Leveraging Organizational Innovation for Strategic Reputation Management

Jeffrey L. Courtright

School of Communication, Illinois State University, Normal, IL, USA

Peter M. Smudde

School of Communication, Illinois State University, Normal, IL, USA

ABSTRACT

Writing conventions and communication genres are the stuff of corporate message creation. Yet their role in reputation management has been ignored. Using the communication and perception of 'innovation' to illustrate the importance of understanding genre theory in reputation management, this article proposes a process model of identity, image, and reputation that situates message design in the context of diffusion of innovations theory. To demonstrate the model's utility and apply genre principles, we analyze recent strategic communications from selected companies in the Reputation Institute's 2008 Global Pulse Project (five rated highly on innovation, compared with five companies ranked lower on overall reputation). Results suggest common themes, stylistic choices, and discourse patterns used to frame companies' identities, produce favorable stakeholder images, and build an 'innovative' reputation. Corporate Reputation Review (2009) 12, 245–269. doi:10.1057/crr.2009.18

KEYWORDS: corporate identity; corporate reputation; discourse conventions; genre; innovation; organizational persona

INTRODUCTION

It is no secret that effective crisis communication is tied not just to what is said in an organization's defense, but also *how* it is said. Numerous studies of corporate *apologia* attest

to the fact that genre considerations – concerns for the interaction of form and content with the situation (and/or purpose of the message) – are important to immediate image repair and a long-term focus on corporate reputation. Yet neither the corporate reputation literature nor that of organizational rhetoric have focused on the prospective (ie future-focused) possibilities that genre theory holds for message design's role in the promotion of favorable images among stakeholders and positive corporate reputation. Genre theory and message design play a vital, combined role in building corporate reputation, and the communication of organizational innovation illustrates this role as companies use it as a means to build reputations as innovative organizations.

Our essay proceeds through several subjects. The paper begins with a brief theoretical discussion of innovation from the perspective of communication/rhetoric, the reputation process, and message design's place within it. Of particular note is a composite model of corporate identity, image, and reputation that situates message design at its center. The paper also explicates genre theory, writing conventions, and their roles in the formation and maintenance of discourse communities, using a brief review of genre theory and its application to organizational discourse. For us the term, 'discourse' refers to instances of texts that include both their form *and* content, not the

more-restricted sense of discourse as only verbal utterances in the tradition of Habermas (1985a,b) or Austin (1974) and Searle (1969). Then the analysis section examines specific discourse genres from selected companies in the Reputation Institute's *2008 Global Pulse Project*. The analysis will focus on a sample of these organizations' recent strategic communication efforts to communicate innovation. The results suggest common themes, stylistic choices, and discourse patterns they typically may use to frame expressions of corporate identity to produce favorable images in the minds of stakeholders and to build and sustain corporate reputation as an innovator. The paper's final section presents implications and questions for future research.

INNOVATION AS RHETORICAL SITUATION

Every organization, whether it is for-profit, not-for-profit, government-sponsored, or non-government-sponsored, constantly addresses to publics and stakeholders what makes it different and better than other, perhaps competing organizations. These matters concern the reputation process and message design's place within it. In a broader way, however, these matters reflect to publics and stakeholders ideas about an organization's innovativeness. In this way innovation comprises a rhetorical situation (ie an attempt to shape the environment, not just respond to it) and a response to an exigence (ie something is provided for the market to meet what is lacking in it). In other words, innovation is both communicated and perceived.

Defining the term 'innovation' and its derivatives (eg innovativeness, radical innovation, and discontinuous innovation) has been problematic at best. Studies in the business literature (eg De Meyer, 2007; Garcia and Calantone, 2002; Godin, 2006; Goswami and Mathew, 2005; McDermott and O'Connor, 2002) amply demonstrate the extent of this semantic quagmire. What is apparent from

these and similar studies is that 'innovation' is a word that generally conveys positive ideas about newness, uniqueness, value, benefits, improvement, change, development, etc.¹ These ideas are at the heart of our project: Corporations address innovation in generally colloquial terms because such a semantic approach is appropriate for their audiences and communicative purposes. Highly intellectualized senses and references of 'innovation', although useful in academic research, are not as potent in everyday discourse between an organization and its publics. The appeal of Moore's (1999) perspective of innovations as a matter of effective market positioning and communication is an important example of this colloquial, business utility and the province of 'real-world' reputation management. Governmental views of 'innovation' do not stray much further as they include basic economic perspectives of (1) advocating 'industrialization by actively directing the flow of resources to firms and encouraging firms to invest such resources in technological upgrading' for nations far from 'the technological frontier', and (2) 'playing a merely facilitative role that allows innovation networks to thrive without restraint' for nations nearest that frontier (Mahmood and Rufin, 2006: 339; also see Heraud, 2004).

The communication of innovations illustrates the duality of situations as viewed in rhetorical theory. On one hand, organizations' messages are rhetorical responses to situations (Bitzer, 1968). On the other hand, organizations try to shape the situation through such messages in order to make the environment more conducive to the introduction and promotion of the innovation into the marketplace. Bitzer's (1968) original article posited that a situation is not rhetorical unless it presents an exigence – 'a flaw or imperfection' – that must be addressed with a fitting response. Surrounding this exigence are various constraints and an audience to be addressed. This view was met

with criticism: that it objectifies the situation, because it implies that situation is the cause and rhetorical messages are the effect (eg Consigny, 1974; Vatz, 1973). In reality, then, rhetoric serves both functions – to respond to situations and audience perceptions – and to influence both of them.

