains skepticism about the believability of public relations messages among target audiences, in particular, among the journalists and reporters (Callison, 2001). In this regard, it would be worthwhile to identify the reason why a public relations message has such low credibility. Among the

three major constructs that compose source credibility, expertise, trustworthiness and goodwill, it is generally presumed that public relations can engage sources that have the expertise or knowledge or the ability to speak about an issue on behalf of their organization. However, it is questionable whether the target publics would believe the trustworthiness and goodwill of a public relations message endorser who is speaking on behalf of an organization or a corporation. A message endorser or a certain type of spokesperson may have a friendlier image or a more positive perception than other spokespeople among the target audiences on a specific topic or issue. He or she may be an expert on a specific issue but may have a bad reputation among the target audience due to his/her extremity on that issue. Probably, he or she is perceived as an untrustworthy endorser who tries to use his/her expertise improperly. Further, even though a message endorser is perceived as trustworthy, he or she may not be seen as having 'goodwill' toward the target audience. Probably, a message endorser who is regarded as trustworthy and has goodwill for a corporation may be seen as a one who has expertise but tries to misuse his or her expertise for improper purposes when dealing with a specific public, such as NGO or activist group.

### **Source trustworthiness**

Regarding source trustworthiness, Priester and Petty (1995, 2003) reported that using only high credibility sources is not the best strategy for a corporation, because it may be more effective to use low credibility sources in some situations, and the use of a trustworthy source may be disadvantageous under certain conditions. They reported that information presented by untrustworthy (but expert) endorsers is likely to be thoughtfully elaborated on, whereas information presented by trustworthy endorsers is likely to be

non-thoughtfully accepted. In particular, they suggested two conditions that support their assertions.

First, and foremost, untrustworthy endorsers will be effective when presenting information that elicits positive product-related cognitive responses when thoughtfully considered by the target of the advertisement. . . . such an endorser will prompt increased elaboration of the information. Such increased elaboration will only be advantageous if the thoughts that arise in response to the information are positive. Under such conditions, the valence of the attitudes resulting from an untrustworthy endorser will be as, if not more, positive than the attitudes resulting from the use of a trustworthy endorser. Second, untrustworthy endorsers will be especially effective when the information is presented under conditions of moderate elaboration likelihood – when individuals have the requisite ability but lack the explicit motivation to elaborate the information conveyed in an advertisement. It is exactly under such conditions that the use of an untrustworthy endorser can increase the amount of thought that individuals expend on the product-related information. (Priester & Petty, 2003, p. 419)

### **Source goodwill**

Regarding source goodwill, McCroskey and Teven (1999) argued that whereas much research has been conducted on expertness and trustworthiness as major constructs of source credibility, the study of “goodwill” or “perceived caring” (p. 90) has not been a focus. Based on a factor analysis, they suggested three elements of goodwill: understanding, empathy, and responsiveness.

Understanding is knowing another person’s ideas, feelings, and needs . . . Empathy is one person’s identification with another person’s feelings. This involves behaviors indicating that one person not only understands the other’s views but accepts them as valid views, even if he or she does not agree with those views . . . Responsiveness involves one person acknowledging another person’s communicative attempts. Responsiveness is judged by how quickly one person reacts to the communication of another, how attentive they are to the other, and the degree to which they appear to listen to the other. (p. 92)

They argued that goodwill should be considered equal to or a more important construct than other factors such as expertise and trustworthiness. Similarly, Yoon et al.

(1998) who suggested attractiveness as a major construct of source credibility along with expertise and trustworthiness, concluded that perceived attractiveness of the endorser, which shares characteristics with goodwill to a great extent, is more important than other constructs.

It was reported that the general perception of public relations messages are skewed more toward the negative. To overcome these unfavorable images, corporations and organizations leverage credible endorsers who can speak on an issue on their behalf. However, among the three constructs of source credibility, such as expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill, it is likely that the reason for the unfavorable perception of public relations messages and public relations practitioners is not because of the lack of expertise of those public relations message endorsers, but because of their perceived lack of trustworthiness and goodwill.

Also, some research (McCroskey & Teven, 1999; Yoon, et al., 1999) reported that goodwill is a more important construct than trustworthiness and expertise in composing source credibility. In particular, goodwill should lie at the heart of public relations persuasion messages because it is assumed that “public relations is a management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994, p. 6).

However, in spite of its importance, which can influence the result of public relations messages, little research has been conducted on these two constructs of source credibility -- trustworthiness and goodwill. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate the effect of these variables on the effectiveness of public relations persuasion messages.

As these constructs compose the concept of source credibility, they are supposed to be highly correlated with each other, and may have high multicollinearity, but, as was identified by McCroskey and Teven (1999), it is plausible to assume that they represent different facets of source credibility.

### **Hypotheses**

There are four models/theories that form a theoretical background for this study about the effect of message sidedness and source credibility in public relations messages. They are (a) inoculation theory, (b) discounting hypothesis, (c) attribution theory, and (d) optimal arousal theory / fear appeal studies.

Inoculation theory (McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961; McGuire, 1961, 1985; Etgar & Goodwin, 1982) provided this study with a theoretical basis for the effectiveness of refutational and nonrefutational two-sided messages. Borrowing a concept from the public health practice of giving preventive shots, this theory says that if a moderately refutational message is given to audiences in advance, they would be less persuaded than those who are not inoculated or who are only exposed to a supportive message, when they are exposed to a stronger refutational message. A plethora of studies on message sidedness studies show that, even though there is no single result that supports either one-sided or two-sided messages, in general, even though there is no time gap between stimuli, a two-sided message is more effective than a one-sided message.

Adding on to inoculation theory, the discounting hypothesis (Allen, 1991; Allen & Reynolds, 1989; Allen & Stiff, 1989; Smith, 1984) posits that a source who fails to meet an expectation or exceed an expectation is reevaluated by an audience. The logical explanation of this hypothesis regarding message sidedness research is that this theory

supports the effectiveness of a refutational two-sided message over a one-sided message. The discounting hypothesis considers immediate attitude change while inoculation theory handles attitude change over time (Allen, 1991). Also, this theory provides background for the study of source credibility: a reporting bias and a knowledge bias. In connection with message sidedness, it is assumed that if a two-sided message is delivered to people, it means that it violates the recipients' expectation that the communicator, who speaks on behalf of the organization to which he or she belongs, would only relate positive points regarding his or her organization or specific issues. By breaking these expectations, the communicator acquires credibility, and therefore, the message gains more effectiveness in persuading or keeping the audience from being persuaded by counterarguments

Attribution theory (Bohner et al., 2003; Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1973; Lang et al., 1999) describes how people make causal explanations and how they develop answers for "why"-type questions. From the perspective of message sidedness research, this theory provides psychological background for how two-sided messages help increase the credibility of the message. Similar to the discounting hypothesis, attribution theory explains the reason why a two-sided message is more effective than a one-sided message in many cases, is because it violates the recipients' expectation.

Finally, the optimum arousal theory (Berlyne, 1971; Crowley & Hoyer, 1994) and fear appeal studies, along with inoculation theory, provided an experimental background for message sidedness research. The optimum arousal theory assumes that stimuli that are moderately novel, surprising, or complex are more effective than stimuli that are too

strong or too weak. Also, fear appeal studies argue that fear arousal was the most effective in medium strength conditions.

However, these existing theories do not explain the interaction effect between message sidedness and constructs of source credibility (source trustworthiness and source goodwill) of public relations messages. For instance, inoculation theory does not explain the immediate effect of a refutational message (Allen, 1991). Most message sidedness studies that support discounting hypothesis or attribution theory treated source credibility as a dependent variable. On the other hand, studies on source credibility treated source credibility as an independent variable (McCracken, 1989; McCroskey, 1999; Ohanian, 1990; Yoon et al., 1998).

To identify the interaction effect between message sidedness and two constructs of source credibility, this study manipulated source trustworthiness and source goodwill as independent variables. Their effects on the recipients' attitude toward the public relations message, the issue and toward the company were tested.

Based on these findings, the following hypotheses were developed:

- H1.** There will be a two-way interaction effect between message sidedness and source trustworthiness on the attitudes of the recipients of the message.
  - H1a.** The effect of message sidedness on peoples' attitudes will be more distinctive when the endorser is low rather than high in trustworthiness.
- H2.** There will be a two-way interaction effect between message sidedness and source goodwill on the attitudes of the recipients of the message.
  - H2a.** The effect of message sidedness on peoples' attitudes will be more distinctive when the endorser is low rather than high in goodwill.

Also, it was questioned if there is any three-way interaction effect among message sidedness, source trustworthiness and source goodwill. Therefore:

**RQ1.** Is there a three-way interaction effect among message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and source goodwill on the attitudes of the recipients of the message?

**RQ2.** If there is a three-way interaction effect among message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and source goodwill on the attitudes of the recipients of the message, is a refutational two-sided message from an endorser with high source trustworthiness and high source goodwill the most effective?

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study is to analyze the relationship among the three main variables – effects of message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and source goodwill – and their interaction effects on attitude change of the target audiences when exposed to a public relations persuasion message.

For this, a 3 x 2 x 2 (message sidedness: supporting one-sided vs. nonrefutational two-sided vs. refutational two-sided) x (source trustworthiness: high vs. low) x (source goodwill: high vs. low) between-subject experimental design was used. A MANOVA was used to analyze these main and interaction effects, and pair-wise mean difference tests were conducted to determine statistically significant mean difference among different experimental groups.

### **Pretests**

Two pretests were conducted to check the validity of independent and dependent variables.

### **Participants**

Participants were recruited among the undergraduate students in the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida. A total of 324 students in two large public relations classes and two advertising classes participated. Each group was composed of 27 members. To randomly assign the participants, Weblogs were pre-numbered by date which was shown in the upper left side of the Weblogs, and were distributed to each subject who sat down randomly where they used to sit. The

participants were randomly assigned to 3 x 2 x 2 treatment conditions such as (message sidedness: supporting one-sided vs. nonrefutational two-sided vs. refutational two-sided) x (source trustworthiness: high vs. low) x (source goodwill: high vs. low). As this experiment was to test the effect of a public relations message on the attitude of the message readers, which was shown to them for the first time, no control group was used.

### **Stimuli**

To manipulate message sidedness, three types of Weblog pages were created for a supporting one-sided message, a nonrefutational two-sided message, and a refutational two-sided message, using the replies to the main message. The topic of the Weblog was about the expected effect of establishing a Carrefour super distribution center and superstore on the economy and environment of Gainesville as well as on the subjects (University of Florida students). Carrefour is one of the largest European superstore chains with more than 11,000 stores over 32 countries, but has not opened a store in America yet. As such, the brand was not known to the subjects, and it was posited that there are no or little known positive or negative prior perceptions or attitudes toward Carrefour.

Source trustworthiness and source goodwill were manipulated using a description of Carrefour by the operator of the manipulated Weblog. The operator of the Weblog was described as a business analyst, who is believed to have a certain degree of “source credibility,”<sup>4</sup> to allow subjects to focus more on the manipulated description of Carrefour. In total, twelve different versions of a Weblog were created.

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<sup>4</sup> The term “source credibility” was used to describe general source credibility of the message endorser. The operator of the Weblog is expected to have expertise as well as trustworthiness and goodwill toward the community, not toward to Carrefour.

## **Procedure**

Participants were told that the purpose of the experiment was to collect their comments on allowing a Carrefour distribution center and superstore to be opened in Gainesville. They were told that because Carrefour had submitted a construction and employment plan to the City of Gainesville's Department of Construction and Development, the city government had to review the proposal, and would like to have students' comments before they made a decision.

Based on the manipulation of this condition, 12 different versions of a Weblog, along with descriptions of the company, were provided. Participants were asked to read the Weblog message and description about Carrefour carefully, and respond to questions. In an agreement with the lecturers for the classes, extra credit was given to those students who participated. After completing the experiment, participants were debriefed. The completed data was gathered and coded for statistical analyses.

## **Independent Variables**

### **Message Sidedness**

A supporting one-sided message, a nonrefutational two-sided message and a refutational two-sided message were manipulated. Based on the optimal arousal theory (Berlyne, 1971; Crowley & Hoyer, 1994), which argues that it is the most effective when the proportion of negative information is approximately 40 percent, the ratio of positive information versus negative information was manipulated to the level of approximately 60%: 40% by number of posters. As the unit of analysis was a Weblog that allows replies to the messages or to other replies, message sidedness was manipulated using these replies.

More concretely, the main message positively and objectively reported Carrefour's submission of a proposal to open a distribution center and a superstore in Gainesville. For a supporting one-sided message, only positive replies were shown. For a nonrefutational two-sided message, negative replies against the supporting message were also shown without any refutation. To make the arguments look more realistic and natural, the order of supporting and negative replies was alternated. For a refutational two-sided message, replies that refuted those negative replies were used. Like the nonrefutational two-sided message, the order of supporting and refutational replies to those negative replies was alternated.

The main message that introduced Carrefour's coming to Gainesville and asked readers for their opinions was presented as follows:

Carrefour, one of the largest European superstore chains headquartered in Paris, France, plans to set up a distribution center and a superstore in Gainesville. The company submitted a construction and employment plan last week to the City of Gainesville's Department of Construction and Development. The projected amount of the investment is believed to approach \$34 million.

In the report, Carrefour says that within two years this investment will create more than 300 jobs for the Gainesville community and those living in the surrounding area. The report also projected that the price of real estate in this area is expected to increase, because, this will allow Gainesville to grow as a new hub distribution center in North Florida over the next five years.

Also, the report said that consumers are expected to benefit from a Carrefour superstore, because it will provide them with more shopping freedom and opportunity. Carrefour plans to start construction immediately upon getting approval from the City of Gainesville.

So, what do you think of this issue? Do you agree or disagree with Carrefour coming to Gainesville?

Then, message sidedness was manipulated using replies to the message as follows:

### Supporting one-sided message

At [10:54 AM](#), [Gogator386](#) said...

I think this is really awesome news that will revitalize the shrinking economy of Gainesville.

[Post a Comment](#)

At [8:07 PM](#), [Gimmeajob](#) said...

I hope Carrefour will create more internships and part-time jobs as well as scholarship opportunities for UF students

[Post a Comment](#)

At [11:23 PM](#), [Sunny1128](#) said...

I hope I can buy fresher foods at cheaper prices thanks to the competition with Wal-Mart and Publix.

[Post a Comment](#)

### Nonrefutational two-sided message (in the following order that mixed supporting and negative posters)

At [10:54 AM](#), [Gogator386](#) said...

