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Dialogic Communication and Public Relations Websites: A Content Analysis of the Global  
Top 250 PR Agencies

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Media and Communication  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Masters of Arts in Professional Communication

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by  
Charles Chidiebere Akwari  
May 2017

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Dr. Susan E. Waters, Committee Chair

Dr. Stephen Marshall

Dr. Robert Andrew Dunn

Keywords: Dialogic Communication Theory, Holmes Report, Global PR, Public Relations,  
Two-way Communication, Website Usability

## ABSTRACT

Dialogic Communication and Public Relations Websites: A Content Analysis of the Global

Top 250 PR Agencies

by

Charles Chidiebere Akwari

Past research has shown that dialogic communication has essential characteristics that foster two-way communication between organizations and their stakeholders. This study investigates how public relations firms incorporate the principles of dialogic communication on their websites. The top and bottom 50 websites from the Holmes report on Top 250 Global PR agency rankings were content analyzed. Kent and Taylor's (1998, 2003) five principles of dialogic communication were applied to find out if public relations firms incorporate the principle of dialogic communication effectively on their websites, provide relevant information for stakeholders and prospective clients, and if there are differences between PR rankings in terms of website usability and the dialogic loop. Findings reveal that bottom 50 PR websites are not as dialogic as the top 50 PR websites. In addition, the study revealed that both top and bottom to a considerable extent incorporated the principles of dialogic communication.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God Almighty who has given me the strength and knowledge to achieve this feat. To him alone be praised.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Susan Waters, who all through the course of my study was supportive and encouraging. Without her supervision, this research would not have been possible.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Cutlip, Center, and Broom (1994) defined public relations as “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 2). This shows that public relations practitioners are charged with the responsibility of ensuring engagement, relationship building, and taking feedback from publics, which directly reflects the two-way communication. Technology today affords public relations firms the opportunity of using the internet to build and maintain relationships with the publics. Remarkably, the internet, when put into effective use, can create the avenue to compete for a client’s attention with other firms who have since dominated the PR business (Coombs, 1998). Organizations, groups, and businesses use the internet and the worldwide web every day to communicate with clients worldwide. When analyzing over 250 Holmes Report ranked world public relations agencies, there is a need to understand how these agencies use the Web to communicate, engage and establish relationships with the publics. These websites were however ranked based on revenue.

Some research has been carried out on how public relations organizations incorporate the principles of dialogic communication on their websites. The research by Kent and Taylor (2001) revealed that public relations practitioners have accepted and include internet strategies, using social media, email, and websites as key features of their online presence. Kitchen and Panopoulos (2010) encourage the industry to ensure that it incorporates the learning and understanding of technology in its strategy. Ki and Hon (2006) also stated that



public relations research has come to the realization of the full potential of internet as a platform to build and maintain relationships between organizations and its publics.

Numerous research studies have examined how public relations firms incorporate the principles of dialogic communication on their website. For example, Gordon and Berhow (2008) found out variables incorporated on the website of the universities under study which are related to the “dialogic loop” feature were not adequately displayed unlike other features. The opportunity for coded user response was 38 percent, while links for contacting the admissions office and appointment sign-ups were 31 percent and 30 percent respectively (Gordon & Berhow, 2008). Huang and Yang (2015) carried out a national survey of IPR, PRSA, and IABC senior level practitioners. It was done to investigate the problems that prevent public relations organizations from incorporating online dialogic communication with the publics. They found out that both “departmental compatibility and organizational culture’s risk-tolerant level” (Huang & Yang, 2015, p. 377) associated with online dialogic communication have a strong influence on the way they engage or create dialogic communication with the publics. Kent and Taylor (2001) posited that a website that is strategically designed would create a better platform or opportunity for organizations to engage and establish a dialogical communication with its publics.

To better understand how public relations firms incorporate dialogic communication in their website, this study provides a content analysis of the top and bottom fifty websites of the Holmes Report on global top 250 PR firms of 2015 using Kent and Taylor’s (1998; 2000) principles of dialogic communication theory. The purpose of this study is to review past research to examine how the principles of dialogic communication are being incorporated on

a PR firm's website. This study will review the relevant literature and research. The literature will highlight and discuss global and international public relations, models of public relations in international settings, social media, and public relations followed by a brief review of website usability. The literature will also review dialogic communication by Kent and Taylor (1998, 2001, 2002) to examine specific variables that are paramount to improving or enhancing dialogic communication. The study will also discuss the method and research questions posed on the study of dialogic principle with emphasis on "dialogic loop" on global top 250 PR firms, 2016. The study will conclude with the research results/findings and a discussion of the findings. The limitations of the study will also be discussed and suggestions for further/future research will be highlighted.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This study reviewed relevant literature from several research endeavors. First, it reviewed public relations models and the World Wide Web, website usability and dialogic communication theory.

#### **Public Relations Model and World Wide Web**

Over the years, there has been a misconception about public relations serving the same function as advertising, although there are similarities. Advertising is more of a one-way communication, which is synonymous with the press agency model of public relations, while public relations is a two-way communication (Kennedy, 2013). Public relations is also about truth and full information while advertising is sometimes about gimmicks. Harlow (1976) defined public relations as “the distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain a mutual line of communication, understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between an organization and its publics” (p. 9).

Cutlip et al. (1994) gave a more succinct definition of public relations that cuts across its functions. They define public relations “as the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip et al., 1994, p. 2). The heart of this definition lies in the function of public relations in maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its stakeholders. This lies in its adoption of a two-way symmetric model as a guide in maintaining this goal.

The public relations model has evolved from press agency to public information and from two-way asymmetric to the two-way symmetric model (Grunig & Hunt, 1982). Cutlip and Center (1952) first claimed public relations as a two-way communication as well as management function, but their notion of the management of the two-way communication was vague. Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (1996); however, gave a more developed way in the management of two-way communication in their introduction to organizational public relations with the introduction of two-way symmetrical model of communication. This development has improved the public relations practitioners and scholars to embrace public relations as a way organizations manages communication with its stakeholders (Grunig et al., 1996). In addition, Grunig et al. (1996) assert that numerous public relations practitioners “have broadened their vision and see public relations as the part of the strategic management function through which organizations interact with their publics both before and after management decisions are made” (p.21).

Grunig et al.’s (2006) Excellence Theory summarized the function and beneficial use of the two-way symmetrical model by PR practitioners as: it provides a level playing field for arrangement and common comprehension to happen between an organization and its stakeholders. The theory gives an organization the tool and way expected to make a solid reputation for an organization based upon strong, mutual connections and keeps up both the organization's interest and that of its stakeholders in a balanced, mutual, and fair manner. Both the organization and its stakeholders can team up to both develop and reinforce the entire organization, driving it to greater achievement.