Clearly a completely objectivist view of situations cannot withstand scrutiny when we consider the complexity of organizational rhetoric. Organizations address multiple audiences in their response to often competing interpretations of their environments. Likewise, they are not limited in the options about how to respond. What has become clear since the initial controversy over the ‘rhetorical situation’ is that messages are instrumental both reactively and proactively. Benoit (1994), in pointing out that the objectivist treatment of situation has persisted in the rhetorical literature, observes that situations may be framed in a variety of ways. Benoit’s position is based on Kenneth Burke’s (1969a: xv) argument that all rhetoric is framed using one of five emphases known as ‘his’ pentad: Agent (Who did it?), Act (What was done?), Scene (Where and/or when was it done?), Agency (How was it done?), or Purpose (Why was it done?).

Innovation as Rhetorical Exigence

There are two basic views to innovation. From an organization’s point of view, innovation concerns its ability to create new and better products and services. From the market’s point of view, innovation concerns how new and better things get into socio-economic systems. We believe innovation must be viewed through both lenses simultaneously because both parties, organizations and consumers/customers, are engaged in rhetorical acts that impress their worldviews onto each other and attempt to influence each other through messages about those worldviews.

How the communication of organizational innovation is framed is important to

that innovation’s success. Rogers’ (2003) work emphasizes the importance of organizations presenting innovations to influence audiences. He advanced the idea of the ‘adoption curve’, which is a ‘normal’ curve that accounts for the genesis of products or services as they make it to the mass market. The adoption curve is made up of several components that account for the introduction, growth, maturity, and decline of a market. The adoption curve progresses from ‘innovators’ to ‘skeptics’, and everyone on the curve is either an organization offering innovations of some degree or a customer seeking and implementing wanted innovations. Interestingly, the fundamental attitudes of organizations and customers are similar.

The first (left) half of the curve accounts for the development and growth of a market to maturity, from ‘innovators’ to the ‘early majority’. Innovators are the few geniuses that identify and solve problems in unique ways that present great promise. ‘Early adopters’ have the vision for how to apply innovations’ value toward creating competitive advantage for themselves before anyone else. The ‘early majority’ are the first ones in the mainstream-market to more broadly apply an innovation as the early adopters did and try to obtain similar advantages but on a larger scale. The second (right) half of the adoption curve accounts for a market’s decline, even as people continue to obtain an innovation but to decreasing degrees. In this half of the curve, the ‘late majority’ includes those who have waited to see greater proof of an innovation’s success before adopting it. ‘Laggards’ and, finally, ‘skeptics’ are those who adopt an innovation very late and near the end, respectively, in the product life cycle because few (if any) alternatives exist and they have little choice other than to adopt, if at all. By then the next innovation has already taken off and the cycle begins anew.

But the curve from the early adopters to the early majority is not continuous. This

discontinuity Moore (1999) calls the ‘chasm’ because it is difficult for most early adopters to cross and join the mainstream market. The reason: Early adopters have really only worked with like-minded people and organizations, including innovators. So it takes a major perspective change and a large amount of effective, successful communication to demonstrate an innovation’s value to a mainstream audience that operates by very different values and expectations than those who have enjoyed the innovation almost like a new toy that boosts business.

The critical communication needed to cross the chasm involves an intimate understanding of audiences, the environment, and other factors. This dimension calls for insightful analysis about message design for innovations that has not been done in the relevant organizational communication, public relations, and similar literature. We must turn to Moore (1999), who presents a vital approach to message design, although he does not address its implications for reputation management. He explains how it is that innovators have a new burden of proof they have not experienced before. The innovators and early adopters have a natural, ‘visionary’ interest in an innovation itself and communicate the unique, unprecedented value to those most receptive to adoption of new ideas. But those in the mainstream market are ‘pragmatists’ who ‘are more interested in the market’s response to a product than in the product itself’ (1999: 156). The result is very different framing of arguments and degrees of evidential support for those arguments to audiences about innovations and the organizations that offer them.

Figure 1 shows an elaboration on Moore’s (1999: 157) ‘Competitive-Positioning Compass’. The single most-important point in the figure is that it provides us with a useful means for both audience analysis and communication development that includes an organization’s view of itself. The compass shows precisely the kind of audience atti-

tudes and organizational thinking that is needed to design an effective message platform for any innovation. The process for the diffusion of innovations – awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption – and the effective use of communication channels in that process – mass media, biased intermediaries, unbiased intermediaries, interpersonal relationships, and personal experience – are instrumental here (Lattimore *et al.*, 2009). Note in Figure 1 that the move from the upper left quadrant to the lower right quadrant is the realm of argument organizations need to successfully cross the chasm in the product adoption curve. The substance of an organization’s arguments changes significantly from visionary to pragmatic because of the mainstream market’s pressures on organizations considering an innovation. The crossing of the chasm should make attention to message making an imperative for the organization that wishes to create and maintain a reputation for innovation. While this attention to message design likely occurs in practice, the models found within the image and reputation literature fail to make the communication process itself central to the process of reputation building, which is the very ‘stuff’ of all reputation management.