I think this is really awesome news that will revitalize the shrinking economy of Gainesville. [Post a Comment](#)

[Post a Comment](#)

At [8:07 PM](#), [Gimmeajob](#) said...

I hope Carrefour will create more internships and part-time jobs as well as scholarship opportunities for UF students

[Post a Comment](#)

At [10:10 PM](#), [Debbie0202](#) said...

Do we really need more superstores in Gainesville? I think that we already have too many. Also, Carrefour is a French company. Aren't American companies gonna have too much foreign competition?

[Post a Comment](#)

At [11:23 PM](#), [Sunny1128](#) said...

I hope I can buy fresher foods at cheaper prices thanks to the competition with Wal-Mart and Publix.

[Post a Comment](#)

At [01:17 AM](#), [Tomorrow](#) said...

How long will it take to complete the construction? We definitely will have to suffer from dust, noise and even traffic congestions during the construction period. I don't want these inconveniences...

[Post a Comment](#)At [08:33 AM](#), [Green4life](#) said...

Look at Gainesville, losing her green color! No more construction, please!  
Stop destroying our environment!

[Post a Comment](#)

**Refutational two-sided message (in the following order that mixed supporting and negative posters, and refutational replies to the negative posters)**

At [10:54 AM](#), [Gogator386](#) said...

I think this is really awesome news that will revitalize the shrinking economy of Gainesville. [Post a Comment](#)

[Post a Comment](#)At [8:07 PM](#), [Gimmeajob](#) said...

I hope Carrefour will create more internships and part-time jobs as well as scholarship opportunities for UF students

[Post a Comment](#)At [10:10 PM](#), [Debbie0202](#) said...

Do we really need more superstores in Gainesville? I think that we already have too many. Also, Carrefour is a French company. Aren't American companies gonna have too much foreign competition?

At [11:15PM](#), [Carrefour](#) said...

↳ I don't think we have enough superstores in Gainesville. Carrefour is not a small French company, but a global company that has a lot of expertise and offices. Why not allow them to come into Gainesville, so that consumers in Gainesville can have better choices?

[Post a Comment](#)At [11:23 PM](#), [Sunny1128](#) said...

I hope I can buy fresher foods at cheaper prices thanks to the competition with Wal-Mart and Publix.

[Post a Comment](#)At [01:17 AM](#), [Tomorrow](#) said...

How long will it take to complete the construction? We definitely will have to suffer from dust, noise and even traffic congestions during the construction period. I don't want these inconveniences...

At [10:45PM](#), [Lee hope](#) said...

↳ I heard that the construction will take approximately six months. It's inevitable that some Gainesville citizens will suffer from dust and noise to

a certain extent. But I'm sure some contractors will minimize these inconveniences by working at night and during the weekend. Also, considering the positive effects on the Gainesville's economy, and on the quality life of Gainesville citizens, I think it is worthwhile to grin and bear it.

[Post a Comment](#)

At [08:33 AM](#), [Green4life](#) said...

Look at Gainesville, losing her green color! No more construction, please! Stop destroying our environment!

At [08:33 AM](#), [Carrefour](#) said...

↪ The construction will have very little effect on the environment of Gainesville as it will take place at the existing commercial area where empty and old warehouses have been left unused. On the contrary, after completion, the area will be a place where people can enjoy shopping with their family and friends.

[Post a Comment](#)

### **Source Trustworthiness**

Source trustworthiness was manipulated into a high trustworthiness source and a low trustworthiness source. Unlike most source trustworthiness research in advertising, in which an endorser is an independent individual such as a celebrity or a sports star, in a public relations message, it is common for a CEO or an internal public relations person to speak for or on behalf of his or her company. In other words, for a public relations message, even though it is an individual who speaks for an issue, it is the company that source trustworthiness matters. Also, unlike a comparative advertisement that shows advantages and disadvantages of a specific product or a service, it seems unnatural for an internal public relations message endorser to speak of negative aspects of an issue or about the company voluntarily.

In this study, source trustworthiness was manipulated using the explanation of Carrefour by the operator of the Weblog, who is believed to be independent and has trustworthiness. In describing Carrefour, the terms and concepts that are related to

trustworthiness, such as “honest,” “respected,” “ethical,” “illegal tax deal,” “bribery scandal,” and “sued by Green Peace,” were used as follows:

***High source trustworthiness:*** Carrefour was elected as the “Most Honest Seller” by Consumer Report as well as the “Most Respected Buyer” by the Association of European Agriculturists, in 2003 and 2004. Its inspection standards are known to be the strictest in the industry. All employees must complete 10 hours of ethics education each year. Since its establishment in 1980, there has been no scandal related to tax evasion, conflict with employees or any environmental issues.

***Low source trustworthiness:*** Carrefour was recently investigated by the French Bureau of Investigation for its alleged illegal tax deals between branches in different countries. In 2000, the president of Carrefour was accused of bribery in a French court. More recently, Carrefour U.K. was sued by Green Peace for selling some GM (genetically modified) foods without identifying them.

### **Source Goodwill**

Source goodwill was manipulated into a high goodwill condition and a low goodwill condition. Like source trustworthiness, source goodwill was manipulated using the explanation of Carrefour. The terms and concepts, such as “caring,” “concerned,” “sensitive,” and “understanding,” used in the ethos/credibility scales used by McCroskey and Teven (1999) were used in manipulating source goodwill. In particular, as a token of goodwill toward the community, corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities including care for environment, educational systems, and contribution to the local community were manipulated as follows:

***High source goodwill:*** Carrefour was selected as the “World’s 100 Most Respected Corporations” five times by Global Reporting Initiative Index since 2000. In particular, Carrefour’s high reputation lies in its sustained support of the local community. In every market where it has a presence, Carrefour donates one percent of its net profits for the development of educational systems. It also endeavors to preserve the environment. All of its stores are equipped with a state-of-the-art, the nature-friendly disposal system. Moreover, it is the first and only superstore that does not provide disposable plastic bags that are not biodegradable.

***Low source goodwill:*** Carrefour is not as respected outside of Europe as it is in Europe. Carrefour is viewed as a global firm that does not return its profits to the local community, and keeps its corporate social responsibility activities at a minimal level. Carrefour is the only global firm that is not included in the “World’s 100 Most Respected Corporations” by Global Reporting Initiative Index. In addition, Carrefour is the first superstore that provided non-biodegradable disposable plastic bags, and still uses them even though they are harmful to environment.

## **Dependent Variables**

### **Attitude toward the Trustworthiness of the Message**

The attitude and trustworthiness scales used by Trifts and Haubl (2003) were used. Participants were asked five questions designed to access their attitude toward the message in the Weblog. Five bipolar, 7-point rating scales were used, ranging from -3 (undependable, dishonest, unreliable, insincere, and untrustworthy) to +3 (dependable, honest, reliable, sincere, and trustworthy).

### **Attitude toward the Issue**

Attitude scales slightly modified from the scales used by Priester and Petty (2003) were employed.<sup>5</sup> Participants were asked four questions designed to access their attitude toward the issue, i.e., allowing Carrefour to build a distribution center and a superstore in their community. A mix of four 7-point semantic differential scales and bipolar rating scales were used, ranging from -3 (negative, harmful, unfavorable, and bad) to +3 (positive, beneficial, favorable, and good).

### **Attitude toward the Company (Carrefour)**

The attitude and trustworthiness scales used by Trifts and Haubl (2003) were employed. Participants were asked five questions designed to access their attitude toward

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<sup>5</sup> The original scales used a 5-item semantic differential employing 9-point scale ranging from -4 (negative, harmful, foolish, bad, and unfavorable) to +4 (positive, beneficial, wise, good, and favorable). The “foolish/wise” item was deleted in this study.

the company, i.e., Carrefour. Five bipolar, 7-point rating scales were used, ranging from -3 (undependable, dishonest, unreliable, insincere, and untrustworthy) to +3 (dependable, honest, reliable, sincere, and trustworthy).

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the experiment outlined in Chapter 3. The chapter begins by describing manipulation checks for the independent variables (message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and source goodwill), and reliability checks for the dependent variables (attitudes toward the message, the issue, and the company). It is followed by a report of the results of the test of the hypotheses and research questions. It concludes with reports of additional findings.

### **Manipulation Check for Independent Variables**

#### **Message Sidedness**

For a manipulation check of message sidedness and refutation, participants (n=324) were asked two questions: (a) “I think that this weblog presents primarily a \_\_\_\_\_ argument about Carrefour”, and (b) “I think that posters to this weblog \_\_\_\_\_ refute or counter the argument here about Carrefour”). Two 7-point bipolar rating scales were used, ranging from -3 (one sided) to +3 (two sided) for question (a), and from -3 (ineffectively) to +3 (effectively) for question (b).

As shown in Table 1, for Question (a), the ANOVA for the mean scores of a one-sided message versus two-sided messages showed a significant difference among the three means ( $M_{\text{one-sided}} = -.55$ ,  $M_{\text{nonrefutational two-sided}} = .37$ ,  $M_{\text{refutational two-sided}} = .33$ ,  $F(2, 321)=10.68$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The Scheffe post-hoc test<sup>1</sup> showed a significant mean difference

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<sup>1</sup> Scheffe’s method was used as it is the most conservative method with respect to Type I error (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998, p.356).

existed only between a one-sided message versus a two-sided messages ( $M_{\text{one-sided}} - M_{\text{nonrefutational two-sided}} = -.92$ ,  $M_{\text{one-sided}} - M_{\text{refutational two-sided}} = -.88$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but not between a nonrefutational two-sided message and a refutational two-sided message ( $M_{\text{nonrefutational two-sided}} - M_{\text{refutational two-sided}} = .04$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Thus, it is assumed that subjects who read a one-sided message clearly perceived it as a one-sided message, whereas subjects who read a two-sided message perceived it as a two-sided message regardless of the argument type, i.e., a nonrefutational two-sided message or a refutational two-sided message.

For Question (b), the ANOVA for the mean scores of a one-sided message versus two-sided messages showed a significant difference ( $M_{\text{one-sided}} = -.29$ ,  $M_{\text{nonrefutational two-sided}} = .32$ ,  $M_{\text{refutational two-sided}} = .48$ ,  $F(2, 319) = 10.82$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The Scheffe post-hoc test showed that there was a significant mean difference between a one-sided message and two-sided messages ( $M_{\text{one-sided}} - M_{\text{nonrefutational two-sided}} = -.61$ ,  $M_{\text{one-sided}} - M_{\text{refutational two-sided}} = -.77$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but not between a nonrefutational two-sided message and a refutational two-sided message ( $M_{\text{nonrefutational two-sided}} - M_{\text{refutational two-sided}} = -.16$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Thus it was questioned as to whether the refutational version of the message was perceived actually effectively refuting or countering better than the non-refutational version. While subjects who read a two-sided message (regardless of whether it was refutational or not) perceived that the posters to the main message in the Weblog refuted the arguments effectively, there is no difference between a nonrefutational two-sided message or a refutational two-sided message.

Table 1. Manipulation check for message sidedness

	One-sided		Two-sided				<i>F</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>P</i> -value
			Non-refutational		Refutational					
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
<i>Q(a): one-sided vs. two sided</i>	.55	1.64	.37	1.57	.33	1.74	10.68	2	321	.01
<i>Q(b): effective vs. ineffective</i>	-.29	1.41	.32	1.30	.48	1.12	10.82	2	319	.01

### Source Trustworthiness

For a manipulation check of source trustworthiness, the ethos/credibility scales used by McCroskey and Teven (1999) were employed. Participants were asked five questions designed to assess their perception of source trustworthiness. Five 7-point, bipolar rating scales were used, ranging from -3 (dishonest, untrustworthy, dishonorable, immoral, and unethical) to +3 (honest, trustworthy, honorable, moral, and ethical).

To check the dimensionality of the source trustworthiness measures, the five items were factor analyzed using a principal axis factoring extraction method with Varimax rotation. One factor was extracted that accounted for 79.1% of the variance, with an Eigenvalue = 4.16.<sup>2</sup> Table 2 displays the items and factor loadings for the rotated factors. All factor loadings were greater than .83.<sup>3</sup> A Scree test also showed that all of these items fall into one factor group (Figure 1). Therefore, using the factor score regression approach, a source trustworthiness index was created. A follow-up reliability check showed that this scale has high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .95).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In general, the factors having Eigenvalues greater than 1 are considered significant; all factors with Eigenvalues less than 1 are considered insignificant (Hair et al., 1998, p.103)

<sup>3</sup> The generally agreed upon lower limit for factor loading that accounts for 50 percent of the variance is .70 when the sample size is 100 or larger. In general, factor loadings greater than .50 are considered practically significant (Hair et al., p.111).

<sup>4</sup> The generally agreed upon lower limit for Cronbach's alpha is .70 (Hair et al., p. 118).

A *t*-test of the mean scores for the low source trustworthiness condition versus the high source trustworthiness condition showed a significant difference ( $M_{\text{low trustworthiness}} = .03$ ,  $M_{\text{high trustworthiness}} = .58$ ,  $t=-4.53$ ,  $df=322$ ,  $p<.01$ ). In general, subjects who read a Weblog message from a high trustworthy source had a more positive attitude toward the source.

Table 2. Factor analysis of source trustworthiness

Item	Factor loadings	Cronbach's $\alpha$ if item deleted
Trustworthy	.93	.93
honorable	.90	.94
ethical	.90	.94
honest	.89	.94
moral	.83	.95

Extraction method: Principal axis factoring

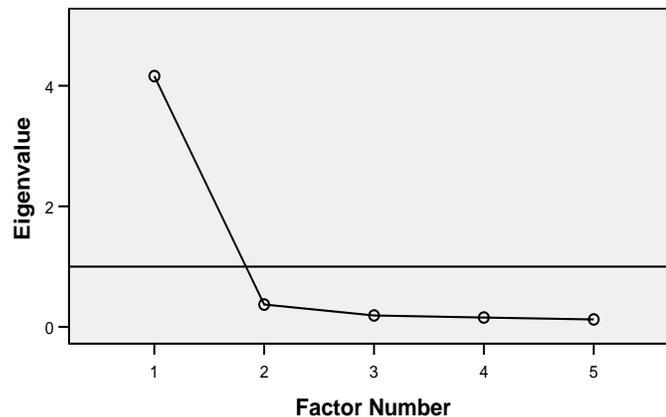


Figure 1. Eigenvalue plot for Scree test for source trustworthiness

### Source Goodwill

For a manipulation check of source goodwill, the ethos/credibility scales used by McCroskey and Teven (1999) were employed with a slight modification.<sup>5</sup> Participants were asked six questions designed to access their perception of source goodwill. Six 7-

<sup>5</sup> The original McCroskey and Teven's scales (1999) were developed to measure source goodwill toward individuals. As source goodwill in this study is about the goodwill of a corporation toward the community, the three items that were directed to individuals, were changed to community, such as: cares about me → cares about our local community; has my interests at heart → has the local community's interests at heart; concerned with me → concerned with local community).

point, bipolar rating scales were used, ranging from -3 (does not care about our local community, does not have the local community's interests at heart, self-centered, unconcerned with local community, insensitive, and not understanding) to +3 (cares about our local community, has the local community's interests at heart, not self-centered, concerned with local community, sensitive, and understanding).