The internet and the proliferation of social media have made available a viable platform where organizations and its public can engage. Its impact cuts across a global scale; websites, and social media are used by a vast majority of the world population (Grunig, 2006). It provides organization the capacity to reach, interact, and engage with a new and diverse audience on a daily basis. An example would be when organizations use social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.) to spread useful, interesting, and engaging contents with a feature where users can comment, share, like, tweet, and retweet information of interest, thus, helping organizations to gather feedback and gain awareness about their opinion, reservations, or inquiry (Grunig, 2006). Grunig (2006) believes the proliferation of digital communication makes the two-way symmetrical public relations model objectively flexible to practice.

Presently, like never before, the two-way symmetrical model has become a part of PR practitioners who are overseeing websites and social media handles of organizations. This brings about the notion of push and pull public relations. According to Odden (n.d), push PR is the approach employed to disseminate organizations' news and press releases through email, social media or the website, while pull PR "is based on the demand consumers have for online news as well as the search activities of people in the media looking for subject matter experts, researching past news coverage and looking for story ideas" (para. 7). Pull PR includes the following features as noted by Odden (n.d): "news search engine visibility, organic search engine visibility, social news and bookmark sites, blog & RSS, and search engines" (para. 10).

## Website Usability

Most organizations have tapped into the idea of utilizing websites to reach diverse consumers in order to expand their business (Lee & Koubek, 2010). For companies whose aim is to maximize profit and tap into the growing competitive market, designing a website should be its primary aim (Lee & Koubek, 2010). This is important for the company's expansion. It is crucial that when designing a website, the users should be placed into consideration. Generally speaking, the features that make up a good website are "traditionally explained by relating it to user and usability. In other words, a successful and preferable web site generally refers to one with high usability, which is user-friendly and user-centered in interface and functional aspects." (Lee & Koubek, 2010, p. 330). The International Standard Organization (ISO) gave a succinct definition of web usability as "the extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction in a specified context of use" (p. 3). They stressed further by operationalizing the key terms as:

Effectiveness is fundamental as it is about achieving the intended goal(s).

Efficiency is about the resources (such as time or effort) needed by users to achieve their goals so it can be important. In addition, it is important that users are satisfied with their experience, particularly where users have discretion over whether to use a product and can readily choose some alternative means of achieving their goals (ISO, p.3).

The research carried out by Belanche, Casaló, and Guinalú (2012) analyzed the influence of website usability on consumer satisfaction and intention

to use. They found out that “website usability affects satisfaction which in turn affects intention to use” (p. 130).

Bensimon and Walker (1992) agree that PR practitioners need to align the demands of their stakeholders. In order to connect with the public, PR practitioners are adopting the use of websites and social media. According to the Internet Live Stats (2016), the number of internet users in the world has exceeded 3.4 billion from its last count in 2015. With these unwavering growing numbers of internet users, it is salient that communication via the internet with publics has moved from a mere communication tool to vital tool for PR firms and agencies. The internet plays an important role in the work of public relations practitioners. The major function of a website is to serve as a platform for organizations and for users to gain knowledge (Fang & Holsapple, 2007). Industries have well understood its importance. They provide websites to encourage web users’ acquisition of needed information about the organization, its services, products, and activities (Fang & Holsapple, 2007). In the light of the above, it is however, imperative for an organization to make sure that its website is designed and developed in a way that affords users a high degree of usability.

A vast majority of organizations have adopted communication via websites with its publics, and it cuts across all sectors (Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009). The internet and website communication provides organizations the opportunity to engage its target publics, which is an important medium for public relations (Grunig, 1992). Aside from relationship building, a well-designed website would provide a platform to reach a large public with the opportunity of feedback which saves resources from traditional advertising (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003). There are some web features that give opportunity of not just attracting potential clients, but create an avenue source for information, subscribe to such information and

bookmark based on interest. These features include news and blogs, podcasts, social media widgets, newsletters, and comment sections (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003).

Website usability according to Nielsen (2012) is the quality attribute of a website that tells how user-friendly websites are. Nielsen (2012) outlined the five components that defined usability as: learnability, efficiency, memorability, errors, and satisfaction.

**Learnability:** has to do with how user friendly is it for users to perform basic task in their first encounter with the website.

**Efficiency:** checks how fast users can perform task on the website

**Memorability:** deals with how quick are users able to reestablish proficiency after a period of time.

**Errors:** simply checks the amount of errors and how damaging the errors are and the how best the websites can recover from the errors.

**Satisfaction:** how friendly or satisfying is it to use the website.

However, many other important attributes define usability. Utility happens to be a key with borders on design functionality of a website (Nielsen, 2012). PR researchers have recommended quite a number of ways on creating an effective website. For example, Kent (1998) outlined the three tests to evaluate the effectiveness of a website: “the dialogic/feedback loop, come back again-ness, intuitive or ease of use” (p. 1). Falk (2000) also outlined the six website strategies/ criteria that need to be addressed in order to have a winning website: avoid dead links, provision of contact information, proper placement



information, use of standard colors to ease reading, ease of use and clearly defined purpose.

Pavlik and Dozier (1996) posit:

The design of online communication should follow many of the same rules of message design in any other environment, including creativity, quality, and consistency with overall organizational image. In addition, rules of the Web and other new media should be considered, including keeping content fresh, interactive, and uncluttered (p. 2).

Hallahan (2001) cited Tsantes and Associates' research on the use of websites by tech reporters. The survey carried out by Tsantes and Associates revealed that the non-inclusion of press contact information on websites was the main complaint, which also includes inferior web design and unavailability of product information. They recommended that public relations agencies should apply the usability research criteria outlined by researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of its websites that are meant for target audiences (Hallahan, 2001). Kent and Taylor (1998) assert that a well-designed website is not limited to rich content, the website should be one that is user friendly, easy to navigate, and load faster - not exceeding 4 seconds. In other words, text should be preferred to heavy graphics. They summed it up by saying, a site should be interactive to allow users the ability to peruse site information and encourage return visits.

Taylor et al. (2003) outline the features that enhance web usability: a site map, major links to other pages, and a search engine box. These features would greatly help with site navigation and improve user experience. Fang and Holsapple (2007) assert, "Websites are not always as successful or as usable as they could be. Website users can encounter various

problems when trying to acquire knowledge from a website and trying to use a website's functionalities” (p. 477).