MODELING THE MESSAGE DESIGN PROCESS INTO REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

Although scholars have given some attention to communication’s role in reputation management (eg Brønn and Berg, 2005; Schultz *et al.*, 2000), that role has been, in the main, broadly construed. This is not surprising because this literature of necessity has focused on defining and demarcating the key terms of identity, image, and reputation. We grant that attention to particular communication concerns has been paid (eg visual identity (eg van den Bosch *et al.*, 2005); how narratives may build reputation (Dowling, 2006; Vendelø, 1998); the media’s role in influencing corporate reputation (Dowling and

Figure 1: Competitive -positioning compass

Weeks, 2008), and how messages chosen during crises relate to reputation (eg Coombs, 2007). However, no one model has placed message design at the heart of reputation building in such a way that any rhetorical or communication theory (cf. Ihlen, 2004) may be employed to deepen our understanding of how messages may shape identity in order to influence stakeholder images and change or sustain corporate reputation. In this brief section we propose a model that reflects extant literature in corporate communication and reputation.

As the corporate reputation literature clearly indicates, corporate identity is an expression of what organizational members explicitly recognize as what the organization stands for – its ‘unique characteristics – which are rooted in the behaviors of the organization’ (van Riel and Balmer, 1997: 341). The ‘identity mix’ (communication, symbolism and behaviors) influence perceptions of organizational members and external audiences.

A corporate identity of innovation, we suggest from a communication/rhetorical point of view, is comprised of at least three components: the actual degree of innovation that is enacted and/or recognized by an organization’s own members, the type(s) of innovation(s) they view as central to their organization, and the resulting external publics’ perceptions of the organization as an innovator. At the left side of the model, then, we begin with corporate identity and its link to innovation. The degree and types of innovations create perceptions within the organization; its members have come to associate with the organization’s distinctiveness. (For further discussion of corporate identity’s reflexive nature (ie as both the product of and influence on organizational communication), see Cheney and Christensen (2001); Gioia *et al.* (2000), and Hagen (2008).)

In our model, shown in Figure 2, the light-gray arrow indicates the influence of these perceptions on the message design

process. Research necessarily includes (a) an understanding of the organization and how members perceive it; (b) the situation that management, public relations, human resources, marketing, and/or advertising are planning to address (Daymon and Holloway, 2002; Stacks, 2002; Watson and Noble, 2005); and (c) how audiences might perceive different message strategies and tactics. From this set of information, a public relations practitioner, for example, creates a message platform (ie a simple outline of the central idea/thesis/slogan for a campaign and key supporting 'proof' points, all of which the practitioner wants publics to remember even if they forget everything else). In communication, like architecture, form follows function. Corporate communicators select particular communication genres because the conventions (ie rules) for using them and using them well fit the purpose of the desired communication effort and enable effective framing of the message platform in light of that purpose and the balance of considerations for both the organization and its target audience(s). Then, and only then, does the writer apply the message platform in detailed text with verbal and, perhaps, visual content, including the formatting of the final communication piece according to the conventions (see Smudde and Courtright, 2010).

The medium-gray arrow indicates the next steps in the communication of the message(s) to different audiences as defined by Rogers (2003) and Moore (1999). We present these in their order of audience's receptivity *to* innovations, not innovators' views of audiences, because the value that reputation management adds to an organization is ultimately measured by communication outcomes – whether and how well audiences responded according to plan. The message-design factors covered in Figure 1 come into play here for each of the audiences along the adoption curve. Whichever audience is targeted, its perceptions of an organization and its innovation are based on past experiences,

current communication, and future expectations and assumptions. The top box in Figure 2, then, shows that audiences not only process information about an innovation, but they also process whether the organization's identity as communicated is consistent with the persona conveyed (implicitly or explicitly) through the message plus what they already know about the organization.

The desired result, from a communication/rhetoric perspective, is identification, which Kenneth Burke (1966, 1969) explains as that which emphasizes the common ground people share. Yet because people are inherently separate from one another, identification also entails division simultaneously with that sense of unity. To bridge that division, people use language to turn that separation into oneness with each other. In this way people seek common ground or 'substance' with one another because it serves as a shared context for communication and the basis for one's attitudes. There can be multiple identifications achieved by audience perceptions (in the form of images). The most enduring of these images create and sustain corporate reputation, and the examples we cover in this article will demonstrate this point. Our model, then, necessarily leads us back to the organization's corporate identity, because feedback from audiences and evaluations of communication efforts influence how the organization communicates in the future, but those perceptions also influence how the organization's members view the organization (because they are also members of external audiences as well as being internal audience members). The production and reproduction of corporate identity, therefore, includes attempts to identify with audiences and resulting identifications that build and reinforce reputation.²

The 'corporate identity' box in our model employ terms from the organizational rhetoric literature to alleviate the identity-image confusion. One important move is the replacement of 'corporate identity' with the

Figure 2: Genre-based, rhetorical model of corporate reputation management

term ‘corporate persona’. Owing to the fact that some authors use the term image to refer to the corporate identity that an organization communicates rather than as a receiver-based concept (ie image is perceived by audiences (eg Moffitt, 1994, 1999: 14–18)), we prefer the rhetorical notion that organizations communicate who they are through *personae* (McMillan, 1987; also see Cheney, 1992). The reason for our preference is because organizations most likely do not completely convey their corporate identities in every message they strategically employ. Such *personae* – along with audience members’ experiences within a particular context (Moffitt, 1994; Williams and Moffitt, 1997) – result in interpretations that help shape images of the organization in the audience’s minds. Multiple images, of course, then lead to long-term reputation. For internal audiences, corporate identity or *persona* (and, by implication, externally derived images and reputation – see the dotted arrows in Figure 2) is recursive because organizational members

also are part of external publics. This recursive influence contributes to organizational identity through identification – organizational identification in the sense most frequently used in the organizational behavior and organizational communication literatures. Organizational members manage multiple identities (Cheney, 1991) but, most important for our model, identify with the organization in ways that other stakeholders do not.