To check the dimensionality of the six source goodwill items, the six items were factor analyzed using a principal axis factoring extraction method with Varimax rotation. One factor was extracted that accounted for 66.5% of the variance, with an Eigenvalue = 4.31. Table 3 displays the items and factor loadings for the rotated factors. All factor loadings were greater than .71. A Scree test also showed that these items fall into one factor group (Figure 2). Therefore, using the factor score regression approach, a source goodwill index was created. A follow-up reliability check showed that this scale has high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .92).

Table 3. Factor analysis of source goodwill

Item	Factor loadings	Cronbach's $\alpha$ if item deleted
concerned	.90	.89
interested	.87	.90
cares	.85	.90
sensitive	.81	.91
understanding	.73	.92
not self centered	.71	.92

Extraction method: Principal axis factoring

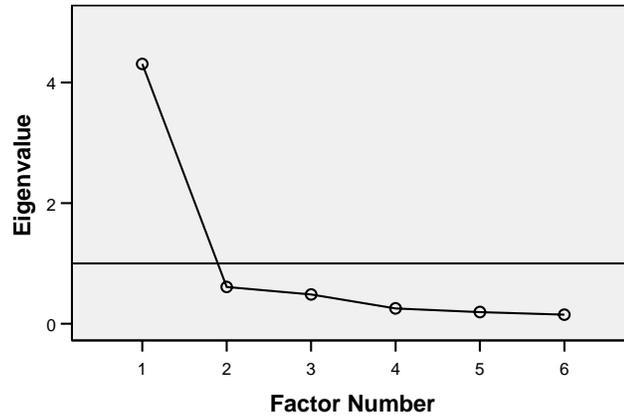


Figure 2. Eigenvalue plot for Scree test for source goodwill

A *t*-test of the mean scores for the low source goodwill condition vs. the high source goodwill condition showed a significant difference ( $M_{\text{low goodwill}} = -.34$ ,  $M_{\text{high goodwill}} = .31$ ,  $t = -5.18$ ,  $df = 319$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In general, subjects who read a Weblog message from the high source goodwill had a more positive attitude toward the source.

### Reliability Check for Dependent Variables

#### Attitude toward the Message

To check reliability (internal consistency) of the subjects' attitude toward the message in the Weblog, the five items were factor analyzed using a principal axis factoring extraction method with Varimax rotation. One factor was extracted that accounted for 58.9% of the variance, with an Eigenvalue = 3.34. Table 4 displays the items and factor loadings for the rotated factors. All factor loadings were greater than .66. A Scree test also showed that these items fall into one factor group (Figure 3). Therefore, using these factor scores, an index for attitude toward the message was created. A follow-up reliability check showed that this scale has high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .88).

Table 4. Factor analysis of attitude toward the message

Item	Factor loadings	Cronbach's $\alpha$ if item deleted
trustworthy	.84	.83
reliable	.83	.84
dependable	.79	.84
sincere	.70	.86
honest	.66	.87

Extraction method: Principal axis factoring

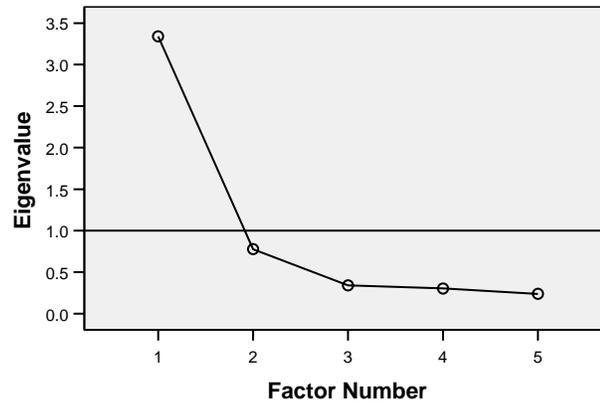


Figure 3. Eigenvalue plot for Scree test for attitude toward the message

### Attitude toward the Issue

To check the internal consistency of the subjects' attitude toward the issue, the four items were factor analyzed using a principal axis factoring extraction method with Varimax rotation. One factor was extracted that accounted for 81.1% of the variance, with an Eigenvalue = 3.43. Table 5 displays the items and factor loadings for the rotated factors. All factor loadings were greater than .88. A Scree test also showed that these items fall into one factor group (Figure 4). Therefore, using these factor scores, an index for attitude toward the issue was created. A follow-up reliability check showed that this scale has high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .95).

Table 5. Factor analysis of attitude toward the issue

Item	Factor loadings	Cronbach's $\alpha$ if item deleted
favorable	.92	.92
good	.92	.92
beneficial	.89	.93
positive	.88	.93

Extraction method: Principal axis factoring

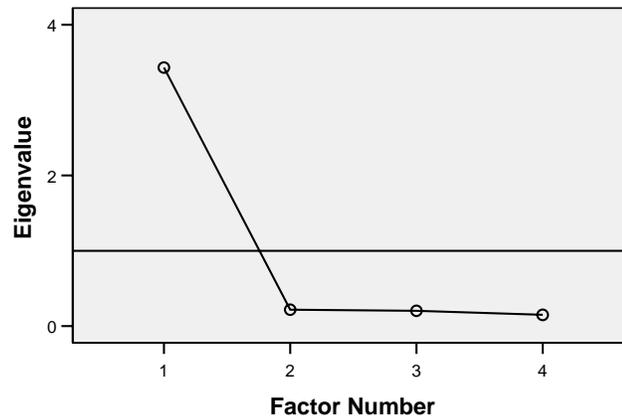


Figure 4. Eigenvalue plot for Scree test for attitude toward the issue

### Attitude toward the Company

To check the internal consistency of the subjects' attitude toward the company, the five items were factor analyzed using a principal axis factoring extraction method with Varimax rotation. One factor was extracted that accounted for 75.2% of the variance, with an Eigenvalue = 4.01. Table 6 displays the items and factor loadings for the rotated factors. All factor loadings were greater than .83. A Scree test also showed that these items fall into one factor group (Figure 5). Therefore, using these factor scores, an index for attitude toward the company was created. A follow-up reliability check showed that this scale has high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .94).

Table 6. Factor analysis of attitude toward the company

Item	Factor loadings	Cronbach's $\alpha$ if item deleted
trustworthy	.92	.91
reliable	.91	.92
dependable	.85	.93
sincere	.83	.93
honest	.83	.93

Extraction method: Principal axis factoring

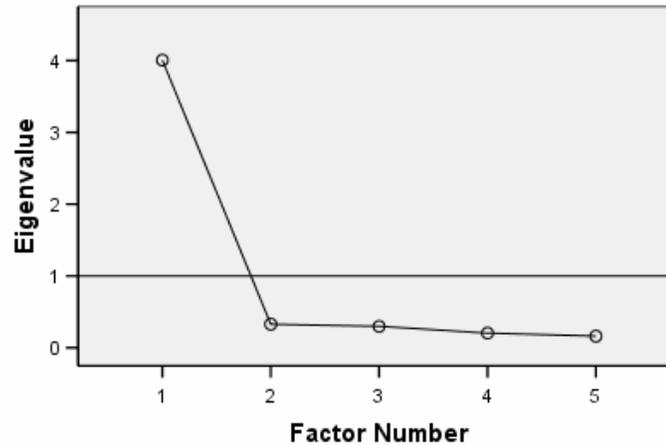


Figure 5. Eigenvalue plot for Scree test for attitude toward the company

## Hypotheses Testing

### Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 posited that there would be a two-way interaction effect between message sidedness and source trustworthiness on the attitudes of the recipients of the message. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to test this hypothesis. Linear combinations of all dependent variables were considered together (Table 7), and the results showed that there was no significant interaction effect between message sidedness and source trustworthiness on the attitudes of the recipients of the message (Wilks' Lambda = .98,  $p > .05$ ). Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

### Hypothesis 1a

Hypothesis 1a posited that the effect of message sidedness on peoples' attitudes will be more distinctive when the endorser (company) is low rather than high in trustworthiness. As shown from the results of MANOVA test (Table 7), there was no interaction effect between message sidedness and source trustworthiness, Hypothesis 1a was also not supported.

### Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 posited that there would be a two-way interaction effect between message sidedness and source goodwill on the attitudes of the recipients of the message. The MANOVA result (Table 7) showed that there was an interaction effect between message sidedness and source goodwill on the attitudes of the recipients of the message (Wilks' Lambda=.95,  $F(6, 620)=2.67, p<.02$ ). The Wilks' Lambda value for interaction effect was .95, meaning that 95 percent of this effect was not explained by the interaction between the message sidedness and source goodwill. Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Table 7. Multivariate tests for message sidedness, source trustworthiness and source goodwill

Effect	Wilks' $\Lambda$	$F$	H $df$	Error $df$	$p$ -value
MS	0.98	1.07	6	620	0.38
Goodwill	0.97	3.79	3	310	0.01
Trust	0.92	9.49	3	310	0.01
MS*Goodwill	0.95	2.67	6	620	0.02
MS*Trust	0.98	0.92	6	620	0.48
Goodwill*Trust	0.99	0.40	3	310	0.75
MS*Goodwill*Trust	0.98	0.91	6	620	0.49

As Wilks' Lambda was significant, each dependent variable was tested. The results of the test of between-subject effects (Table 8) showed that the interaction effect

of message sidedness and goodwill affected recipients' attitude toward the company ( $F=5.73, p<.01$ ), but not towards the message ( $p>.05$ ) nor toward the issue ( $p>.05$ ).

### Hypothesis 2a

Hypothesis 2a posited that the effect of message sidedness on peoples' attitudes will be more distinctive when the endorser is low rather than high in goodwill. There was an interaction effect between message sidedness and source goodwill on the recipients' attitude toward the company only ( $F=5.73, p<.01$ ).

Table 8. Results of between-subjects test

Source	Dependent Variable	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Message sidedness (MS)	Attitude toward message	2	0.42	0.40	0.67
	Attitude toward issue	2	3.83	2.05	0.13
	Attitude toward company	2	0.72	0.61	0.54
Goodwill	Attitude toward message	1	0.64	0.61	0.44
	Attitude toward issue	1	15.89	8.51	0.01
	Attitude toward company	1	8.30	7.08	0.01
Trust	Attitude toward message	1	0.53	0.51	0.48
	Attitude toward issue	1	4.24	2.27	0.13
	Attitude toward company	1	32.21	27.46	0.01
MS*Goodwill	Attitude toward message	2	2.56	2.43	0.09
	Attitude toward issue	2	2.22	1.19	0.31
	Attitude toward company	2	6.73	5.73	0.01
MS*Trust	Attitude toward message	2	0.38	0.36	0.70
	Attitude toward issue	2	2.83	1.51	0.22
	Attitude toward company	2	0.98	0.83	0.44
Goodwill*Trust	Attitude toward message	1	0.01	0.01	0.99
	Attitude toward issue	1	0.32	0.17	0.68
	Attitude toward company	1	0.62	0.53	0.47
MS*Goodwill*Trust	Attitude toward message	2	0.62	0.59	0.56
	Attitude toward issue	2	0.83	0.44	0.64
	Attitude toward company	2	2.15	1.84	0.16

As shown in Table 9, results of a mean difference test showed that a one-sided message from a high goodwill source ( $M=.84$ ,  $SD=.93$ ) was more effective than a one-sided message from a low goodwill source ( $M=.17$ ,  $SD=1.20$ ) on the recipients' attitude toward the company ( $t=-3.24$ ,  $df=106$ ,  $p<.01$ ). A nonrefutational two-sided message from a high goodwill source ( $M=.64$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ) was also more effective than a nonrefutational two-sided message from a low goodwill source ( $M=.09$ ,  $SD=1.17$ ) ( $t=-2.41$ ,  $df=106$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

However, the mean of a refutational two-sided message from a high goodwill source ( $M=.24$ ,  $SD=1.07$ ) was not significantly different from the mean of a refutational two-sided message from a low goodwill source ( $M=.49$ ,  $SD=1.20$ ) ( $t=1.15$ ,  $df=106$ ,  $p>.05$ ). On the contrary, even though statistically not significant, the mean of a refutational two-sided message from a low goodwill source was higher than the mean of a refutational two-sided message from a high goodwill source.

In addition, if a message was from a high goodwill source, a one-sided message ( $M=.84$ ,  $SD=.93$ ) was more effective than a refutational two-sided message ( $M=.24$ ,  $SD=1.07$ ) ( $t=3.12$ ,  $df=106$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Also, in the high source goodwill condition, even though it is statistically marginally significant ( $t=1.82$ ,  $df=106$ ,  $p=.07$ ), a nonrefutational two-sided message ( $M=.64$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ) was more effective than a refutational two-sided message ( $M=.24$ ,  $SD=1.07$ ). However, the mean of a one-sided message and a nonrefutational two-sided message was not significantly different.

On the other hand, if a message was from a low goodwill source, there was no significant mean difference among the different message types in the  $p<.05$  level.

However, there was a marginally significant mean difference between a nonrefutational

two-sided message ( $M=.09$ ,  $SD=1.17$ ) and a refutational two-sided message ( $M=.49$ ,  $SD=1.20$ ) ( $t=-1.76$ ,  $df=106$ ,  $p=.08$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 2a was marginally supported.

Table 9. Means and standard deviations for message sidedness and source goodwill for attitude toward the company

		Message Sidedness					
		One-sided		Two-sided			
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Non-refutational		Refutational	
Source Goodwill		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	<i>High</i>		.84	.93	.64	1.18	.24
<i>Low</i>		.17	1.20	.09	1.17	.49	1.20

Figure 6 shows the interaction effect between message sidedness and source goodwill.