### **Dialogic Principles of Public Relations and the Internet**

The word dialogue has its roots in the Greek word "dia" (through) and “logos” (meaning). This definition might not hold a clear meaning of the word as expected (Bohm, 2013). Dialogue according to Bohm (2013), helps us to understand one another in a more authentic manner. Kent and Taylor (2002) noted that dialogic theory was first applied by Pearson (1989) in his research on organizational communication and public relations and after his demise, the theory was given attention by Botan, who took up the research and developed it to cover dialogue as a way of uplifting the publics to a position where communication that exists in organizations should be equivalent to that of its publics. Its importance is seen in its ability “to change the nature of the organization–public relationship by placing emphasis on the relationship” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 25). Stoker and Tusinski (2006) argue that aims of dialogic communication are laudable, but in some sense, are biased. Stoker and Tusinski (2006) are of the opinion it might lead to unethical behavior as selectively designing a communication plan to persuade the public eliminates the two-way symmetrical model that should be adopted by PR practitioners.

Over the years, there has been a shift from the two-way asymmetric model to a two-way symmetric model of public relations- this is reflected in its practice of soliciting feedback from the publics. The theoretical foundation of this research work relied on the principle of dialogic theory of public relations, which was developed by renowned scholars (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2000; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001). In their studies, they reviewed the theory of

dialogic communication as it relates to public relations' use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) platforms. The theory expresses the principles behind the communication that exist between an organization and its publics which is largely based on dialogic communication theory (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Here, it presents an argument that two-way balanced communication is crucial to mutually beneficial relationships.

However, the study carried out in 2001, where they investigated the media communication of activist organizations use Web communication to build relationships with publics. They examined 100 environmental activist organization websites. The result shows that a large number of activist organizations conformed with the technical and design aspect needed to engage the public in dialogic communication, but are not fully incorporating the two-way communication (Taylor et al., 2001). In spite of the way public relations is experiencing change in terms of assessment and evaluation, perspective, and cause, the commitment of public relations to incorporate objectives is something that is difficult for top management and PR practitioners to understand. This is largely because there is still no agreed uniform approach to assess or gauge public relations endeavors. The proliferation of technology and science has drastically altered the way people view the world or various profession, which includes PR (Grunig & White, 1992). Several researchers have argued the need for theoretical based research as a guide to the development and growth of public relations (Stoker & Tusinski, 2006).

According to Kent and Taylor (1998), the internet is an open door for organizations to establish a genuine dialogue between them and their publics. The two terms “dialogue” and “dialogic” are turning out to be more common in depicting ethical and reasonable ways to deal with communication in the scholarly world and industry as PR moves to a two-way

relational communication model. The concept of dialogic communication according to Kent and Taylor (2000) has its origin in philosophy, rhetoric, psychology, and relational communication models. Public relations firms are mutually dependent on the relationship that exists between them and their stakeholders or clients. This stakeholder holds some sort of influence on organizations, and the organization depends on the public for patronage. The principles of dialogic theory when applied appropriately turn out to be the ideal approach to strategic communication in order to make sure an organization fulfills its objectives and growth by maintaining a mutual beneficial relationship through two-way symmetric communication (Grunig et al., 1992; Kent et al., 2003). This can be facilitated partly through an organization's website.

Dialogic communication requires both traditional and modern practice while also focusing on the future of enhancing platforms that would enable the publics to engage better (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Internet, especially the World Wide Web, has been deemed an essential tool for public relations. This technological innovation initiated by the internet created a new platform for organizations to serve, establish and build relationships through interaction with stakeholders. For PR firms, it provides a more controlled platform where they can communicate with consumers, stakeholders, and the media. For consumers, it provides them with the platform through which firms can be seen in order to understand them better (Kent & Taylor, 2002). In addition, it is being viewed by researchers as a channel that would encourage a more effective organization and its public relationships as well as engage them in building a better community (Kent & Taylor, 2002). There is a theoretical shift from public relations laying emphasis on communication management, to placing emphasis on

communication as a tool for building, negotiating, and maintaining relationships, which has evolved over the years (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Kent, Taylor, and White (2003) carried out a study on how an organization's website and its design can facilitate and contribute in building and maintaining relationships with its stakeholders. In the study, they posit that organizations whose aim centers around maintaining relationships with its stakeholders in order to meet or fulfil their goals and objectives must seek, consider, and strike a balance to get feedback from stakeholders. However, the study found out that they are not using dialogic communication on their websites.

This is similar to the arguments raised by Park and Reber (2008) which suggest that public relations practitioners should have online strategic communication as tactical tools which goes along with traditional public relations strategies to be an important asset to behold. By doing this, it would go a long way to help create a better atmosphere for PR best practices. Taking these vital recommendations into consideration, organizations can improve corporate image and accountability, collect feedback and opinions for reviews, and align corporate goals and objectives to reflect the interests of publics (Park & Reber, 2008).

In 2005, McAllister-Greve carried out a content analysis on selected community college websites to study to find out if the principles of dialogic communication are in effect. They looked at the "the practical and theoretical implications of the dialogic public relations activities via community college websites" (p.1), and if they explore fully, not just the virtual advantage of internet websites, but "the internet's innovative interactive capabilities in creating and maintaining relationships, and fostering dialogue with internal and external constituents" (p. 1). Here, they found out that the colleges do offer a wide range of access to

information through their websites, but they are not applying fully the dialogic benefits of the internet interaction advantage of creating a dialogue (McAllister-Greve, 2005). According to Kent and Taylor (2002), research on public relations and its internet and world wide web (www) use are covered in “two broad categories: attitudes and expectations about the Web as an organizational tool, and Web site design characteristics for providing information to publics” (p. 64). These two broad categories were researched in Kent, Taylor and White (2001) and propose that organizations should be more tactical in the design of its website(s) so as to boost or enhance response to feedback from stakeholders.

The widely-known method of studying how organizations use websites to engage stakeholders happens to be dialogic theory by Kent and Taylor. Kent and Taylor (2002) outlined five attributes that guide public relations theory of dialogic communication as:

mutuality, or the recognition of organization– public relationships;  
propinquity, or the temporality and spontaneity of interactions with  
publics; empathy, or the supportiveness and confirmation of public  
goals and interests; risk, or the willingness to interact with individuals  
and publics on their own terms; and finally, commitment, or the extent  
to which an organization gives itself over to dialogue, interpretation,  
and understanding in its interactions with publics (Kent & Taylor,  
2002, p. 26).