To explain the model’s center box, in the next sections of the essay we provide explanations and examples of what specifically is meant by ‘genre’ and ‘discourse conventions’, but a few nuances of our model should be noted. Our model shows that each box related to and from the central message-design box includes much more than the typical foci of organizational culture, identity, and reputation. Each of the model’s three outer boxes links these concepts to the specific concern of innovation and outcomes that should accrue when an organization builds its reputation as an innovator. As part

of the organizational culture, innovation must become enacted and embedded through strategic planning, performance management, and processes. Organization culture is both the context and the catalyst for communication (ie message design and dissemination), innovation, action, and all interactions with internal and external audiences. Organizational culture also is the realm for making sense of internal and external audiences' knowledge, opinions, and behaviors. With regard to external audiences, reputation should lead to value, benefits, and competitiveness. External audiences, as outsiders looking in, must rely on information from an organization and others (ie third parties) as they observe, evaluate, and act in ways that fulfill their own needs and expectations. External audiences take in organizational messages and (1) directly influence organizational culture because of their reactions to those messages and their behaviors toward an organization and (2) indirectly influence internal audiences through the mass media. For internal audiences, organizational identity should lead to a shared vision and continued organizational viability. Internal audiences are subject to discourse from organizational officials and filtered messages from external audiences. As insiders looking in and out, internal audiences have a direct affect on organizational culture and success. They are the literal faces of their organizations and have the responsibility to ensure that they both live up to and live out their organizations' goals for personal, professional, and market-based reasons.

Perhaps the most important dynamic in the model is the 'convection' of all discursive actions (written and oral) indicated by the arrows between blocks and their affects on an organization and message design. Indeed, the kinds of people on the adoption curve (ie from visionaries to skeptics) are key because their marketplace perspectives influence innovation internally and externally. For example, the loops between messages

circling back into an organization fuels competition *within* the organization to legitimize innovation. The reason is that 'competition takes place at the level of the corporate agenda, not at the level of competing products' (Moore, 1999: 132). At an organizational level, visionaries within and without the organization seek bold change, assist in the development of new value propositions, and act as sponsors to help overcome resistance to innovation in the organization and in the marketplace. Pragmatists seek disciplined change, 'are vying with visionaries for dollars to fund projects ... [and] work to educate the company on the risks and costs involved' (Moore, 1999: 132). In this dynamism, message design concerns all matters about innovation and, consequently, reputation that hinge upon it.

Message design is thus the linchpin in the creation and maintenance of organizational culture and identity as well as external image(s) and reputation. Corporate identity is conveyed through message design in the form of a desired image, a corporate persona. We have argued that message design, therefore, is central to reputation building. However, before we illustrate how message design is of particular importance in linking innovation to an organization's reputation, we provide a brief explication of genre theory, writing conventions, and their role in the formation and maintenance of discourse communities so that the examples we provide later in this essay may be appreciated fully.

Genre Theory, Writing Conventions, and Discourse Communities

Genre concerns have been with us since Aristotle, who argued that three specific types of situations (forensic, deliberative, and epideictic) necessitated the use of specific forms and types of argument. Logical appeals also exhibited a concern for form, with the syllogistic reasoning and a particular type of argument, enthymemes, associated with them. Rhetorical use of genres thus began

as guidelines for the creation of messages. Although Aristotle's ideas are noted in general treatments of organizational discourse today (Cheney *et al.*, 2004: 86; Heracleous, 2004: 181), most use of genres in organizational rhetoric serve as *post hoc* methods of rhetorical and literary criticism. We applaud (and have used) such methods, for there is much to be learned from examples of corporate practices done well or gone awry. However, we maintain that genres and their attendant writing conventions may be used in the same way the Greeks used rhetoric: prospectively to address audiences as discourse communities.

Genre studies within the speech communication tradition are tied in part to Bitzer's (1968) 'Rhetorical Situation' article referred to earlier, for many studies have treated speech types or genres as responses to the constraints posed by situations and those related to audience characteristics or expectations. Chief among these has been the work of Campbell and Jamieson (nd), who argued that genres are a 'constellation of forms', a unique fusion of style, substance, and situation, recurring over time. Among the genres studied have been eulogies (Goldzwig and Sullivan, 1995; Jamieson and Campbell, 1982), various forms of discourse associated with the U.S. presidency (Campbell and Jamieson, 1986, 2008), the diatribe (Windt, 1972), and messages that are prophetic in tone; that is, apocalyptic rhetoric (Brummett, 1984) and the jeremiad (Johannesen, 1985). Each of these genres has been shown to have specific audience needs, situational constraints on the message source, style and tone, and identifiable message strategies (specific content may vary, but the broader message strategies remain the same).