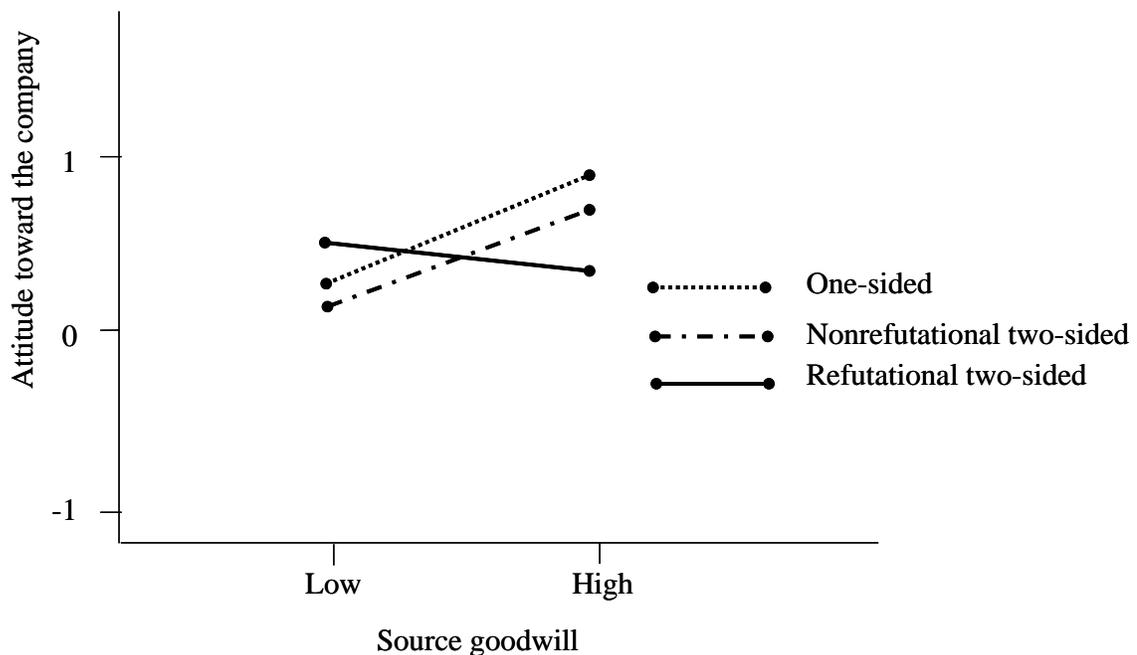


Figure 6. Interaction effect of message sidedness and goodwill on the attitude toward the company

### Research Question 1

This research question asked about a three-way interaction effect among message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and source goodwill on the attitudes of the recipients

of the message. The results of MANOVA (Table 7) showed no three-way interaction effect (Wilks' Lambda=.98,  $p>.05$ ).

### **Research Question 2**

Research question 2 asked that if a refutational two-sided message from an endorser (company) with high source trustworthiness and high source goodwill is the most effective on the attitudes of the recipients of the message, if there is a three-way interaction effect among message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and source goodwill. There was no three-way interaction effect (Wilks' Lambda=.98,  $p>.05$ ).

### **Additional Testing and Findings**

Given that the results of the Hypothesis 1 showed that there was no two-way interaction effect between message sidedness and source trustworthiness, the main effects of message sidedness and source trustworthiness were tested.

### **Main Effect of Message Sidedness**

All dependent variables were considered together. A MANOVA result (Table 7) showed that there was no main effect of message sidedness on the attitudes of the recipients of the message (Wilks' Lambda=.98,  $p>.05$ ).

### **Main Effect of Source Trustworthiness**

A MANOVA result (Table 7) showed that there was a main effect of source trustworthiness on the attitudes of the recipients of the message (Wilks' Lambda=.92,  $F(3,310)=9.49$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The Wilks' Lambda value for the main effect was .92, meaning that 92 percent of this effect was not explained by the main effect of source trustworthiness.

As Wilks' Lambda was significant, each dependent variable was tested. The results of multivariate test showed that there was a main effect of source trustworthiness on the recipients' attitude toward the company ( $F=32.21, p<.01$ ), but not towards the message ( $p>.05$ ) nor toward the issue ( $p>.05$ ).

As shown in Table 10, results of a mean difference test showed that, overall, a message from a source with high trustworthiness ( $M=.73, SD=.92$ ) was more effective than a message from a source with low trustworthiness ( $M=.10, SD=1.27$ ) ( $t=-5.12, df=322, p<.01$ ). More specifically, a nonrefutational two-sided message from a high trustworthiness source ( $M=.79, SD=.92$ ) was more effective than a nonrefutational two-sided message from a low trustworthiness source ( $M=-.06, SD=1.30$ ) ( $t=-3.91, df=106, p<.01$ ). A one-sided message from a high trustworthiness source ( $M=.75, SD=.95$ ) was more effective than a one-sided message from a low trustworthiness source ( $M=.26, SD=1.22$ ) ( $t=-2.35, df=106, p<.05$ ). Also, a refutational two-sided message from a high trustworthiness source ( $M=.64, SD=.90$ ) was more effective than a refutational two-sided message from a low trustworthiness source ( $M=.09, SD=1.29$ ) ( $t=-2.57, df=106, p<.05$ ). However, results of the post hoc tests showed that there were no significant mean differences among a one-sided message, a nonrefutational two-sided message and a refutational two-sided message ( $p>.05$ ), in both high and low source trustworthiness conditions.

Finally, as there was no three-way interaction effect among message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and source goodwill, two-way interaction effects were tested. As shown from Table 7, there was a two-way interaction effect between message sidedness and source goodwill (tested with Hypothesis 2). However, there was no two-way

interaction effect of message sidedness and source trustworthiness (tested with Hypothesis 1). Also, there was no two-way interaction effect between source trustworthiness and source goodwill (Wilks' Lambda =.99,  $p>.05$ ).

Table 10. Means and standard deviations for message sidedness and source trustworthiness toward the company

		Message Sidedness					
		One-sided		Two-sided			
				Non-refutational		Refutational	
Source Trustworthiness		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>High</i>	<i>High</i>	.75	.95	.79	.92	.64	.90
	<i>Low</i>	.26	1.22	-.06	1.30	.09	1.29

Figure 7 shows the main effect between message sidedness and source trustworthiness.

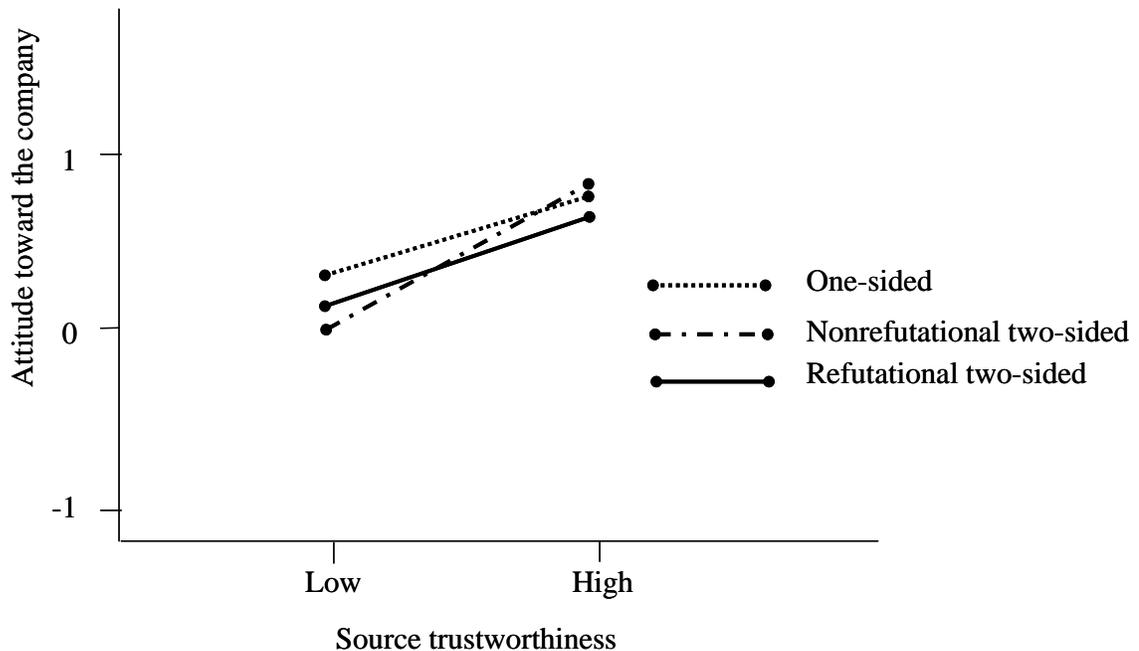


Figure 7. Main effect of source trustworthiness on the attitude toward the company

## Weblog as a New Public Relations Tool

This study used a Weblog as an experimental tool for communicating a public relations message instead of traditional public relations tools such as press releases, white papers, newsletters, or pitch letters. A Weblog is “a publicly accessible personal journal for an individual. Similar to a personal diary, but shared over the web” (5 Star Support, 2006). Here, a Weblog was used since they are being employed by more and more corporations as a public relations tool targeting Netizens.<sup>6</sup> Even though it has become a topic of debate whether using a Weblog as a public relations tool is ethical or not (Barbaro, 2006), reflecting the characteristics of cyber communication<sup>7</sup> and the increasing number of Internet users,<sup>8</sup> Weblogs are gaining popularity as an effective alternative public relations tool. This illustrates the importance of Weblogs in public relations research as well as practice.

A major reason of using a Weblog as a new alternative public relations tool for corporations is because by using a Weblog they can secure more objectivity than when using traditional public relations tools. For instance, a press release has limited potential for using message sidedness as it is expected to include only positive aspects or

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<sup>6</sup> This terminology was firstly used in 1992, by Michael F. Hauben (Hauben, 2004). In his article, “The Net and Netizens: *The Impact the Net Has on People’s Lives*,” Hauben foresaw the future of cyberspace as “Welcome to the 21st Century. You are a Netizen (a Net Citizen), and you exist as a citizen of the world thanks to the global connectivity that the Net makes possible. You consider everyone as your compatriot. You physically live in one country but you are in contact with much of the world via the global computer network. Virtually, you live next door to every other single Netizen in the world. Geographical separation is replaced by existence in the same virtual space.” (Hauben, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Morris (1996) grouped the characteristics of cyber-communication into four categories: a) one-to-one asynchronous communication, such as e-mail, b) many-to-many asynchronous communication, such as Usenet and electronic bulletin board, c) synchronous communication that includes one-to-one, one-to-few or one-to-many such as MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons) and chat room, and d) asynchronous communication such as websites and FTP sites (Morris, 1996, pp. 42-43).

<sup>8</sup> The number of internet users in the United States was over 2 million as of January 2006, accounting for 68.6% of the whole population. The number of global internet users was over 1 billion as of the end of 2005 (Internet World Stats, 2006).

advantages of an issue in favor of a company. Even though message sidedness might be used in a press release, the biggest drawback of using message sidedness in a press release lies in its 'unnaturalness.' On the other hand, a Weblog has the characteristics of a personal journal, and is regarded as more objective, allowing the use of message sidedness to seem more natural, and therefore, more positive message sidedness effects are expected. In addition, while traditional public relations tools are heavily dependent on mass media, Weblogs enable corporations to access their target publics directly without any constraints in time and space.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the results of the experiment presented in Chapter 4. The chapter begins with a summary of findings, followed by a detailed analysis of conclusions related to the hypotheses and research questions. Next, a discussion of the implications for public relations theory, practice, and pedagogy is provided, followed by limitations of this research. Finally, the chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

### **Summary of Findings**

This study examined the effect of message sidedness in public relations messages and its interaction effect with source credibility, in particular, with source trustworthiness and source goodwill, on the message recipients' attitude toward the message, the public relations issue, and toward the company. Specifically, this study attempted to use a new public relations message tool, Weblogs, to situate this communication paradigm in the Internet era.

Results indicate that there was no three-way interaction effect among message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and source goodwill. There was a main effect of source trustworthiness and a two-way interaction effect between message sidedness and source goodwill on the recipients' attitude toward the company.

Overall, a message from a source with high trustworthiness was more effective than a message from a source with low trustworthiness on the recipients' attitude toward

the company regardless of the message sidedness. There were no significant mean differences among a one-sided message, a nonrefutational two-sided message and a refutational two-sided message, in both high and low source trustworthiness conditions.

On the other hand, if a message was from a high goodwill source, a one-sided message was more effective than a refutational two-sided message. Likewise, a nonrefutational two-sided message from a high goodwill source was more effective than a nonrefutational two-sided message from a low goodwill source. However, the mean of a refutational two-sided message from a high goodwill source was not significantly different from the mean of a refutational two-sided message from a low goodwill source.

### **Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 1a**

Hypothesis 1 posited that there would be a two-way interaction effect between message sidedness and source trustworthiness on the attitude of the recipients of the message. Also, based on an assumption that there would be a two-way interaction effect, Hypothesis 1a posited that the effect of message sidedness on peoples' attitudes will be more distinctive when the endorser (company) is low rather than high in trustworthiness. However, there was no such two-way interaction effect. Neither Hypothesis 1 nor Hypothesis 1a was supported. Instead, there was a main effect of source trustworthiness on the recipients' attitude toward the company.

### **Main Effect of Source Trustworthiness**

Even though the interaction effect in Hypothesis 1 was not supported, the results showed consistent findings with some of the existing research on source trustworthiness. For example, Priester and Petty (2003) reported that there was a main effect of endorser trustworthiness from their series of experiments, which tested the interaction effects

between endorser trustworthiness and argument quality. They reported that participants in their experiments had more favorable attitudes toward the product which was endorsed by a high trustworthiness source than that of a low trustworthiness source. In this study, subjects who were disclosed to a high trustworthiness source condition had a more favorable attitude toward the company than subjects disclosed to a low trustworthiness source condition.

### **Implication for Public Relations Theory**

Existing research on public relations reported that perceptions of public relations and its practitioners were skewed toward the negative (Newsom et al., 1993; Callison, 2001). Callison (2001) argued that these perceptions are based on people's association of public relations with reporting bias (Eagly et al., 1978) in favor of clients. This explains why corporations employ a credible endorser who can add credibility to their public relations messages. However, unlike an advertising message for which the role of the message endorser is critical for the successful selling of the products or services, public relations messages are dealing with issues on which the perception of the company is more directly affected, and therefore, instead of employing an external message endorser or model, CEOs or internal public relations specialists deliver the message for or on behalf of their companies.

This study focused on this issue, too. But instead of focusing on manipulating the endorser trustworthiness as an individual, it manipulated the trustworthiness of the company itself as a message source. This was based on an assumption that a company as a message source is more important than an individual message endorser who speaks about a public relations issue, and therefore, the effect of using a credible endorser would

not be as critical as it is in an advertising message. Also, because the purpose of public relations message is not to bend the truth unethically for the benefit of the clients or the company, if the company is perceived as untrustworthy, the message from a CEO or a public relations person would be also perceived as untrustworthy.