However, these principles go beyond the implied or clear hypotheses that form the basis of the idea of dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002). They also developed five principles to work as instruments that measures dialogic relationships between organizations and their

stakeholders which include: (1) dialogic loops (newsletters, comment box, social media widgets), (2) ease of interface (e.g. site map, links to rest of website, major links to homepage, search engine), (3) conservation of visitors (posting of last updated date and time, quick links to other pages of website and downloadable information), (4) generation of return visits (e.g. news/forums/blogs, bookmark/ RSS feeds, calendar of events), and (5) providing information relevant to a variety of publics (agency contact information, client list, area of expertise/services, list of employees/ team/ people, case studies, publicity about clients and projects) (Kent & Taylor, 2001). Several researchers have adopted these outlined principles in their research in public relations (Hether, 2014; McAllister-Greve, 2005; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Wirtz & Ngondo, 2003).

Some studies have examined the dialogic communication as it relates to organizational websites using the five principles developed by Kent and Taylor (2002). Wirtz and Ngondo (2013) content analyzed the website strategies of O'Dwyer's 2012 top-fee generating public relations agencies with major operations in the U.S. in their research. They applied the five principles and content analyzed top 50 and bottom 50 of top 150 firms and found out there are no significant differences between them comparatively. The websites showed considerable levels of dialogic principles. However, some features were untapped by the organizations (e.g., Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), search engine, and bookmarks) which could help foster dialogic communication of their websites (Wirtz & Ngondo, 2013). Hether (2014) also examined through content analysis an in-depth interview how Kaiser Permanente uses social media to communicate with its stakeholders. It was evident in the findings that they adopted the four models of public relations in their message content. However, the principles of

dialogic communication were incorporated (e.g., generation of return visits and conservation of visits).

Taylor and Sen Das (2010) stated that “the Internet is a unique space for organization-public interaction- for public relations practitioners; the Internet is one more tool to reach the media and publics” (p.1). Fang and Holsapple (2006) noted that one of the major purposes of websites is to serve as an avenue for both organizations and its users as a source for information. Organizations have affirmed its importance in sourcing for information about clients, partners, and services. In the light of the above, “it is important for the provider of a Web site to ensure that it is developed in a way that provides a high degree of usability to those who seek to acquire knowledge through it” (Fang & Holsapple, 2006, p. 476).

### **Research Questions**

Dialogic theory has been deemed an ideal approach to incorporate in organizations’ websites to make sure growth of its relationship with the publics is maintained through two-way communication (Kent & Taylor, 2001, 2002; McAllister-Greve, 2005; Wirtz & Ngondo, 2013). This paper studies the dialogic principles of websites of the top 250 public relations firms in the world according to The Holmes Report (2016). Interaction is important in relationship building (Yeon, Choi & Kioussis, 2005). Yang and Taylor (2010) reiterated “visitor interactions with a website could affect visitors’ attitudes and involvement levels with the website” (p. 345). The website of an organization should also create an avenue for stakeholders and potential clients to initiate dialogue with the organization. A good public relations website should help foster this relationship (Hallahan, 2001). To ascertain the dialogic principle for relationship building, its provision of useful information and usability of



public relations firm's websites, the study posed these research questions to help guide the study:

RQ1: Do public relations firms' websites incorporate the principles of dialogic communication effectively?

RQ2: Do public relations firms' websites provide relevant information for stakeholders and prospective clients?

RQ3: Are there differences between the PR rankings in terms of website usability and dialogic loop?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

#### **Method and Procedure**

##### **Content Analysis**

Content analysis was chosen for this study as it provides a base for quantitative analysis through pattern matching and comparison, which allows the research to match different data sets during study (Krippendorff, 1980). Krippendorff (1980) summarized content analysis as any procedure “for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context, with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts and a practical guide to action” (p. 108). Content analysis is a systematic way of quantifying data into identifiable categories (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). It allows theoretical argument to be tested in order to aid better understanding through analyzing and summarizing data sets (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

This study seeks to explore how PR firms incorporate the principles of dialogic communication on their websites through content analysis drafted by Kent and Taylor (1998). The five principles by Kent and Taylor (1998, 2002) were explored and used to examine the websites and include: 1) usefulness of information, 2) generation of return visits, 3) ease of interface, 4) conservation of visitors, and 5) the dialogic loop. The researcher further modified and added some variables that clearly capture the criteria to these principles to fit the research spectrum. Only the homepage of each websites were coded.

## **Coding Categories/ Sample Plan**

The quantitative content analysis was used to gather data for the study. The top 250 Global PR ranking from the 2016 Holmes report was used for the sample of the study. The study selected top and bottom 50 of the websites as sample population. The research replicated Kent and Taylor's (1998, 2002) building relationships on the web through dialogic communication. Public relations websites were chosen to code as a champion of two-way communication pioneers; thus, they are expected to apply such within their organizations: usability features/ ease of interface (sitemap, major links to other pages, search engine box, logo of the organization, about us/ who we are), usefulness of information (agency contact information, list of employees/team/people, client list/ customers, area of expertise/ service, case studies, publicity about clients/ projects, mission statement, and news), conservation of visitors (posting of last updated time and date, page load time), return visit (quick Link to other parts of the website, bookmark /rss feeds, downloadable information (pdf, doc, pptx files)), and the dialogic loop (contact us, comment box, newsletters/ emails requests, and social media widgets).

## **Coding Procedures**

The researcher designed a code sheet to capture and analyze the websites. Two experienced coders did the design and testing of the coding categories. A trained graduate student and the researcher coded the 100 global public relations website. The researcher and trained coder determined if each variable that captures the dialogic principle were present or not with a yes (1) if the variable is present or no (2) if the variable is not present (see Appendix 1 for coding sheet). The coding process took six weeks in order to carefully identify

each variable to be coded. The purpose of the research is to investigate if the principle of dialogic features were in the homepage of the websites. Variables that were absent which may have been hidden on other pages of the websites were not coded as present. The coding process took a span of four weeks including intercoder-reliability.