A generic approach 'aims at understanding rhetorical practice over time by discerning recurrent patterns that reflect the rules that practitioners follow ... Those rules outline the parameters within which symbolic action will express the rhetor's motives,

will be acknowledged by the audience as a form or recognized as a convention for expressing intention, and will be capable of satisfying audience expectations' (Campbell and Jamieson, 1986: 295). This approach to generic analysis 'aims to illuminate rather than classify' (Swales, 1990: 43). So we can think of corporate messages as fitting specific genres of discourse that can be studied for their rhetorical and social dimensions. Approaches to genre found in linguistics, and in applications found in the technical communication literature, emphasize the latter.

From a linguistic perspective, genres of discourse may be defined not only in terms of the forms they take – the discourse conventions that have been used time and time again – but by the purposes they accomplish (Miller, 1984) and the audiences for whom they are useful towards those ends. Regarding this latter point, audiences who use and respond to a common set of genres and discourse conventions may be said to constitute a discourse community. For example, Smudde (2009) explains that there is a large community that upholds conventions about enacting public relations discourse for external and internal audiences. Such social agreement about texts gets at the heart of discourse genre. As Swales asserts, a genre's communicative purposes 'are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience' (1990: 58). Swales' perspective thus unites rhetorical and linguistic approaches to genres.

In short, multiple audiences use – and respond to – genres and discourse conventions. As Smudde (2009) argues, categories of public relations discourse derive from conventions for discursive action that are

upheld by members of the large community of people in the field of public relations (and other disciplines) in both industry and academe. That is, the broad community of people (eg professional organizations for public relations, university curricula, scholars/researchers, publishers, practitioners, news media, organizational departments like marketing, sales, legal, and human resources) who are competent in or work with public relations means that the genres of public relations discourse are institutionalized, but they also allow people to adapt them to specific organizational needs and communication situations.

The social process of creating any public relations discourse type is governed by contextual cues about the order of things reflected in the text itself, which is shared among diverse publics to induce cooperation with them. As Killingsworth and Gilbertson observe, 'In selecting appropriate genres, writers model appropriate actions. They tell the audience something about the action implicit in the discourse and something about how they want the audience to respond Genres are shorthand codes for describing typical kinds of communal actions' (Killingsworth and Gilbertson, 1992: 73, 87). The categories of public relations discourse, then, are major genres of public relations that practitioners create and members of a discourse community respond to, for they exhibit formal appeal: As Burke puts it, 'form is the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite' (1968: 31) by reflecting certain discursive patterns (cf. Burke, 1968: 124–149), that is, genres.

What is striking to us is how little has been done, particularly in the public relations and organizational rhetoric literatures, to take what we know about genres and discourse conventions and apply them to the creation of organizational messages. There are at least two reasons for this. First, the majority of what we know in the organizational rhetoric

literature comes, as referred to earlier, from *post hoc*, retrospective studies of organizational crisis communication. Granted, the research programs of Benoit (1995a,b; Benoit and Brinson, 1994; Benoit and Czerwinski, 1997; Blaney *et al.*, 2002; Brinson and Benoit, 1996, 1999) and Hearit (eg Courtright and Hearit, 2002; Hearit, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1999; Hearit and Brown, 2004) have generated multiple studies of corporate *apologiae* (for a review, cf. Hearit, 2001), no rhetorical studies to our knowledge have proposed that typologies such as Benoit's (1995a) be used in *propter hoc*, prospective scholarship to move beyond the logistics of crisis plans to scenarios to develop standby statements grounded in an understanding of apologia as a genre. We recognize that this is somewhat problematic since apologia does not conform to the generic parameters set by theorists such as Campbell and Jamieson (nd), for not all crisis situations have the same type of exigence, constraints, or audience needs. (For further discussion of this problem and an explanation of why this may occur, cf. Rowland and Jerome, 2004.)

Second, there may be a resistance to applying genre theory more generally to all types of organizational discourse because some forms (eg memos, news releases, public service announcements, etc) may at first blush appear mundane and even uninteresting. Some of us may resist the idea because there are handbooks and writing textbooks that have presented any genre or discourse convention as merely following a formula or recipe for format, style, and basic content. Some industry articles (eg McCleneghan, 2005; Pelham, 2000; Ryan, 1995) offer writers' preferred recipes for news releases, for example, but at best display an implicit and incomplete understanding of the reasons behind the discourse conventions they invoke. As we explained earlier, however, there are theoretical reasons behind the expected patterns. Yet, despite a call for studies of corporate communication that employ discourse

conventions, genres, and other rhetorical concepts in a prospective manner (eg Smudde, 2004), we have found no studies of corporate communication criticism that lead to concerns for message design (for one exception, cf. Courtright and Slaughter, 2007). Only one experimental design (Coombs and Schmidt, 2000) has tested Benoit's (1995a) image repair typology of apologetic strategies, but the study stops short of offering recommendations (cf. Smudde and Courtright, 2008).