The results showed that the trustworthiness of a company is an important factor that affects the attitudes of the recipients of the message toward the company. The more the company is perceived as being trustworthy, the more effective the public relations message. This confirms findings for other research on source trustworthiness, as well as providing intriguing theoretical implications. For example, Priester and Petty (2003) reported that source trustworthiness has a main effect as well as an interaction effect with argument quality. They argued that while the use of a trustworthy source is more effective in general, in some situations, a strong argument from a low trustworthiness source is almost or equally effective to a strong argument from a high trustworthiness source.

This study suggests a possible combination of message sidedness and argument quality. For instance, a one-sided message may be developed using either a strong argument or a weak argument. Likewise, a refutational two-sided message may be developed using either a strong argument or a mild argument. It would be plausible to expect that the effect of argument quality interacted with message sidedness would be different by source trustworthiness. If only a main effect is considered, it could be predicted that a one-sided message with a strong argument would be more effective than a refutational two-sided message with a weak argument regardless of source trustworthiness. On the other hand, if an interaction effect is considered, a one-sided

message with a strong argument from a low trustworthiness source may be more effective than a refutational two-sided message with a weak argument from a high trustworthiness source. These inferences are yet to be tested in future research.

Also, for a refutational two-sided message and a non-refutational two-sided message, according to optimal arousal theory (Berlyne, 1971; Crowley & Hoyer, 1994), a two-sided message that contains a moderate level of refutational message is more effective than a one-sided or a two-sided message that contains a refutational message that is too strong or too weak. However, in the experiments of Priester and Petty (2003), this aspect was not considered as subjects were exposed to only high and low argument conditions. Further research should look for the effect of argument quality (strong, moderate and weak conditions) and its interaction with message sidedness (one-sided, nonrefutational two-sided and refutational two-sided) under different source trustworthiness conditions (high and low).

### **Implication for Public Relations Practice**

In this study, the results of the experiment showed that a message from a high trustworthiness source was more effective than a message from a low trustworthiness source regardless of the message sidedness. These findings provide meaningful practical implications for public relations practitioners in developing a public relations message.

#### **For a company with high trustworthiness**

Priester and Petty (2003) argued that information presented by trustworthy endorsers is likely to be non-thoughtfully accepted. Therefore, it is likely that regardless of the message sidedness, recipients of a message from a high trustworthiness source will

have more positive attitude toward the source (company) than a message from a low trustworthiness source.

Therefore, if a company is perceived as a highly trusted message source by its target publics, this company may use both a one-sided message and a two-sided message depending on the situation and purpose. For instance, if the company is dealing with a controversial issue, it is better for the company to use a nonrefutational two-sided message, i.e., describes advantages or positive points of the issue to the target publics as well as disadvantages or negative aspects of the issue without refuting or countering them. A voluntary disclosure of negative aspects will result in the breaking of the reporting bias (Eagly et al., 1978), and therefore, the company may be seen as more objective and candid.

On the other hand, if this company uses a one-sided message, depending on situations, it would be equally effective to using a non-refutational two-sided message. Because the company is regarded as trustworthy by the target publics, they may not see any negative aspects to the public relations issue as long as the company does not raise those negative points. If this is the case, the company should simply let “sleeping dogs lie” and not begin raising and refuting those negative issues voluntarily. The company should leverage its positive image as a trustworthy source by not voluntarily bring up attention to negative aspects of a public relations issue.

However, it is not always possible to speak of only positive aspects in a public relations message. In particular, in a crisis situation or when undertaking issue communications, the company should be able to cope with expected or unexpected negative aspects of public relations issues effectively. For example, if a company trusted

by its publics in general is involved with a controversial issue, such as the construction of a nuclear power station in a community, it is not practical for the company to provide only a one-sided supporting message. In this case, it is recommended that the company develop a refutational two-sided message to cope with these issues.

One caveat for using message sidedness in public relation messages is to deliberately control the amount of positive and negative information about the issue. Like comparative advertising, as suggested in the optimal arousal theory, the amount of positive aspects should be slightly more than negative aspects. In other words, the tone of argument in favor of positive aspects should be slightly stronger than the tone of negative argument to the extents that the message recipients would perceive the message as trustworthy and have positive attitude toward the company. For instance, in comparative advertising, though it is consumers who judge and decide whether they would buy the products or the services shown in the advertisement, the advertising message is developed to induce these consumers who are exposed to the advertisement to think or feel that they can have a positive attitude toward the products or the services naturally, using either the central route or the peripheral route depending on their degree of elaboration and involvement (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981).

#### **For a company with low trustworthiness**

In general, if a company is not perceived as a trusted company by its target publics, there are limitations in using message sidedness to develop a public relations message. Because the company is already perceived as an untrustworthy information source among the target publics, even though the company voluntarily refutes negative aspects of the issue, the target publics' skeptical attitude toward the company might not

be affected by the message sidedness as intended. Instead, they may pick up on these negative aspects more than they normally would.

In spite of this fundamental limitation in composing a public relations message, the effect of argument quality could still be considered. As Priester and Petty (2003) reported, a strong argument from a low trustworthiness endorser was almost or equally effective to a strong argument from a high trustworthiness endorser, as it may lead to more elaborated attitudes. Therefore, it would be plausible to argue that a message with a strong argument may be more effective than a message with a weak argument for a company with low trustworthiness.

Also, like a company with high trustworthiness, there are situations that require a company to use a two-sided message strategy. If there is such a situation for a company with low trustworthiness, a refutational two-sided message with a strong argument may be used. As the target publics will be skeptical about this company, they may pay less attention to the message, if it does not contain a clear, strong argument in favor of the company.

Most of all, it should be noted that if a company is perceived as untrustworthy by its target publics, the company is limited in developing a public relations message. In other words, it is more important for a company to build trust and a positive image among the target publics before it disseminates a public relations message on a specific issue, in particular, on a controversial issue. Moreover, it should be noted that trustworthiness and reputation are not acquired in the short-term because they are the results of persistent long-term public relations activities.

## Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 2a

Hypothesis 2 posited that there would be a two-way interaction effect between message sidedness and source goodwill on the attitudes of the recipients of the message. Also, based on an assumption that there would be a two-way interaction effect, Hypothesis 2a posited that the effect of message sidedness on peoples' attitudes will be more distinctive when the endorser (company) is low rather than high in goodwill. The results showed that there is a two-way interaction effect between message sidedness and source goodwill on the recipients' attitude toward the company.<sup>1</sup>

### Interaction Effect of Message Sidedness and Source Goodwill

The interaction effect showed that the mean of a refutational two-sided message from a high goodwill source was not significantly different from a low goodwill source.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, a one-sided message and a nonrefutational two-sided message from a high goodwill source were more effective than a one-sided message and a nonrefutational two-sided message from a low goodwill source. Also, for the high goodwill source condition, a one-sided message was more effective than a refutational two-sided message. For the low goodwill source condition, even though it was statistically insignificant, a refutational two-sided message was more effective than a non-refutational two-sided message ( $t=-1.76$ ,  $df=106$ ,  $p=.08$ ).

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<sup>1</sup> Also, there was a main effect of source goodwill on the recipients' attitude toward the issue ( $F(3, 310)=6.33$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and the company ( $F(3, 310)=7.08$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Participants had more favorable attitude toward the issue when the message was from a high goodwill source ( $M=.78$ ) than when it was from a low goodwill source ( $M=.45$ ). Also, they had more favorable attitude toward the company when the message was from a high goodwill source ( $M=.57$ ) than when it was from a low goodwill source ( $M=.25$ )

<sup>2</sup> Even though statistically insignificant ( $p=.25$ ), the mean of a refutational two-sided message from a low goodwill source ( $M=.49$ ,  $SD=1.20$ ) was higher than the mean of a refutational two-sided message from a high goodwill source ( $M=.24$ ,  $SD=1.07$ ).

These findings highlight important and intriguing implications for public relations theory and practice as well as for public relations pedagogy.

### **Implication for Public Relations Theory**

To date, an abundance of research on source credibility has reported that information provided by a high credibility source is more effective than information provided by a low credibility source in increasing positive attitude change and behavioral intentions (Petty & Wegener, 1998; Cotlieb & Sarel, 1991; Homer & Kahle, 1990; Ward & McGinnies, 1974; Woodside & Davenport, 1974). In particular, McCroskey and Teven (1999) argued that, among the major constructs of source credibility, source goodwill is equal to or more important than other constructs of source credibility, such as source expertise and source trustworthiness.

In this experiment, it was shown that source goodwill interacted with message sidedness to affect the attitude of the message recipients. To date, there has been a plethora of independent research examining either source trustworthiness or message sidedness. However, there were few studies that identify the interaction effect between source goodwill and message sidedness, especially in the context of a public relations message.

The reason why source goodwill is important in public relations research is that it affects the impact of a public relations message. As one of the most important constructs of source credibility, the more a company is perceived as having high goodwill toward the community or toward target publics, the more effective the public relations messages of that company will be. As McCroskey and Teven (1999) argued, goodwill is not a matter of cognition, but a matter of understanding, empathy, and responsiveness.

Whereas trustworthiness is more about cognition, goodwill is more about affection. Source goodwill is also a matter of attractiveness (Yoon et al., 1998). For example, when college students like their college's football team, they do so mostly not because the football team plays well, but because they feel homogeneity, i.e., they feel that they are on the same side as the team. Likewise, when a company is perceived as having goodwill toward a community, people living in that community will be more positive and generous to the company, and it will result in better communication results. Even in crisis situations, people will be more forgiving and sympathetic to the company. This supports the reason why corporations are actively involved in public relations activities such as corporate social responsibility activities and reputation management, because the company is hoping that it will enhance the perceived goodwill of the company, i.e., to position themselves as a responsible corporate citizen.

Also, there was an interaction effect between source goodwill and message sidedness. This implies that even though goodwill is an important variable for the success of a public relations message, it can achieve better results if leveraged with message sidedness. In principle, the company should identify whether it is perceived as having high goodwill or not, and according to the status and depending on the situation, it should decide whether it will use a one-sided message, a nonrefutational two-sided message, or a refutational two-sided message.

In addition, goodwill provides criteria for the evaluation of public relations messages, as well as providing a theoretical base for undertaking public relations programs, specifically, corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, reputation management, and issues and crisis communications. One of the alleged weaknesses of

public relations messages as well as public relations programs is that it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of these public relations messages or the results of the programs. This study showed that the more a company is perceived as having goodwill toward the community or the society to which it belongs, the more effective the public relations message from this company on public relations issues.

### **Implication for Public Relations Practice**

#### **For a company with high goodwill**

If a company is perceived by its target publics as having high goodwill toward the community to which it belongs, it would be most effective to use a one-sided supporting public relations message. As there already exists a friendly perception of the company among target publics, it may not be a good idea to provide them with negative information on a controversial issue, which may cause unnecessary argument about the issue. In other words, this company should make use of its advantageous perception as a high goodwill information source.

However, in public relations practice, there are situations that require a company to use a two-sided message to argue over a controversial issue or to justify the company's position. The representative cases are issues communications and crisis communications. Even in these situations, it is recommended that the company use a non-refutational two-sided message rather than a refutational two-sided message to make use of its positive image as a company which has goodwill toward the target publics.<sup>3</sup> When developing a nonrefutational two-sided message, based on optimal arousal theory, the amount of

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<sup>3</sup> Even though it is statistically marginally significant ( $t=1.82$ ,  $df=106$ ,  $p=.07$ ), in the high source goodwill condition, the mean of a nonrefutational two-sided message ( $M=.64$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ) was higher than the mean of a refutational two-sided message ( $M=.24$ ,  $SD=1.07$ ).

positive message aspects should be slightly more than negative message aspects. Again, the tone of the supporting argument should be slightly stronger than that of the opposing argument.

Employment of a refutational two-sided message should be the last choice unless this kind of argument is not raised by other parties, such as NGOs, activist groups, competitors, or other critical stakeholders.

### **For a company with low goodwill**

On the other hand, for a company perceived as having low goodwill toward the community to which it belongs, a refutational two-sided message should be employed. Because the perception of the company among target publics is not friendly, if this company uses a non-refutational two-sided message, the target publics may not receive it as positively as they may receive it from a high goodwill source. Also, if this company uses only a one-sided message, target publics may look at the issue from a rather negative point of view as their perception of this company is negatively skewed, and this company may look less objective.

Theoretically, if the target publics were exposed to a one-sided message, there will not be any breaking of reporting bias, i.e., the target publics may expect that the company would only speak of positive aspects of the issue, and consequently, they may not accept the message as it is because of the lack of perceived objectivity. On the other hand, if the company provides a refutational two-sided message, as explained by the discounting hypothesis (Allen, 1991; Allen & Reynolds, 1989; Allen & Stiff, 1989; Smith, 1984), it violates the expectation of the target publics that the company would

only speak of positive aspects of the issue, and consequently, the company would be perceived as more honest, fair-minded, and expert by the public.

Therefore, by employing a refutational two-sided message, a company with low goodwill will be able to gain more attention from the target public, because they will elaborate the message more thoughtfully (Priester & Petty, 2003), and there will be more opportunities for them to change the target publics' attitude from negative to positive, or to form a positive attitude toward the company.

Finally, for a low goodwill company to use a refutational two-sided message, one precondition should be satisfied, i.e., the company should be confident that its position is right. That is, its position should have more objective persuasiveness or more positive aspects than negative aspects so that when the message is elaborated on by the recipients, they would agree with the message or change their attitude from negative to positive. As Priester and Petty (2003) argued, this message strategy would be advantageous only "if the thoughts that arise in response to the information are positive" (p. 419).

### **Additional Implications**

#### **Implication for Public Relations Pedagogy**

Message sidedness has been investigated thoroughly in advertising and marketing research, but not in public relations research. As reported in the existing research, results of the message sidedness effect varied depending on situations and variables used (Cowley & Hoyer, 1994; Lang et al., 1999). O'Keefe (1999) argued that in general, a refutational two-sided message is more effective than a one-sided message.

However, in this study, it was shown that there was no such message sidedness effect when source trustworthiness was considered. Regardless of the type of message

sidedness, a message from a source with high trustworthiness was more effective than a message from a source with low trustworthiness. On the other hand, there was a message sidedness effect when source goodwill was considered. For instance, if a message was from a source with high goodwill, a one-sided message was more effective than a refutational two-sided message. In the low goodwill condition, a refutational two-sided message was more effective than a nonrefutational two-sided message, and equally or even more effective than a refutational two-sided message from a company with high goodwill.