### **Intercoder Reliability**

A second coder coded thirty percent of all websites and all variables for those websites. To take into account chance agreement and assess inter-rater reliability, a Cohen's Kappa coefficient was computed and the following values were obtained. A value of 1 indicates perfect agreement for some categories. All categories have very good agreement, being greater than or equal to  $\kappa = .80$  and a percentage agreement of 95% (Cohen, 1960,

### **Kent and Taylor Five Dialogic Features of a Website**

- Ease of Interface  
Sitemap, major links to other page, search engine box, about us/ who we are
- Usefulness of Information  
Agency contact information, list of employees/ people/ team, client list/ customers, area of expertise, case studies, publicity about clients/ projects, mission statement, news, logo of the organization.
- Conservation of Visitors  
Page Load Time (less than 4 sec), posting of last updated time and date
- Return Visit  
Blogs, bookmark now/ rss feeds, links to other website, downloadable information

- Dialogic Loop

Contact us, comment box, social media widgets, offers regular information (newsletters or emails)

### **Operational Definition of Terms**

**Usability feature/ Ease of interface.** According to Kent and Taylor (1998), users visiting a website for information should find it easy to navigate the website in search of the desired information. Also, relevant links should be available that users can easily identify. The web content should be more textual as to having a website with more graphics as text has been seen to load much faster than graphic content due to size (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Delayed page load time has been seen to put users off. Kent and Taylor (1998) succinctly assert:

If a Web site ultimately leaves certain publics with a negative image of the organization--that it is fluff, that it does not care about all its publics, that it serves only the technologically privileged--then ultimately the Web site has failed to foster or facilitate dialogic relationships (p. 330).

A well-designed website should have abundant content in addition to fast page load time (Kent & Taylor, 1998). The tools that are helpful to users to better navigate the sites includes, site maps, search engine box and major link to other page (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

**Usefulness of information.** Websites should contain information of value to stakeholders/ client, prospective clients, and the public (Taylor et al., 2003). Content should be the drive of every website. This information according to Kent and Taylor (1998) includes:

“contact addresses, email address of organizational members, external experts, shareholders, and those holding valid competing/contradictory positions” (p. 328). The features that were used to capture this principle include: agency contact information, list of employees/ people/ team, client list/ customers, area of expertise, case studies, publicity about clients/ projects mission statement, news, logo of the organization (Taylor et al., 2003).

**Conservation of visitors.** Kent and Taylor (1998) are of the opinion that “If the goal of public relations in webbed environments is to create and foster relationships with publics, and not to "entertain" them, websites should include only "essential links" with clearly marked paths for visitors to return to your site” (p. 330). In other words, the website should contain but not be limited to the following features: blogs, posting of last updated time and date, bookmark now/ rss feeds, quick links to other websites, and downloadable information (Taylor et al., 2003). The features used to capture this principle include: blogs, posting of last updated time and date, bookmark now/ rss feeds, links to other websites, downloadable information (Taylor et al., 2003).

### **Dialogic loop**

The dialogic loop also referred to as the feedback loop provides avenues for organizations to gather feedback from audiences which in itself is a public relation strategy (Taylor et al., 2003). It affords an audience the privilege or opportunity to ask questions, give opinions, make further enquiry, and query the organization (Kent & Taylor, 1998). For this process to take place, certain features need to be contained in the website, which include: a newsletter, a comment box, and social media widgets (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.). However, it is not enough to have these features incorporated, there should be representatives who take care of these enquiries and revert to the audience. The features that incorporate this

principle includes: contact us, comment box, social media widgets, and offers regular information (newsletters or emails) (Taylor et al., 2003).

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to investigate incorporation of dialogic communication on public relations firm's websites, to ascertain the difference between the top and bottom 50 in terms of website usability and dialogic loop and access if the website provides relevant information to stakeholders and prospective clients. Kent and Taylor (1998) and Kent et al.'s (2003) five principles of dialogic communication were used in drafting the code sheet. This section will include results from data gathering and analysis, results from the three research questions posed as well as summary of the research findings. The SPSS software was used to conduct a nonparametric one-sample chi-square to analyze the principles of dialogic communication with variables that clearly capture each principle between the top and bottom 50 PR websites. An aggregated data analysis was also conducted using the SPSS to ascertain the presence of dialogic features in the top and bottom 50 of the Global PR websites.

A total of 100 Global PR websites were coded according to the four principles of dialogic communication set forth by Kent and Taylor (1998): ease of interface, usefulness of information, conservation of visitors, return of visitors, and the dialogic loop, which are used to answer the research question posed. Data from the computed coding sheet comprises of Yes (1) and No (2) responses were calculated. The test was conducted to access whether public relations websites incorporate principles of dialogic communication in their website strategy and if the firms' websites provide relevant information for stakeholders or prospective clients as well as access the difference between the PR ranking in terms of website usability and dialogic loop. However, only the front page of the websites was coded.



Table 1

*Aggregated Frequency Distribution of Top and Bottom 50*

Dialogic Features	Total (%)
<b>Ease of interface</b>	
Site map	31.0
Major links to other page	100
Search engine box	35.0
About us/ who we are	94.0
<b>Usefulness of information</b>	
Agency contact information	62.0
List of employees/ people/ team	76.0
Client list/ customers	59.0
Area of expertise	89.0
Case studies	57.0
Publicity about clients/ projects	62.0
Mission statement	30.0
News	67.0
Logo of the organization	99.0
<b>Conservation of visitors</b>	
Page Load Time (less than 4 secs)	42.0
Posting of last updated time and date	1.0
<b>Return Visit</b>	
Blog	52.0

Table 2 (Continued)

Bookmark now/ rss feeds	6.0
Quick Links to other Web sites	100
Downloadable information	19.0
Dialogic loop	
Contact US	98.0
Comment Box	5.0
Social media widgets	86.0
Offers regular information (newsletters or emails)	18.0

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### Chi-square analysis of Top 50 Websites

**Usability feature/ ease of interface.** There are four variables that clearly capture this principle of dialogic communication by Kent and Taylor (1998, 2000): Sitemap, major links to other pages, search engine box, about us/ who we are. For sitemap, there is a significance between the number of websites that have sitemaps and those that do not is  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 25.92, p < .01$ . This result suggests that sitemaps are not frequently used in the top 50 of the Global PR websites. Major links to other pages do not have a significant difference between the top 50 Global PR websites as all the websites have major links to other parts of the website:  $X^2(0, N = 50) = 0, p > .01$ . The result of the test shows that there is a significant difference in display of search,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 28.88, p < .01$ . The result from data analysis of About us/ who we are was significant,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 32.0, p < .01$ , the result suggests that there is a significant difference between websites that has About us/ who we are and those that do not have this feature.