The lack of focus on strategic, prospective message design, let alone attention to the genre theory and discourse conventions associated with it, thus pervades both the literatures of corporate reputation and organizational rhetoric. The same is also true of the literature that indirectly links innovation to corporate reputation management. Our model suggests that this is a major gap in these and related literatures that it fills. What few studies in the corporate apologia literature might capitalize on the importance of innovation to image building and reputation management do not because of their focus on particular strategies used to turn crisis situations into opportunities. One such strategy is the use of model and anti-model arguments (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969: 362–371). Certain crisis situations provide an organization with the opportunity to turn criticism into a justification for becoming the innovative leader within its industry. The company responds to the crisis by framing the accusations against them as the anti-model (ie the pattern of behavior that is not acceptable industry practice). Companies such as Merrill Lynch (Brand, 2007) and, we would argue, Johnson and Johnson's introduction of tamper-proof packaging after the famous Tylenol case, created the 'model argument' – that the organizations now were industry leaders due to their innovations. The Merrill Lynch study and others like it (eg Sellnow and Brand, 2001) look at model/anti-model arguments within crisis situations but only

implicitly relate them to their function in conjunction with discourse conventions and genre considerations.

The need, therefore, exists to place message design, genre theory, and discourse considerations to the forefront of communicating corporate identity and managing reputation. The next section demonstrates the utility of the model we have proposed toward that end.

ANALYSIS

For this study, we have chosen to examine three corporate discourse convention genres: news releases, annual reports, and websites.³ The discourse analyzed come from the websites of companies ranked in the most recent reports from the Reputation Institute's (RI) *2008 Global Pulse Project*, which ranks the top 200 companies based on overall reputation. We elected to compare organizational discourse from those that ranked highest and lowest on the measure's 'innovation' component. Although one would assume that all companies perceived to have strong reputations would reflect standard characteristics of writing genres in public discourse, it stood to reason that the discourse of those toward the lower end of the rankings might provide contrast with that of the companies ranked highest on the measure's 'innovation' component (RI, 2008b: 8). The highest-ranked companies include (in order) Toyota, Google, Sony, Novo Nordisk, and Ferrero. However, even though Ferrero ranked fourth overall and in terms of perceived innovation, the company was omitted from our study because Ferrero Group publishes no annual reports. To replace Ferrero and maintain our focus, we chose Walt Disney, which ranked second on innovation and fifth overall in a separate U.S. report (RI, 2008a). For comparison, the lowest-ranked companies in our study were, according to overall global ranking, Fujitsu, Kingfisher, Samsung, Airbus, and Indian Oil. We dropped Poland's PTC because no English version of its website

existed, and Dufeng Motor Corporation, because we could not access its website server.⁴

News Releases

The news release genre is ideal for this study in that it presents, in effect, the organization's ideal news story, if it had complete control over what was published or carried in the news media. So we can see in this genre the most explicit statements about an organization's view of itself and, when apt, its innovations and innovativeness. As might be expected, the news releases from our ten companies chosen for analysis are straightforward in their use of conventions: an attention-getting headline and inverted-pyramid pattern of organization: a lead paragraph that summarizes the main point of the story (answering the pentadic questions noted earlier), subsequent paragraph(s) that expand on the lead, and expendable material, not essential to the story should it be shortened by the news outlet that uses its information. We qualitatively analyzed each company's news releases from October 2007 to September 2008 (downloaded from online press rooms), yielding a total of 1029 items. In all cases, the releases conformed to this basic pattern.

There is more at work here than mere form, however. Closer examination reveals these press releases to be a subset of the broader genre that Aristotle called *epideictic*. Such messages provide speakers the opportunity to extol the values that the audience holds dear and condemn those not valued by the audience, community, or culture (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). This reinforcement of traditional values Sullivan (1993) calls *epideictic's conservative function*, that is, it preserves those values. The acknowledgement or disparagement of values is called its *celebratory function*. Additionally, Sullivan notes that *epideictic* also fulfills an *educational function* (ie messages inculcate values) and a *performative function* (ie a speaker displays

rhetorical technique and ability with compelling content).

These four functions clearly obtain when an organization becomes the 'speaker'. With few exceptions, each of this study's subjects employ news releases to invoke and appeal to values. Financial news, management-change announcements, and other standard information imply core values shared by the organization and its publics, particularly investors. Product news and reports of innovation, however, capitalize on two important opportunities that top innovative companies employ – and Fujitsu and Samsung, as members of the industry that Moore used to explicate the market dynamics for technology innovation. First, product and innovation news uses the strategy of language intensity (see Borchers, 2005: 187–188) to dramatize the story's main point and the values connected with it. Samsung, also a technology company, does this to some degree, but not as much as Fujitsu and the others. Indian Oil, for example, tends to highlight awards it has won and its CEO's role in trade organizations. Airbus predominantly publicizes new orders from various airlines. Kingfisher presents the extreme case because its releases only address values of broader appeal with two stories in September 2008 regarding environmental sustainability.

The second opportunity on which news releases capitalize is what Sullivan (1993) adds to his list of *epideictic* functions: the speaker's *ethos*, or, for our purposes, corporate image and reputation building. For example, most product and issue-oriented messages do this for all ten companies through the use of quotations. What separates the top innovators from the others, however, is strategic use of quotes from experts and organizations partnering with them. Under the heading of Burke's pentadic term, 'Agent', innovative companies appear to strive for additional credibility by not relying on quotes from company officials alone. Unsurprisingly, all the news

releases we examined announce what an organization is doing, featuring innovations in the story's lead with the company's name as the active subject. Using Burke's pentad, the corporate Agent, the organizations partners (if any), and the innovative Act would seem to be the most important symbolic terms to emphasize. Indeed, the headlines are shortened versions of lead paragraphs, which is a pattern that places the company and then its newsworthy innovation first. However, consistent with Miller, Swales, and Campbell and Jamieson, Lassen (2006) suggests that news releases as a genre are driven by their purposes in response to specific situations (ie messages in investor relations, product news releases, etc have different purposes that influence other aspects of the genre when applied to message design). For example, Samsung's news releases announce innovations most often in connection with two major trade shows. Similarly, financial performance and personnel announcements appeal primarily to investor publics because of their emphasis on matters that bear on organizational results and governance. Product-oriented news releases tend to be more focused on innovation than investor-oriented news.