These findings should be taken into consideration for public relations pedagogy. There was no consistent support for any specific type of message sidedness. Instead, a company should be able to carefully develop a public relations message depending on its perceived trustworthiness and goodwill. Also, public relations scholars should be able to figure out the relevant situations in which what type of message sidedness works better than other type of message sidedness. These message sidedness strategies should be more thoroughly researched and elaborated on so that students and public relations practitioners can benefit from these findings.

### **No Main Effect of Trustworthiness and Goodwill on Attitude toward the Issue or the Message**

There may be other confounding variables that were not considered in this study. For example, involvement might have worked as an artifact. Each of the subjects might have different prior attitudes toward environment protection or economic issues, as well as acquiring job opportunities.

Also, there may be a causal relationship among the dependent variables. It seems that attitude toward the company was a dependent variable that was affected by independent variables most directly as shown in the results. In other word, attitude toward the company may work as an endogenous variable that affects attitude either attitude toward the message or the issue.

Also, the stimuli might work as unintended way. The public relations tool manipulated in this study was a Weblog, which was operated by an individual who was perceived as having a certain degree of trustworthiness and goodwill. Therefore, even though source trustworthiness and source goodwill were manipulated with high and low conditions in the Weblog, it seems that it did not affect the recipients' attitude toward the Weblog message.

### **Additional Variables**

This research posited three dependent variables: recipients' attitude toward the message, the issue, and the company. As shown in Chapter 4, there was a main effect of source trustworthiness and an interaction effect of source goodwill and message sidedness on the recipients' attitude toward the company. However, there was no such effect on the recipients' attitude toward the issue and toward the message.

A possible interpretation is that there may be external or moderating variables that affected the recipients' attitude toward the issue such as involvement conditions and recipients' prior attitude toward the issue.

Therefore, even though it was not hypothesized, involvement and prior attitude were considered as covariates, and a MANCOVA was used to test if these covariates changed the interpretation of the effects of the manipulated independent variables on the

recipients' attitude toward the issue and the message. Next, involvement was included as factor, and its main and interaction effects with other independent variables were examined.

### **Involvement and Prior Attitude as Covariate**

#### **Involvement**

Involvement has traditionally been an important moderating variable that affects persuasion. Both message sidedness and source credibility are thought to be moderated by the degree of involvement (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). Haley (1996) and Yoon et al. (1998) argued that the effects of source credibility are moderated by receiver characteristics such as involvement and initial attitude. Johnson and Scileppi (1969) also maintained that people with high involvement with the issue are less influenced by source credibility.

In particular, in public relations research, involvement has been perceived as a critical variable that plays a pivotal role in segmenting publics (Grunig, 1978, 1984, 1987; Hallahan, 2000, 2001) and their reactions to public policy issues (Heath & Douglas, 1990, 1991). Grunig (1989) defined involvement as "the extent to which people connect themselves with a situation" (p. 5), and used involvement to discern active publics and passive publics. He argued that people become active publics if their involvement increases because they realize that their personal interest is dependent on the resolution of an issue or an event. Heath and Douglas (1991) also maintained that "involvement is an important concept for public relations practitioners and scholars, because it can be used to predict persons' willingness to receive a message as well as the likelihood that existing message content will be used to assess each new message" (p. 179).

In this study, to evaluate how involvement interacted with other independent variables, involvement scales slightly modified from the scales used by Martin et al. (2003) was employed.<sup>4</sup> Participants were asked three questions designed to assess their degree of involvement with the issue. Three bipolar, 7-point rating scales were used, ranging from -3 (unimportant, irrelevant, and not needed) to +3 (important, relevant, and needed). To check the dimensionality of involvement, the three items were factor analyzed using a principal axis extraction method with Varimax rotation. One factor was extracted that accounted for 60.1% of the variance, with an Eigen value = 2.19. All factor loadings were greater than .66. Therefore, using the factor score regression approach, an involvement index was created. A follow-up reliability check showed that this scale has high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .81).

### **Prior attitude**

To evaluate how the subject's attitude to large convenience stores might mediate the subject's responses to Carrefour, the recipients' attitude toward Wal-Mart was considered. It was assumed that if the respondents had a strongly negative or positive attitude toward Wal-Mart, it could relate to their response to these messages because, in general, Wal-Mart is a competitor with many similarities to Carrefour.

The attitude and trustworthiness scales used by Trifts and Haubl (2003) were employed. Participants were asked five questions designed to assess their attitude toward Wal-Mart. Five bipolar, 7-point rating scales were used, ranging from -3 (undependable,

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<sup>4</sup> The original scales used a 4-item semantic differential employing 7-point scale ranging from +1 (unimportant, irrelevant to me, means nothing to me, and not needed) to +7 (important, relevant to me, means a lot to me, and needed). The "means nothing to me/means a lot to me" item was not included in this study.

dishonest, unreliable, insincere, and untrustworthy) to +3 (dependable, honest, reliable, sincere, and trustworthy).

To check the dimensionality of prior attitude, the five items were factor analyzed using a principal axis extraction method with Varimax rotation. One factor was extracted that accounted for 67.6% of the variance, with an Eigenvalue = 3.70. All factor loadings were greater than .76. Therefore, using the factor score regression approach, a prior attitude index was created. A follow-up reliability check showed that this scale has high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .91).

### **MANCOVA results**

As involvement and prior attitude scales have high internal consistency, a MANCOVA was used controlling these variables as covariates. As shown in Table 11, the results showed that there was a main effect of source trustworthiness (Wilks' Lambda = .91,  $F(3, 305) = 10.09, p < .01$ ) and interaction effect of source goodwill and message sidedness (Wilks' Lambda = .95,  $F(6, 610) = 2.87, p < .05$ ). However, there was no significant change from the results that did not consider these covariates in the earlier part of this dissertation. Even though there were significant main effects of involvement and prior attitude, the results remain the same, showing that covariates were effectively controlled by the random assignment process.

Table 11. Multivariate tests for message sidedness, source trustworthiness, source goodwill controlling for involvement and prior attitude

Effect	Wilks' $\Lambda$	$F$	H $df$	Error $df$	$p$ -value
Involvement	.26	297.51	3	305	.01
Prior attitude	.97	2.95	3	305	.03
MS	.99	.67	6	610	.68
Goodwill	.96	4.14	3	305	.01
Trust	.91	10.09	3	305	.01
MS*Goodwill	.95	2.87	6	610	.03
MS*Trust	.98	1.08	6	610	.37
Goodwill*Trust	.99	.83	3	305	.48
MS*Goodwill*Trust	.98	.85	6	610	.54

For variables with significant Wilks' Lambda values, each dependent variable was tested. Again, the results of the test of between-subject effects (Table 12) showed a similar result to the between-subject test that did not consider involvement and prior attitude. There was a main effect of source trustworthiness ( $F=30.05$ ,  $p<.01$ ), and an interaction effect of message sidedness and source goodwill ( $F=5.63$ ,  $p<.01$ ), on the recipients' attitude toward the company. However, there was no main effect of source trustworthiness or interaction effect of message sidedness and source goodwill.

Also, the MANCOVA results showed that even though there were main effects of involvement and prior attitude, the results did not significantly change, demonstrating that these covariates were successfully controlled in the experiment.

Table 12. Results of between-subjects test controlling for involvement and prior attitude

Source	Dependent Variable	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Involvement	Attitude toward message	1	24.63	25.82	.01
	Attitude toward issue	1	308.86	868.96	.01
	Attitude toward company	1	35.42	34.56	.01
Prior attitude	Attitude toward message	1	5.53	5.80	.02
	Attitude toward issue	1	1.51	4.26	.04
	Attitude toward company	1	3.74	3.65	.06
Message sidedness (MS)	Attitude toward message	2	.41	.43	.65
	Attitude toward issue	2	.30	.84	.43
	Attitude toward company	2	.36	.35	.70
Goodwill	Attitude toward message	1	.53	.56	.46
	Attitude toward issue	1	3.06	8.61	.01
	Attitude toward company	1	7.61	7.42	.01
Trust	Attitude toward message	1	.32	.33	.56
	Attitude toward issue	1	.61	1.72	.19
	Attitude toward company	1	30.808	30.054	.01
MS*Goodwill	Attitude toward message	2	1.51	1.58	.21
	Attitude toward issue	2	.43	1.20	.30
	Attitude toward company	2	5.78	5.63	.01
MS*Trust	Attitude toward message	2	.19	.20	.82
	Attitude toward issue	2	.62	1.74	.18
	Attitude toward company	2	1.63	1.60	.21
Goodwill*Trust	Attitude toward message	1	.35	.36	.55
	Attitude toward issue	1	.27	.75	.39
	Attitude toward company	1	2.34	2.28	.13
MS*Goodwill*Trust	Attitude toward message	2	.69	.72	.49
	Attitude toward issue	2	.03	.07	.93
	Attitude toward company	2	1.52	1.48	.23

### Involvement as an Independent Variable

Another MANOVA test was conducted to test for a main effect or interaction effect of involvement as a factor (rather than a covariate) with message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and source goodwill. For this, the involvement scale was recoded into a

high and a low group with a mean = 0 split for the factor index. As shown in Table 13, the results of the multivariate tests showed that there was an overall main effect for source goodwill (Wilks' Lambda = .97,  $F(3, 298) = 3.46$ ,  $p < .05$ ), source trustworthiness (Wilks' Lambda = .92,  $F(3, 298) = 8.61$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and involvement (Wilks' Lambda = .77,  $F(3, 298) = 30.48$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Also, there was a marginally significant three-way interaction effect among message sidedness, source trustworthiness and involvement (Wilks' Lambda = .96,  $F(6, 596) = 1.89$ ,  $p = .08$ ), and among goodwill, trustworthiness, and involvement (Wilks' Lambda = .98,  $F(3, 298) = 2.09$ ,  $p = .10$ ) while in the earlier analysis, there was only an interaction effect of message sidedness and source goodwill which contains to be maintained in this analysis (Wilks' Lambda = .96,  $F(6, 596) = 1.90$ ,  $p = .08$ ).

Table 13. Multivariate tests for message sidedness, source trustworthiness, source goodwill, and involvement

Effect	Wilks' $\Lambda$	$F$	H $df$	Error $df$	$p$ -value
MS	.98	.92	6	598	.48
Goodwill	.97	3.46	3	298	.02
Trust	.92	8.61	3	298	.01
Involvement	.77	30.48	3	298	.01
MS*Goodwill	.96	1.90	6	596	.08
MS*Trust	.97	1.29	6	596	.26
Goodwill*Trust	.99	.42	3	298	.74
MS*Goodwill*Trust	.99	.57	6	596	.75
MS*Involvement	.97	1.37	6	596	.23
Goodwill*Involvement	.99	.67	3	298	.57
MS*Goodwill*Involvement	.99	.18	6	596	.98
Trust*Involvement	.98	2.42	3	298	.07
MS*Trust*Involvement	.96	1.89	6	596	.08
Goodwill*Trust*Involvement	.98	2.09	3	298	.10
MS*Goodwill*Trust*Involvement	.98	1.12	6	596	.35

For the new interactions with significant Wilks' Lambda values, each dependent variable was tested. The results of the test of between-subject effects (Table 14) showed a similar result with a previous between-subject test that did not consider involvement. There was a main effect of source trustworthiness ( $F=24.08, p<.01$ ), source goodwill ( $F=6.08, p<.05$ ) and involvement ( $F=10.29, p<.01$ ) and an interaction effect for message-sidedness and goodwill ( $F=4.05, p<.02$ ) on the recipients' attitude toward the company.

For the marginally significant Wilks' Lambda values, the individual between-subject test results showed two three-way interactions: (a) among message sidedness,

Table 14. Results of between-subjects test including involvement<sup>5</sup>

Source	Dependent Variable	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Goodwill	Attitude toward message	1	.03	.03	.87
	Attitude toward issue	1	10.41	7.15	.01
	Attitude toward company	1	6.95	6.08	.01
Trust	Attitude toward message	1	.039	.04	.84
	Attitude toward issue	1	1.92	1.32	.25
	Attitude toward company	1	27.52	24.08	.01
Involvement	Attitude toward message	1	23.04	23.71	.01
	Attitude toward issue	1	128.80	88.50	.01
	Attitude toward company	1	11.76	10.29	.01
MS*Goodwill	Attitude toward message	2	1.29	1.33	.27
	Attitude toward issue	2	.62	.42	.66
	Attitude toward company	2	4.63	4.05	.02
MS*Trust* Involvement	Attitude toward message	2	.73	.75	.47
	Attitude toward issue	2	.56	.39	.68
	Attitude toward company	2	4.13	3.61	.03
Goodwill*Trust* Involvement	Attitude toward message	2	4.62	4.76	.03
	Attitude toward issue	2	.90	.62	.43
	Attitude toward company	2	.33	.29	.59

<sup>5</sup> Left out *F* for independent variables that were not significant ( $p>.05$ ).

source trustworthiness, and involvement on the recipients' attitude toward the company ( $F=3.61, p<.05$ ), and (b) among source goodwill, source trustworthiness, and involvement on the attitude toward the message ( $F=4.76, p<.05$ ).

While these findings were not hypothesized in this study, it shows that involvement was an important independent variable that affected the recipients' attitude toward the message source in interaction with source goodwill, source trustworthiness and message sidedness.

As shown in Table 15, the results of following mean difference tests for involvement showed that the means for the highly involved subjects were higher than for the low involved subjects across all dependent variables. Thus, a public relations message is significantly more effective to highly involved publics on their attitude toward the message ( $M_{\text{high involvement}}=.1.06, M_{\text{low involvement}}=.52, t=-4.97, df=322, p<.01$ ), toward the issue ( $M_{\text{high involvement}}=1.42, M_{\text{low involvement}}=.08, t=-9.81, df=322, p<.01$ ), and toward the company ( $M_{\text{high involvement}}=.61, M_{\text{low involvement}}=.17, t=-3.56, df=322, p<.01$ ).