**Usefulness of information.** There are nine variables that clearly capture this principle according to Kent and Taylor (1998, 2000): agency contact information, list of employees/team/people, client list/ customers, area of expertise/ service, case studies, publicity about clients/ projects, mission statement, logo of the organization and news. For agency contact information, the result of the test was significant,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 0.80, p < .01$ . The result suggests that there is a significant difference between the sites that have agency contact information and those that do not. employees/ team/ People, the result of the test shows a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 8.0, p < .01$ . Clients, the result of analysis shows that there is a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 0.80, p < .01$ . Expertise/ Service, the result of the test was significant,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 32.0, p < .01$ . For case Studies, the result of the test shows that there is a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 2.0, p < .01$ .

The organization logo display do not show any significant difference between the top 50 websites analyzed,  $X^2(0, N = 50) = 0, p > .01$ . Publicity about clients/ projects, the result was significant,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 8.0, p < .01$ . Mission statement, the result shows a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 2.0, p < .01$ . News, the result shows that there is a significant difference between the sites that have news and those that do not,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 15.68, p < .01$ . Overall, the result shows that there is a significant difference in general with websites that fully incorporates the principle of usefulness of information and those that do not in the top 50 global PR websites.

**Conservation of visitors.** There are two variables that that were carefully selected to represent conservation of visitors on websites according to Kent and Taylor (1998, 2000): Posting of last updated time and date and page load time (less than 4secs). For posting of last

updated time and date, the result shows that there is a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 46.80, p < .01$  and page load time also revealed that there is a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 37.80, p < .01$ .

**Return visits.** There are four variables that capture this principle. For blogs, the result of the test was significant,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 5.12, p < .01$ . Quick Link to other parts of the website, the result of the test was not significant as all the websites have quick links to other part of the website,  $X^2(0, N = 50) = 0, p > .01$ . Bookmark /RSS feeds, the result shows a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 35.28, p < .01$ . Downloadable information (pdf, doc, pptx files), the result of the test was significant,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 3.92, p < .01$ .

**Dialogic loop.** There are four variables that were carefully selected to capture this principle from Kent and Taylor (1998, 2000): contact us, comment box, newsletters/ emails request, and Social media widgets. Contact US, the result of the test was significant,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 42.32, p < .01$ . Newsletters/ emails request, the result of the test shows that there is a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 18.0, p < .01$ . Comment Box, the result of the test was significant,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 42.32, p < .01$ . Social media widgets, the result shows that there is a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 15.68, p < .01$ .

### **Chi-square analysis of Bottom 50 websites**

**Usability feature/ ease of interface.** This shows the one-sample chi-square analysis conducted on the bottom 50 of the websites using the five variables that clearly capture this principle according to Kent and Taylor (1998, 2000): Sitemap, major links to other pages, search engine box, logo of the organization, and about us/ who we are. For sitemap, the result shows a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 20.48, p < .01$ . This shows that there is a

significant difference between the websites that have site maps and those that do not have in the bottom 50 websites analyzed. For major link to other pages of website, the result reveals that there is no significant difference as all the websites have the feature,  $X^2(0, N = 50) = 0, p > .01$ . For search engine, the result shows that there is a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 18.0, p < .01$ . For about us/ who we are, the result from data analysis reveals that there is a significant difference between those that have the feature and those that do not,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 46.08, p < .01$ .

**Usefulness of information.** The eight variables that clearly capture this principle according to Kent and Taylor (1998, 2000) include: agency contact information, list of employees/team/people, client list/ customers, area of expertise/ service, case studies, publicity about clients/ projects, mission statement, and news. The result for agency contact information shows that there is a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 13.52, p < .01$ . For employees/team/people, the result shows that there is a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 20.48, p < .01$ . Client list/ customers, the result reveals that there is a significant difference between those that have the feature and those that do not,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 8.0, p < .01$ .

For organization logo display, the result reveals that there is a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 46.08, p < .01$ . For area of expertise/ services, the result shows that there is a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 28.88, p < .01$ . For about us/ who we are, the result from data analysis reveals that there is a significant difference between those that have the feature and those that do not,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 46.08, p < .01$ . Case studies, the result reveals that there is a significant difference between the bottom 50 websites of those that have the feature and those that do not,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 0.32, p < .01$ . For publicity about clients/

projects, the result shows that there is a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 0.32, p < .01$ . Mission statement, the result reveal that there is no significant difference as all the websites have not mission statement,  $X^2(0, N = 50) = 0, p > .01$ . For news, the result shows that there is a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 0.72, p < .01$ .

**Conservation of visitors.** The variables that captures this principle according to Kent and Taylor (1998, 2000) includes: Posting of last updated time and date and page load time (less than 4 secs). For posting of last updated time and date, the result shows that there is no significant difference as none of the website has the feature,  $X^2(0, N = 50) = 0, p > .01$ . Page load time, the result of the test was significant,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 15.32, p < .01$ .

**Return visit.** The variables that capture this principle according to Kent and Taylor (1998, 2000) include: blogs, quick Link to other parts of the website, Bookmark /RSS feeds, Downloadable information (pdf, doc, pptx files). For blogs, the result of the test reveals that there is no significant difference between websites that have the feature and those that do not,  $X^2(0, N = 50) = 0, p > .01$ . For Quick Link to other parts of the website, the result of the test was not significant as all the websites have quick links to other parts of the website,  $X^2(0, N = 50) = 0, p > .01$ . For bookmark /rss feeds, the result shows a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 42.32, p < .01$ . For downloadable information (pdf, doc, pptx files), the result of the test was significant,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 46.08, p < .01$ .

**Dialogic loop.** There are four variables that capture this principle from Kent and Taylor (1998, 2000): Contact US, Comment box, Newsletters/ emails request, and Social media widgets. For contact us, the result of the test was significant,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 28.88, p < .01$ . For newsletters/ emails request, the result of the test shows that there is a

significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 23.12, p < .01$ . For comment box, the result of the test was significant,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 38.72, p < .01$ . For social media widgets, the result shows that there is a significant difference,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 35.28, p < .01$ .

In the light of the above result of data analysis, research questions are addressed below:

RQ1: Do public relations firms' websites incorporate the principles of dialogic communication effectively?

To answer this research question posed, the dialogic loop content analysis instrument/variables were adapted from Kent and Taylor (1998) and Kent et al. (2003) to measure the use of dialogic communication on websites. The instrument consists of 22 variables that were used to code the 100 websites. An aggregated frequency data analysis was conducted to ascertain the level of presence of dialogic features incorporated in the top and bottom 50 websites. The result of the data analysis was analyzed based on the four principles:

**Usability/ Ease of interface.** The aggregate data shows that 31% of the websites had site map and low percentage of the websites displayed search engine (35%). However, all of the sites had quick links on their websites (100%) and almost all the websites displayed about us/ who we are (94%).