According to Burke, pentadic Purpose easily dissolves into other key terms such as Agent and Act. In news releases publicizing innovations, the Act implies the quality of what the organization does and, by extension, its character; that is, persona. Novo Nordisk's innovations consistently sustain reputation built on a fight against diabetes; Google introduces new user-friendly applications; Disney, of course, focuses on new efforts to entertain. In contrast, Kingfisher, Airbus, and Indian Oil's releases are rather pedestrian. Kingfisher could be perceived as coming late to addressing environmental issues since its news supports government initiatives; Airbus, might be viewed as interested only in sales of planes and financial success; and Indian Oil may be seen as

concerned most about ledgers and prestige within its industry. The innovative companies examined here capitalize on epideictic opportunities to identify with audience values and transcend monetary emphases. Yet the emphasis on Agent and Act allows for underlying Purpose to build company-audience relationships without making the purpose become an end to itself. As Burke writes of purpose, 'ironically, motivational schemes that would feature it less may allow it more' (1969: 291).

In general, news releases that fulfill the expected patterns of the journalistic discourse community display relatively straightforward headlines, leads, and details, and therefore become more useful to gain the attention and acceptance of media gatekeepers. Standard releases for financial and personnel information does the same for a particular audience. What sets apart innovative companies is their use of the genre and its conventions for broader appeal. In particular, Burke's pentad can be used well with his theory of form so that effective message framing by innovative companies invites audiences (particularly consumers and investors) to see themselves benefitting from (ie identify with) an innovation, beginning with its purpose and extending into the details about its benefits. News releases as epideictic discourse function to celebrate the innovations themselves, educate audiences regarding them, preserve values shared with target audiences, perform the company's role as innovator, and to present organizational ethos as such.

Annual Reports

Our second genre is annual reports. Grunig explains that 'the *choice* and *use* of symbols to communicate impressions of an organization' is a vital and ethical part of public relations (Grunig, 1993: 129, emphasis added). This is presented each year as corporations publish their annual reports, and of special importance in any annual report is

the letter to shareholders. In these reports, a company's chairperson or chief executive truly functions as a 'corporate rhetor' (Cheney and Vibbert, 1987), because the letter to shareholders 'tells readers how the corporation performed over the past year and clarifies the company's stance on economic or political trends that may affect its future' (Hager and Scheiber, 1990: 119). To the extent that annual reports portray a company's view of its environment and relevant issues, letters to shareholders especially reflect ethics for corporate communication. Those letters are written for all of a company's constituencies, perhaps some more than others. Shareholders, for example, are the primary owners of a company and have a right to honest and accurate information. Annual reports are potentially the most important documents a company can publish during a year, and should be and reflect an ethical representation of the organization's performance over the previous year.

The sum of information in most annual reports is required (pursuant to a nation's regulations), demanded (on the part of shareholders and other external constituencies), and requested (as a function of a company's selected internal constituencies and its overall public relations and marketing strategies). Balancing all of these concerns is a formidable challenge, and suggests the centrality of ethics for any annual report. In general, annual reports contain two basic forms of information: a narrative about a company's business (usually divided into sections or chapters, including the chair or CEO's letter), and consolidated and summarized financial data (eg income statement, balance sheet, cash flows, management discussion and analysis, footnotes, and auditor's letter assuring compliance with accounting standards). The financial data paint a general picture of an organization's financial viability over several years, typically three years but sometimes more. It is specialized, objective

information in its own right, complementing the report's narrative as well as the detailed data found in the Form 10-K in the United States, which is required under Section 13 of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Act of 1934. Thus, the financial data are critical from both a compliance and an information standpoint; moreover, the data support and are supported by the statements made in the narrative.

A company's constituencies learn from an annual report's total narrative – from its style, tone, and content – about who the company is and what its values are, what its businesses are and how successful they have been, and how the company manages its environments and interacts with its stakeholders. Because each audience has a need to know how and why a company conducted its business the way it did during the year, the narrative portion of an annual report is probably its most important part. It tells the story of a company's performance over the prior year to all of its publics and sets the tone for the year ahead. The narrative is an organization's opportunity to truly influence how its constituencies view it, bolstering its identity and public image through what is said and how it is said. In this regard, the chair's or CEO's letter to shareholders alone is likely the most-read part of any annual report because people look to what the top person in an organization has to say about its performance, business decisions, and future.