Table 15. Means and standard deviations for the effect of involvement on the recipients' attitude toward the message, the issue, and the company

	Involvement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Attitude toward message	<i>High</i>	1.06	.92	-4.97	322	.01
	<i>Low</i>	.52	1.06			
Attitude toward issue	<i>High</i>	1.42	1.23	-9.81	322	.01
	<i>Low</i>	.08	1.20			
Attitude toward company	<i>High</i>	.61	1.15	-3.56	322	.01
	<i>Low</i>	.17	1.10			

### Message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and involvement

As shown in Figure 8, there was a three-way interaction effect among message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and involvement on the recipients' attitude toward the

company. In the high involvement condition, there was no significant mean difference among the different types of message sidedness regardless whether the message was from a high trustworthy source ( $F=2.96$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p>.05$ ) versus a low trustworthy source ( $F=1.27$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p>.05$ ). Also, in low involvement condition, there was no significant mean difference among the different types of message sidedness, neither from a high trustworthy source ( $F=1.61$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p>.05$ ) nor from a low trustworthy source ( $F=.43$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p>.05$ ).

On the other hand, post hoc mean difference test results showed that for a company with low trustworthiness, a refutational two-sided message was more effective to the highly involved target publics ( $M=.58$ ,  $SD=1.28$ ) than to the less involved publics ( $M=-.30$ ,  $SD=1.17$ ) ( $t=-2.64$ ,  $df=52$ ,  $p<.05$ ). However, there was no significantly different message sidedness effect for a one-sided message ( $t=-1.26$ ,  $df=52$ ,  $p>.05$ ) or a nonrefutational two-sided message ( $t=-.77$ ,  $df=52$ ,  $p>.05$ ). In contrast, for a company with high trustworthiness, a nonrefutational two-sided message was more effective to the highly involved target publics ( $M=.109$ ,  $SD=.95$ ) than to the less involved publics ( $M=.76$ ,  $SD=.90$ ) ( $t=-2.75$ ,  $df=52$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

And, unlike the low trustworthiness condition above, a one-sided message ( $M=.97$ ,  $SD=.95$ ) was more effective to the highly involved target than to the less involved publics ( $M=.44$ ,  $SD=.75$ ) ( $t=-2.36$ ,  $df=52$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and a nonrefutational two-sided message ( $M=.109$ ,  $SD=.95$ ) was more effective than a refutational two-sided message ( $M=.52$ ,  $SD=.90$ ) ( $t=2.32$ ,  $df=55$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Also, a one-sided message was more effective than a refutational two-sided message ( $t=1.92$ ,  $df=61$ ,  $p=.06$ ). However, there was no such message sidedness effect for a refutational two-sided message ( $t=1.92$ ,  $df=61$ ,  $p>.05$ ).

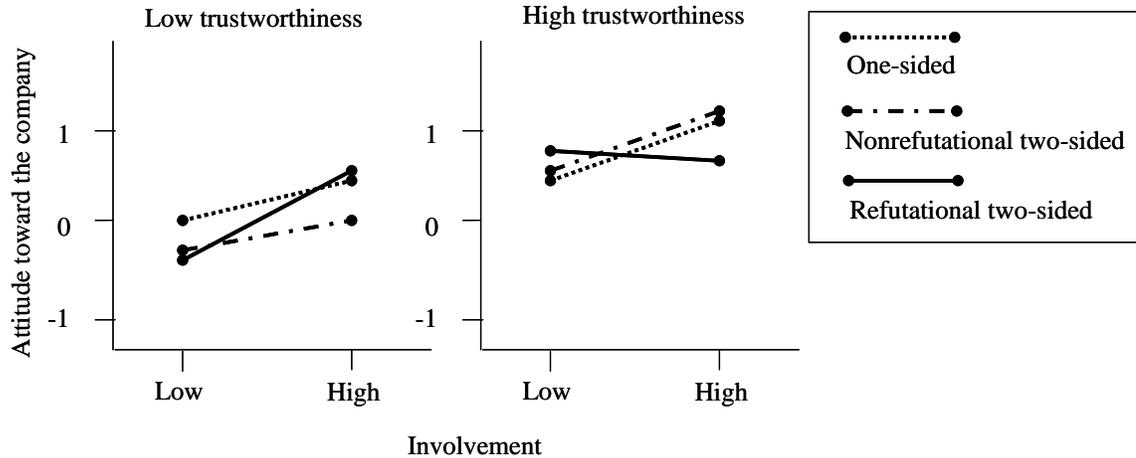


Figure 8. Interaction effect of message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and involvement on the attitude toward the company

In summary, for a source with low trustworthiness and uninvolved publics, a one-sided message would be more effective, while for highly involved publics (active publics), a one-sided message or a refutational two-sided message are equally effective. On the other hand, for a source with high trustworthiness for uninvolved publics, a refutational two-sided message would have the greatest effect, but when trustworthiness is high for an involved public, either a one-sided or a non-refutational two-sided message is equally effective. Perhaps the most important point to note here is that when source trustworthiness is high, the effects are always higher except for the refutational two-sided message which is best avoided for highly involved publics when the source is a highly trusted one.

### Source goodwill, source trustworthiness, and involvement

As shown in Figure 9, there was a three-way interaction effect among source goodwill, source trustworthiness, and involvement on the recipients' attitude toward the message. Results of mean difference tests showed that there was no significant mean

difference between a message from a company with high goodwill and from a company with low goodwill regardless of involvement condition and source trustworthiness.

However, for a source with low trustworthiness and a company with low goodwill, involvement worked as an important variable that affected the recipients' attitude toward the message such that if they perceived the issue as highly involving for them, they had a more positive attitude toward the message ( $t=-2.08$ ,  $df=79$ ,  $p<.05$ ). On the other hand, if the company was perceived as having a high goodwill toward the target publics, there was no mean difference between high- and low involvement condition ( $t=-1.64$ ,  $df=79$ ,  $p>.05$ )

Also, for a source with high trustworthiness and a company with high goodwill, involvement worked as an important variable that affected the recipients' attitude toward the message. When the company was perceived as having high goodwill toward the target publics, and the subjects were highly involved, they had more positive attitude toward the message than did the uninvolved subjects ( $t=-4.85$ ,  $df=79$ ,  $p<.01$ ). On the other hand, if the source was perceived as highly trusted, but the company as having low goodwill toward the target publics, there was no effect of involvement ( $t=-1.39$ ,  $df=79$ ,  $p>.05$ ).

Perhaps the most puzzling finding here is that high goodwill combined with a highly trusted source is not effective for uninvolved publics and, in fact, a source that is less trusted appeared to be more effective with this group.

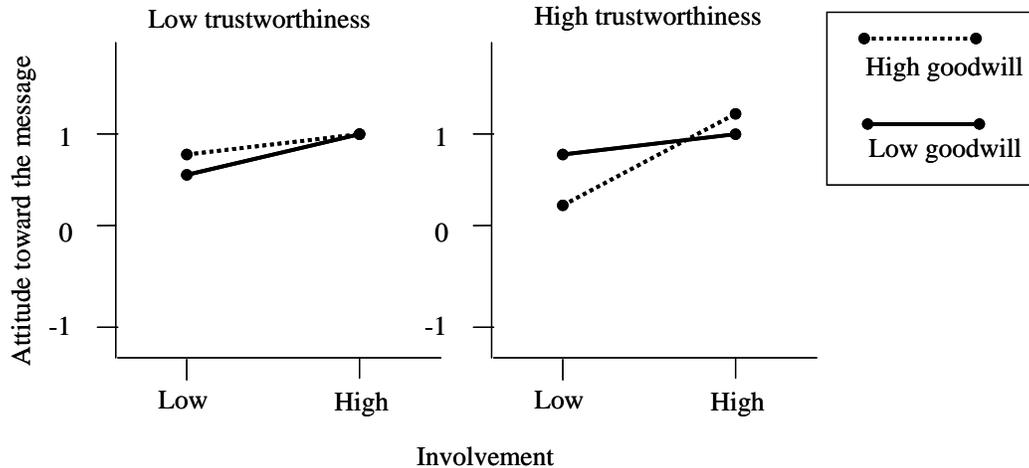


Figure 9. Interaction effect of source goodwill, source trustworthiness, and involvement on the attitude toward the message

In sum, to develop a public relations message for target publics, involvement should be considered along with the company's perceived trustworthiness and goodwill condition by the target publics. It is important for a company to form a prior perception among the target publics that the company is trustworthy, has goodwill toward them or toward the community to which they belong, and develop a relevant public relations message.

### Limitations

This study has limitations. As with most experiments, this study has an artificiality issue. The experiment was conducted in a classroom setting, and therefore, it lacks external validity (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

For instance, there was a limitation on the characteristics of subjects. The subjects were all undergraduate students attending a large southeastern public university in the United States, a representative homogeneous group. Three-quarters of them were female and the mean age was 21-years old. Definitely, they do not represent the population

beyond themselves. Therefore, even though the results may be applied to a specific real-world situation, they cannot be generalized to the real world.

Also, even though the Weblog was produced in a professional manner for an experimental purpose, the materials were printed in black and white and distributed to the subjects in a classroom setting. If an actual online Weblog was shown to the participants and they were asked to answer the questions via Internet, it would have enabled them to have a more realistic experience. However, it was assumed that printing out the Weblog would make no difference in the subjects' response.

Another limitation of this study is that it the effect size of independent variables was relatively weak. Even though the means of each independent variable were significantly different, in reality, the effect sizes were quite small as compared to the scales that ranged from -3 to +3.

In addition, there may have been a weakness in manipulating the independent variables. The manipulation check indicated that the one-sided message and two-sided messages were clearly manipulated, but, it is not clear if the nonrefutational versus the refutational manipulation was successful. Therefore, even though the results showed a difference between them, there was a limitation in interpreting and generalizing the results.

Finally, the research questions were based on an assumption that there would be a three-way interaction effect among message sidedness, source trustworthiness and source goodwill. However, there was no such interaction effect. Instead, though it was not hypothesized, there were three-way interactions when involvement was included as factor. It might be possible that the theory did not support the three-way interaction relationship

among the originally posited variables. Further research would help answering this research question.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

One of the purposes of this study was to identify a possible three-way interaction effect among message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and source goodwill in a public relations message on the target public's attitude toward the message, the issue, and the company. Even though there was no such interaction effect, it would be worthwhile to expand the theory so that we could identify variables where they are moderators.

Also, the fact that there was only a main or interaction effect on the recipients' attitude toward the company, but not toward the message or the issue, may implicate that a causal relationship among these three independent variables. Future research may figure out these causal relationships and the effect sizes of these variables using structural equation modeling and multiple regression analysis.

For a laboratory experiment, one of the ways to secure external validity is to replicate the experiment in different settings with different subjects (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Therefore, it is recommended that this experiment be replicated with other subjects. Also, as this study used a printed version of Weblogs, it is recommended that future experiment be conducted with real online Weblogs. Further, it would be worthwhile to split the experimental groups into on-line and off-line groups, and compare the results if there is any difference between these two groups.

In addition, in this study, individual Weblogs were used as a stimulus material. However, there are many companies that operate an official or several company Weblogs. In this case, the perceived trustworthiness and goodwill of the company might have a

more direct impact on the recipients' attitude toward the company. Also, the characteristics of company Weblogs may be more official than individual Weblogs, and therefore, may have more constraints in expression. Future research may compare the effect of the individual Weblogs with the company Weblogs.

Also, there are other variables that may affect the results of public relations messages. Future research should consider these variables in their experimental design. For instance, there are other variables that would be intriguing subjects for future message sidedness research, such as involvement, argument quality, initial attitude, and order effect of message sidedness.

### **Argument Quality**

Argument quality was not considered in this experiment. However, Priester and Petty (2003) argued that argument quality affects the effectiveness of source trustworthiness. They reported that a strong argument from a low trustworthiness source is more effective than a weak argument from a high trustworthiness source, or almost or equally effective as strong argument from a high trustworthiness source, especially because "an endorser of low trustworthiness can lead to greater scrutiny of product-related information than an endorser of high trustworthiness" (p. 417).

In this experiment, based on the optimal arousal theory, only the amount of positive and negative information was controlled. However, with the same amount of information, the tone of argument quality may act differently. Also, argument quality may be interacted with source goodwill and/or message sidedness. Depending on the situation, it may be possible that a weak argument is more effective than a strong argument if a message is from a company with high goodwill. Probably, a refutational

two-sided message with a strong argument from a company with low goodwill may be more effective than a refutational two-sided message with a weak argument from a company with high goodwill. These inferences are yet to be tested.

### **Initial Attitude**

Existing research reported that initial attitude is one of the major variables that affect persuasion (Cowley & Hoyer, 1994; Hovland et al., 1949).

Hovland et al. (1949) reported that a one-sided message is more effective to an audience who had a prior favorable attitude whereas a two-sided message was more effective to the audience who had a prior negative attitude toward an issue. Cowley and Hoyer (1994) argued that even though audiences have a positive prior attitude, two-sided messages could be effective if the audience is already aware of the negative information on the subject.

In this study, initial attitude or prior attitude was not included as an independent variable because a majority of the subjects (92.3%) answered that they never heard of or were not sure of “Carrefour” name. Instead, prior attitude toward Wal-Mart was tested as a covariate. The post hoc test result showed that there was a main effect of initial attitude on the recipients’ attitude toward the message ( $F=5.80, p<.05$ ), toward the issue ( $F=4.26, p<.05$ ), and probably, toward the company ( $F=3.65, p=.06$ ). However, the subjects may have other types of initial attitudes toward environmental and economic issues, or perceptions of a typical superstore or superstores in general, that might have affected their responses.

### Order Effect of Message Sidedness

There may be order effects of message sidedness or argument (Igou & Bless, 2003; Jackson & Allen, 1987). In this study, the main message described might be regarded as positive toward the issue, and message sidedness was only manipulated by using posters (replies) to the main message or to other posters (Figure 8). However, the main message itself may be manipulated as shown in Figure 9. In this case, there could be five types of message sidedness, i.e., (1) a one-sided message, (2) a nonrefutational two-sided message with poster manipulations, (3) a refutational two-sided message with poster manipulations, (4) a non-refutational two-sided message with manipulation of both main message and posters, and (5) a refutational two-sided message with manipulation of both main message and posters.