**Usefulness of information.** This principle has more variables that were captured. The result shows that 62% of the website displayed agency contact information, while 76% displayed list employees/people/team. 59% displayed client list/ customers, and 89% contained areas of expertise, while 57% displayed case studies. 62% publicized clients and projects, but it is however disappointing that only 30% displayed their mission statement.

67% contained news section while almost all the websites displayed logo of their organization (99%).

**Conservation of visitors.** The data analysis of the result shows that there is a low display of these features that captures conservation of visitors. 1% contained information on last updated date and time while 42% loaded less than 4 seconds.

**Return visit.** For blogs, 52% of the websites had blogs, while only 6% of the websites had contained bookmarks now/ rss feeds, while 19% contained downloadable information. The websites clearly displayed quick links to other websites as 100% of the websites complied with the feature.

**Dialogic loop.** The result of the aggregated data reveals low display of comment boxes (5%) and regular information (newsletters or emails) (18%). However, there is a high display of contact us (98%) and social media widgets (86%).

Next research question is addressed:

RQ2: Do public relations firms' websites provide relevant information for stakeholders or prospective clients?

To address this research question, an aggregated frequency data analysis was conducted. The result revealed that both top and bottom websites displayed agency contact information to a considerable length of 62%, while list of employees/ people/ team was 76%. It was somewhat disappointing that only 62% of the organization websites displayed a mission statement. 59% of the websites included a client list/ customer and 89% also displayed areas of expertise. The logo of the organization was well displayed as 99% of the website displayed logo of the organization. 57% of case studies were contained in the



websites and 62% of the websites publicized client and projects. Lastly, only 67% contain the news feature.

Lastly, the third research question is addressed.

RQ3: Are there differences between the PR rankings in terms of website usability and dialogic loop?

To address this research question, a one-sample non-parametric chi-square was conducted to evaluate and ascertain if there exist a significant difference in usability and dialogic loop between the top 50 websites and bottom 50 Global PR firms. The result from data analysis of dialogic loop features shows that, for site map, top 50 firms displayed more site map,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 25.92, p < .01$ . In terms of major link to other parts of the website, both the bottom and the top 50 websites all contained the feature  $X^2(0, N = 50) = 0, p > .01$  (there is no significant difference). Top website also contained more search engine,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 28.88, p < .01$  according to the result of the data analysis. However, the bottom 50 displayed more about us,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 46.08, p < .01$ .

In addition, the result of the data analysis revealed that there is a significant difference between the top and low ranked websites in terms of dialogic loop. The top 50 firms displayed more contact us feature of dialogic loop,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 42.32, p < .01$ , and contained more comment box,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 42.32, p < .01$ . They also have more websites with social media widgets,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 38.72, p < .01$ . However, the bottom 50 contained more newsletter/ email request,s  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 23.12, p < .01$ . This is largely due to the proliferation of social media as a substitute platform to get user feedback.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

Websites are organizations point of contact online; they serve as the information board to the public where they can seek for information, provide feedback, or learn about products and services. The public relations practitioners rely heavily on building and maintaining relationships with their stakeholders. If stakeholders or the public are not happy with the experience they have on their websites, they may not visit the website again. As noted in the literature, when organizations establish trust through dialogic communication it provides on its websites, stakeholders or the publics could patronize their product or services. The communication that exists between an organization and its stakeholders constitute part of their experience. Thus, the PR industry being an advocate of two-way communication has reasons and needs to be dialogic. Every aspect of the dialogic principles is of importance to creating a lasting relationship, which in turn would yield more revenue for the firm.

The purpose of this study is to apply the five principles of dialogic communication by Kent and Taylor (19998, 2003) through content analysis of top 50 and bottom 50 of the top 250 Global PR firms according to Holmes report. In addition, the researcher also coded for the presence blogs and social media widgets (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube etc.). The researcher also conducted an aggregated analysis to assess if dialogic principles were incorporated in the top and bottom 50 websites. In addition, we conducted a one-sample parametric test to access the difference in usability and dialogic loop between the top 50 and the bottom 50 firm's websites. In the light of the findings, important insights were found from

the research. The three research questions posed were adequately answered alongside other findings.

### **Presence of Dialogic Communication**

The research investigated the presence of dialogic communication. The result of analysis reveals there is clear evidence of dialogic principles incorporated in the websites. According to Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009), a lot of concentration has been placed on PR as a management function while neglecting its relational purpose. The relational function serves as a way to broaden public relations initiatives that would benefit the organization and the host publics (Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009). The results of the analysis were a little poor compared to past research (Taylor et al., 2001). All the websites provided major links to other parts of the websites, and almost all displayed logo of the organization, while few provided search engine box and site maps. The research also found that the PR firm's websites were consistent in providing useful contents, which is evident in their display of about us, agency contact information, expertise/ service, employees/teams/ people, clients/projects, and case studies, but did poorly in the conservation of visitors. Kent and Taylor (1998) maintain that sites should not target the media or clients; it should target the general public as well. The result from the aggregated analysis on conservation of visitors and usefulness of information revealed that only 1% of the websites coded displayed posting of last updated date and time with 42% page load time. This shows that PR firms' websites failed in incorporating this principle fully.

However, a majority of the websites do not provide opportunities for user for feedback (comment box) or a newsletter. Low incorporation of conservation of visitors was also found

in the analysis- posting of last updated date, time and page load time. This feature shows that the websites are active and not abandoned. In addition, return visits were not adequately incorporated which would encourage clients to return to the site. This finding is consistent with Taylor et al. (2001) which in their findings reported 100% of websites with mission statements, while 95% displayed logos of the organization. In addition, the strength and weaknesses of the websites design are somewhat similar. This shows changes that PR firms can work through in order to expand their dialogic strength. If PR firms are not adequately incorporating the features of dialogic communication, it would affect its two-way communication it sets to achieve. Even Grunig (2013) asserts that there is a need to add the four models of public relations to include a “two-way model of excellence or a dialogic communication” (p. 18).

### **Provision of Useful Information**

The research also investigated if PR firm websites provide relevant information for stakeholders and prospective clients. 99% of the websites displayed organizational logos, which is an important part of the organizational image that visually helps connect people to the organization. Results gathered revealed that they targeted both stakeholders and prospective clients. Of the websites coded, 62% provided agency contact information, 76% provided list of employees/ team/ people, 89% provided area of expertise, 57% provided information about case studies, and 62% provided information about clients and projects. These features are displayed in the home page of the website which makes it easier for stakeholders or prospective clients to see.

## Usability and Dialogic Features

The study also examined the difference between the top 50 and the both 50 in terms of incorporation of website usability and dialogic loop features. The results from the research are strikingly similar to the research of Wirtz and Ngondo (2013) which revealed that bottom 50 PR websites are not as dialogic as the top 50 PR websites. The chi-square result shows that top 50 firms displayed more site maps,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 25.92, p < .01$ . In terms of major links to other parts of the website, both the bottom and the top 50 websites all contained the feature  $X^2(0, N = 50) = 0, p > .01$  (there is no significant difference). Top website also contained more search engine,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 28.88, p < .01$  according to the result of the data analysis. However, the bottom 50 displayed more about us,  $X^2(1, N = 50) = 46.08, p < .01$ . Dialogic loops and ease of interface are necessary if the PR practitioner wants to improve user experience and develop a two-way communication with the public. It is widely known that in most organizations, websites are designed and maintained by web designers with inadequate knowledge how a website communicates with the audience. PR practitioners need to work closely with web designers in making sure these principles are incorporated on their websites.

The results of this study suggest that public relations firms' websites offer stakeholders access to information and services online through their websites. However, they are not incorporating fully the principles of dialogic communication according to Kent and Taylor (1998). The data gathered from the aggregated analysis of the websites revealed that the firms did poorly in incorporating the dialogic loop with variables such as comment box and newsletter. Weakness was also detected in the conservation of visitors, but they did considerably well in providing useful information and ease of interface. Judging from

previous research by Kent and Taylor (1998, 2001); Taylor et al (2000); Russell (2008); and Wirtz and Ngondo (2013), these studies shows less presence or incorporation of dialogic loops. However, some of the past research investigated different online platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. For example, the research carried out by Kent and Taylor (2001) found 94% opportunity for user response, 44% opportunity to vote on issues, 46% survey to voice opinion on issues, and 6% offers regular information through email, which is however below expectation.

Furthermore, the findings also revealed a lack of feedback features, which could influence dialogic strength of public relations activities online. This weakness revealed in the area of incorporation of dialogue offered by Kent and Taylor (1998) restricts the opportunity for PR practitioners to gather information and observe the public attitude, stance, or position. Gustavsen and Tilley (2003) asserts that the lack of feedback features are read as organizations type of communication it wants to establish with the publics.

### **Limitations and Direction for Future Research**

During the course of the research, limitations were observed. First, the study focused on top 50 and bottom 50 of the 2016 top 250 global public relations firms by Holmes report. The sample size is small which may not provide adequate statistical power. Secondly, since internet/website research is a fast growing field, and, as such, research should be conducted again to evaluate the changes in dialogic features incorporated by PR websites. Considering these limitations, it would be more valuable if additional websites and variables were explored and coded. It is however evident that there are inadequate dialogic communication features incorporated on many PR websites. However, the top global PR websites are

exploring the features better than the bottom websites. Subsequent research should explore the multimethod approach, which includes survey, content analysis, and interview for a more in-depth and adequate data gathering.

### **Conclusion**

Dialogic communication has been researched as a useful tool for creating and maintaining public relationships, and the web is an essential platform for PR practitioners to relate with the public. Blending this area of study together gives a clear view of website use for dialogic purposes. Pieczka (2010) argues that despite the known importance of dialogic communication as a way to establish better two-way communication, practitioners have shown a poor grasp of the concept. The findings by Pieczka (2010) show that PR practitioners are yet to develop better dialogic tools or incorporate already existing tools by Kent and Taylor (1998). McAllister (2005) also stressed the fact that websites are not fully utilized in displaying dialogic potential. Websites are built to make it easier for organizations to relate with the public and build relationships through dialogue (Taylor et al., 2001).

It is clear from the present study that PR websites are not fully incorporating the principles of dialogic communication. Results from the aggregated data shows that the presence of dialogic communication incorporated on the PR websites are significant, but however poor considering the fact that public relations is about maintain mutual beneficial relationship- the bedrock of two-way symmetric model of public relations. The study also shows through chi-square that the top 50 PR websites are more dialogic than the bottom 50 PR websites. Kent et al. (2003) assert that certain website features and design are paramount if an organization intends to build and maintain mutual relationship. Wirtz and Ngondo

(2013) also noted that “as useful as the dialogic features can be, practitioners need to make sure that they are using the right mix of features to achieve their goals” (p. 25). In conclusion, the study further shows that top/high ranked public relations agencies are more dialogic than the lower ranked agencies as they provide more opportunities for user response, better website usability, and conservation of visitors.



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## APPENDIX

### Global PR Code Sheet

Usability/ Ease of Interface feature Yes (1) No (2)

1. Site map
2. Major Link(s) to other page
3. Search Engine box
4. About US/ Who we are

Usefulness of information to clients and potential clients

1. Agency contact information
2. List of Employees/Team/People
3. Client list/ Customers
4. Area of expertise/ Service
5. Case Studies
6. Publicity about clients/ projects
7. Logo of the organization on front page
8. Mission Statement
9. News

Conservation of visitors

1. Posting of last updated time and date
2. Page load time (less than 4secs)

Return Visit

1. Blogs
2. Bookmark /RSS feeds
3. Quick Links to other Web sites
4. Downloadable information (pdf, doc, pptx files etc.)

Dialogic Loop

1. Contact US
2. Comment Box
3. Offer regular information (newsletters or emails)
4. Social Media Widgets

VITA  
CHARLES CHIDIEBERE AKWARI

Personal Data:                      Date of Birth: December 13, 1986  
  
    Place of Birth: Lagos, Nigeria

Education:                          Certificate, Linguistics, and Communication Studies,  
  
    University of Port Harcourt, Rivers, Nigeria 2006  
  
    B.A. Linguistics, and Communication Studies,  
  
    University of Port Harcourt, Rivers, Nigeria 2010  
  
    M.A. Professional Communication, East Tennessee  
  
    State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 2017

Professional Experience:            Customer Service Representative, Emerging Markets  
  
    Telecommunication Service (Etisalat), Lagos,  
    Nigeria  
  
    September, 2013 to January, 2015  
  
    Student Help Desk, Information Technology Service,  
  
    East Tennessee State University, Johnson City,  
    Tennessee  
  
    October, 2015 to May, 2016  
  
    Graduate Assistant, Center for Academic Achievement,  
  
    East Tennessee State University, Johnson City,  
    Tennessee  
  
    August, 2016 to May, 2017