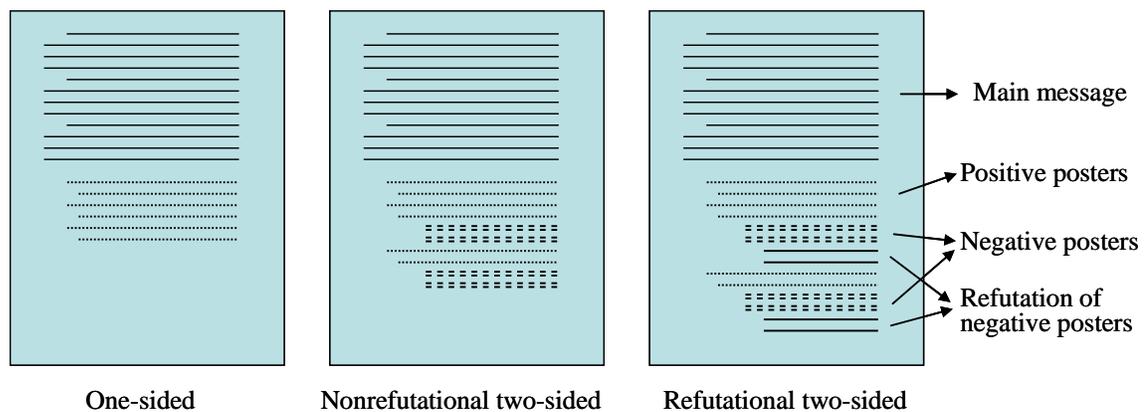


Figure 10. Manipulation of message sidedness with posters in this study

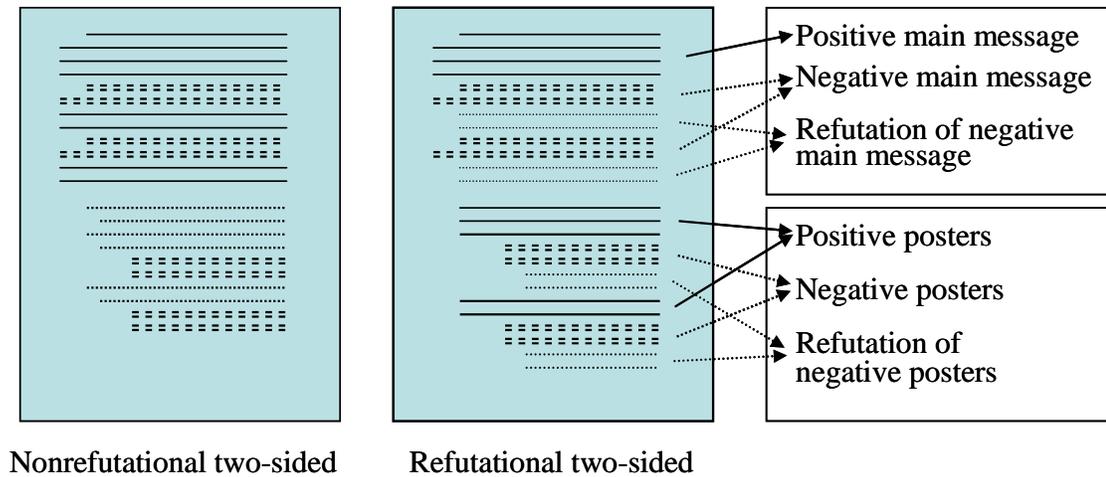


Figure 11. Recommended manipulation of message sidedness with main message for future study

### Conclusion

As reported in several research studies, the results of this research on message sidedness did not consistently support the superiority of any specific type of message sidedness to others (Cowley & Hoyer, 1994; Lang et al, 1999; O’Keefe, 1999). However, it does not mean that there is no effect of message sidedness. On the contrary, it may indicate that more research on message sidedness is needed. Future public relations scholars should be able to identify a specific situation in which the type of message sidedness would be more effective than other types of message sidedness when interacted with other variables.

### Unique Contributions

This study has several unique and intriguing contributions to public relations research as well as to public relations practice as follows:

#### **New approach to message sidedness from a public relations perspective**

This study attempts to advance public relations research by analyzing the effect of message sidedness and source credibility from a public relations perspective, in particular,

the interaction effect of message sidedness with two major constructs of source credibility, source trustworthiness and source goodwill. Even though message sidedness and source credibility were major topics for communication research over a half century, these studies were mostly conducted in psychology, marketing, and advertising research. This current study applies these important communication concepts to the study of public relations.

In particular, two additional findings, (a) the effect of message sidedness and source goodwill moderated by involvement condition, (b) involvement as an important factor that affected the recipients' attitude toward the company or the message, interacted with message sidedness, source trustworthiness, and source goodwill, could provide theoretical and practical implications for public relations research as well as for public relations practice.

For public relations scholarship, the result of this study may be adapted to existing public relations theories such as situational theory (Grunig, 1989; Grunig & Hunt, 1984) or contingency theory (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997) in developing or maintaining more effective relationships with target publics.

For example, as a representative normative theory, situational theory divided publics into (a) *active publics* (b) *aware publics* (c) *latent publics*, and (d) *nonpublics*, based on problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement about an issue, and argued that by the degree of involvement and recognition of issues/constraints, publics can be switched to different publics. This study would add a new perspective on how perceived goodwill of a company would affect the credibility of a public relations message from it, and how message sidedness would work differently for each public.

Contingency theory explains how a public relations message should be developed depending on situation, moving on pure advocacy and pure accommodation continuum. This study would add insight on this theory by suggesting which type of message sidedness would work better than other type of message sidedness, depending on the perceived goodwill of the company by target publics.

### **Rediscovery of source goodwill as a base for public relations**

This study highlights why it is important for a corporation to be perceived as a responsible corporate citizen by its target publics in its community, and how and when a company may use various types of message sidedness to make a public relations message more effective, depending on its perceived goodwill and trustworthiness among target publics.

In particular, goodwill measurement provides criteria for the evaluation of public relations messages, as well as providing a theoretical base for undertaking public relations programs, specifically, corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, reputation management, and issues and crisis communications. One of the weaknesses of public relations messages as well as public relations programs is that it is difficult to identify appropriate variables for the effectiveness of these public relations messages or the results of the programs. This study shows that the more a company is perceived as having goodwill toward the community or the society to which it belongs, the more effective the public relations message from this company on public relations issues.

### **Weblog as a new public relations tool**

Finally, this study acknowledges the use of modern public relations tools by utilizing a Weblog in the experiment. In the Internet era, traditional mass media such as

newspapers and television are losing their effectiveness while the Internet is gaining more popularity as an alternative mass media. One of the most distinctive features of the Internet is that it could work both as a mass media and a public relations tool. In actuality, more and more corporations are using Weblogs as their public relations tools (Barbaro, 2006). Certainly, it is the time that public relations should not only be dependent on traditional mass media, but should find and develop relevant new public relations tools that can reach target publics or stakeholders directly and more effectively.

APPENDIX A  
INSTRUMENTAL MANIPULATION



## Will Carrefour Bring Opportunities to Gainesville?

Monday, March 13, 2006

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- Wednesday, March 15, 2006

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However, Carrefour is not as respected outside of Europe as it is in Europe. Carrefour is viewed as a global firm that does not return its profits to the local community, and keeps its corporate social responsibility activities at a minimal level. Carrefour is the only global firm that is not included in the "World's 100 Most Respected Corporations" by Global Reporting Initiative Index. In addition, Carrefour is the first superstore that provided non-biodegradable disposable plastic bags, and still uses them even though they are harmful to environment.

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• Thursday, March 16, 2006

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WELCOME TO LAUREN'S WEBLOG

## Will Carrefour Bring Opportunities to Gainesville?

• Tuesday, March 21, 2006

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- Wednesday, March 22, 2006

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WELCOME TO LAUREN'S WEBLOG

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- Friday, March 24, 2006

Carrefour, one of the largest European superstore chains headquartered in Paris, France, plans to set up a distribution center and a superstore in Gainesville. The company submitted a construction and employment plan last week to the City of Gainesville's Department of Construction and Development. The projected amount of the investment is believed to approach \$34 million.

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- Monday, March 27, 2006

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**Name:** Lauren A. Holmes

**Location:** Gainesville, FL

**Lauren A. Holmes** is a business analyst, who regularly contributes articles to the Gainesville Sun. She is a member of the Advisory Counsel to the City of Gainesville. She is an alumna of the University of Florida with journalism major, and has lived in Gainesville since 1980. She is a mother of three boys and one girl, and has been operating this weblog since 2004.

➔ **Refutational two-sided x Low goodwill x Low trustworthiness**



*Let's talk about issues*



WELCOME TO LAUREN'S WEBLOG

## Will Carrefour Bring Opportunities to Gainesville?

At 8:07 PM, [Gimmeajob](#) said...

I hope Carrefour will create more internships and part-time jobs as well as scholarship opportunities for UF students

[Post a Comment](#)

At 10:10 PM, [Debbie0202](#) said...

Do we really need more superstores in Gainesville? I think that we already have too many. Also, Carrefour is a French company. Aren't American companies gonna have too much foreign competition?

At 11:15PM, [Carrefour](#) said...

☞ I don't think we have enough superstores in Gainesville. Carrefour is not a small French company, but a global company that has a lot of expertise and offices. Why not allow them to come into Gainesville, so that consumers in Gainesville can have better choices?

[Post a Comment](#)

At 11:23 PM, [Sunny1128](#) said...

I hope I can buy fresher foods at cheaper prices thanks to the competition with Wal-Mart and Publix.

[Post a Comment](#)

At 01:17 AM, [Tomorrow](#) said...

How long will it take to complete the construction? We definitely will have to suffer from dust, noise and even traffic congestions during the construction period. I don't want these inconveniences...

At 10:45PM, [Lee hope](#) said...

☞ I heard that the construction will take approximately six months. It's inevitable that some Gainesville citizens will suffer from dust and noise to a certain extent. But I'm sure some contractors will minimize these inconveniences by working at night and during the weekend. Also, considering the positive effects on the Gainesville's economy, and on the quality life of Gainesville citizens, I think it is worthwhile to grin and bear it.

[Post a Comment](#)

At 08:33 AM, [Green4life](#) said...

Look at the Gainesville, losing her green color! No more construction, please! Stop destroying our environment!

At 08:33 AM, [Carrefour](#) said...

☞ The construction will have very little effect on the environment of Gainesville as it will take place at the existing commercial area where empty and old warehouses have been left unused. On the contrary, after completion, the area will be a place where people can enjoy shopping with their family and friends.

[Post a Comment](#)



### Who is Carrefour?

**Carrefour** is one of the largest European superstore chains, having more than 11,000 stores in over 32 countries, but is yet to open a store in America.

Carrefour is not as respected outside of Europe as it is in Europe. Carrefour is viewed as a global firm that does not return its profits to the local community, and keeps its corporate social responsibility activities at a minimal level. Carrefour is the only global firm that is not included in the "World's 100 Most Respected Corporations" by Global Reporting Initiative Index. In addition, Carrefour is the first superstore that provided non-biodegradable disposable plastic bags, and still uses them even though they are harmful to environment.

Recently, Carrefour was investigated by the French Bureau of Investigation for its alleged illegal tax deals between branches in different countries. In 2000, the president of Carrefour was accused of bribery in a French court. More recently, Carrefour U.K. was sued by Green Peace for selling some GM (genetically modified) foods without identifying them.

About Me [holmes@holmes.com](mailto:holmes@holmes.com)

APPENDIX B  
INSTRUMENT

# Questionnaire

**Based on the message and the supplemental information from Lauren Holmes' weblog, please answer the following questions. Please circle the number that best describes your thoughts or feelings. You should circle one number from each and every line.**

**Q1.** Had you ever heard of the *Carrefour* name **before** you read this weblog? (select one)

Never	1
Not sure	2
Heard of the name before	3
Know the company very well	4

**Q2.** How **supportive** would you be of Carrefour, if it moves to Gainesville?

Not at all supportive	<u>-3</u>	<u>-2</u>	<u>-1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>+1</u>	<u>+2</u>	<u>+3</u>	Totally supportive
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**Q3.** How interested would you be in working for Carrefour as a **full-time** employee, if it moves to Gainesville?

Not at all interested	<u>-3</u>	<u>-2</u>	<u>-1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>+1</u>	<u>+2</u>	<u>+3</u>	Very interested
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**Q4.** How interested would you be in doing an **internship** or working for Carrefour as a **part-time** employee, if it moves to Gainesville?

Not at all interested	<u>-3</u>	<u>-2</u>	<u>-1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>+1</u>	<u>+2</u>	<u>+3</u>	Very interested
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**Q5.** How likely would you be to **buy** products from Carrefour, if it is opened in Gainesville?

Not at all likely	<u>-3</u>	<u>-2</u>	<u>-1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>+1</u>	<u>+2</u>	<u>+3</u>	Very likely
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**Q6.** I think that the messages in this weblog are \_\_\_\_\_.

undependable	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	dependable
dishonest	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	honest
unreliable	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	reliable
insincere	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	sincere
untrustworthy	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	trustworthy

**Q7.** I think that allowing Carrefour to build a distribution center and superstore in Gainesville is \_\_\_\_\_ **to the community.**

negative	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	positive
harmful	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	beneficial
unfavorable	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	favorable
bad	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	good
unimportant	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	important
irrelevant	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	relevant
not needed	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	needed



**Q11.** What is your political ideology?

Liberal	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	Conservative
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**Q12.** I think that this weblog presents primarily a \_\_\_\_\_ argument about Carrefour.

one-sided	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	two-sided
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**Q13.** I think the posters to this weblog \_\_\_\_\_ refute or counter the arguments here about Carrefour.

ineffectively	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	effectively
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**Q14.** I think that the company Carrefour itself is \_\_\_\_\_.

dishonest	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	honest
untrustworthy	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	trustworthy
dishonorable	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	honorable
immoral	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	moral
unethical	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	ethical

**Q15.** I think that Carrefour \_\_\_\_\_.

does not care about our local community	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	cares about our local community
does not have the local community's interests at heart	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	has the local community's interest at heart
is self-centered	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	is not self-centered
is unconcerned with local community	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	is concerned with local community
is insensitive	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	is sensitive
is not understanding	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	is understanding

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**Up to now, you were asked about Carrefour. Now, please answer the questions on Wal-Mart.**

**Q16.** I think that Wal-Mart is a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ company.

undependable	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	dependable
dishonest	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	honest
unreliable	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	reliable
insincere	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	sincere
untrustworthy	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	trustworthy

**Q17.** If you have to explain about Carrefour to your friend, how would you describe it? What are your thoughts about Carrefour? Please write your thoughts freely.

*\*Thank you for your participation. III*

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jangyul Robert Kim will join the faculty of the Department of Journalism and Technical Communication at Colorado State University in August 2006. He will teach public relations and health communication. His research interests include public relations and persuasion theory, international public relations, crisis and issues communications, reputation management, and public health campaigns. He is the first Korean who was accredited by the Public Relations Society of America. Prior to pursuing his academic career, he worked as a public relations consultant providing services to clients, including multinational firms in consumer, healthcare, corporate, finance, and information technology, as well as nonprofit organizations including government and non government organizations.