In our study, the companies ranked among the top innovators in the *2008 Global Pulse Project* showed consistent compliance with genre conventions for annual reports. Of particular importance is their consistent showcasing of innovation and innovativeness in featured content. For example, Disney made the greatest effort in this area with prominent photographic and graphic images of its productions and attractions. Novo Nordisk also made sure its innovations and innovativeness in its pharmaceutical

products – especially for diabetes – were highlighted prominently with feature articles, photos of leading internal experts, and graphics of business-sector performance. Other examples of emphases on innovation and innovativeness include Sony with a detailed corporate strategy, which features a revitalization plan, outlook, and specific initiatives; and Toyota's thorough analysis of production competitiveness and business overview by market. In contrast, Samsung claims that it 'embraces innovation', but such innovations are in the planning stages and therefore vague in description; that is, presented as promises of innovation.

The companies at the bottom of *Global Pulse's* reputation rankings generally showed an expected lesser level of showcasing innovation/innovativeness. Indeed, the dominant pattern among these companies is to present basic messages about organizational performance on the required dimensions of finances, market, operations, and corporate structure. For example, Indian Oil provides readers with its annual report totally online through dedicated links to it and its sections, which seems at first blush innovative and appropriate. The document, however, is simply divided up into separate PDF files of black-and-white pages for each section, and each section simply presents fundamental, factual messages about the business area or required topics without innovation highlights. In contrast, Samsung provides a full-color report that features artistic photography of personnel and products, but beneath these 'flashy' images are straightforward messages about company performance on required subjects.

Nine of the ten companies' reports feature texts of their top leaders' views of the businesses, and these texts are the first to follow the table of contents and summarized performance data. The one report that does not include such a text is Airbus, which is a summary annual report produced with word-processing software and converted to

a PDF file that has no financials and covers basic business operations by product and activity, including industry, customer service, environment, corporate 'personality', and 2008 outlook. Within the texts of the annual reports of the five innovative companies in this study, all showed different types of innovation, much broader in variety than the innovations found in news releases. Sony's annual report refers to ongoing restructuring of its business as means of innovation and future growth. Google's report plays upon the metaphor of the search engine, emphasizing its innovativeness because the company uses research and development; that is, 'Still Searching' Google Inc. (2008: 1).

It is interesting to note that the reports that have texts from top leaders do not always come from people with the same title across companies. Google's text, for example, is almost seven text-heavy pages of analysis from the founders; then the rest of the report is a reprint of the government-required Form 10-K. Kingfisher includes statements from the chair and the chief executive. Toyota includes 'messages' (ie letters) from the chair, the president, and the executive vice president of accounting. Even though Toyota's report has a separate message from its president, it includes an interview transcription approach to present the leader's views of his organization's performance. Most of the companies in this study (four of the top five and four of the bottom five) include sections about corporate responsibility, sustainable/environmental efforts, with Toyota and Fujitsu dedicating the most space to these kinds of matters and, in the case of four of the top five, their associated innovations. The outliers are Google and Indian Oil, which do not have such sections in their reports.

Like the news releases, then, what distinguishes innovative companies from others with good reputations certainly is the use of language intensity. For example, Disney is always looking for 'new ways to showcase

characters and stories'. However, since eight of the ten companies used slick visual design techniques, their use does not necessarily correspond to innovativeness. The lack of 'glitz' may be due to other factors (eg government reporting requirements, industry norms, and the company's character). Mere compliance with financial reporting regulations require little visual enhancement. For example, Google's products do not lend themselves to such strategies, and Airbus chose not to. Reports that showcase what the company has to offer (most notably, those of Novo Nordisk, Disney, and Samsung) illustrate increased language intensity and dramatic visuals. The written content of the report, along with its theme, dictates how much visual support is useful or needed. Therefore innovativeness is communicated through the words in the report, the substance of what has been accomplished, and what the organization plans to do.

Therefore, annual reports also function as epideictic discourse because the relationship between an organization's persona and its acts, innovative or not, are central. The organization and its message become one. This is a particularly powerful strategy that could influence any audience interested in company performance; for example, investors, consumers, employees, corporate watchdog organizations. The company's purposes, whether they merely report financial data or seek additional ends, including reputation building, shape the genre's use and therefore lend themselves to showcasing innovation. The same may be true of our final discourse genre, but we question whether it is being used to its potential.

Websites

What is most interesting to note about corporate websites is that the discourse conventions for them are not unique. Website design, when the Internet was very young, was a whole new thing. Anyone who had the skills and resources to design websites

did so with vast ranges of effectiveness and creativity. Some sites were overly simplistic, others were 'over the top' with nearly every possible design element that could be put on a screen. Webmasters quickly surmised that some standards were necessary. The guiding question was, 'What makes a good website?' Much work went into answering this question from graphic designers to human-factors researchers. What emerged was a flexible set of discourse conventions using printed documents as the analog. That is, the language of Web design was based on metaphors about printed material – websites have 'pages', etc. Even the name 'website' is a metaphor for something physical but really is not – it exists electronically, and we read light, not ink.

So Web designers used the discourse conventions for brochures, booklets, indexes, etc to fashion Internet-specific standards for how text and graphics would work together on the virtual pages of websites. Subjects from the most basic to the most complex are indexed and linked page after page. A key to good website design is effective navigation, which gives website visitors a clear sense of what's where, how to get to it, and how to get back to something seen before by clicking on links to specific webpages about particular topics. As Web technology has evolved, the content for websites evolved (cf. Smudde, 2005). People have written more than 100 million online journals worldwide called Web logs, or 'blogs'. There are downloadable audio and video shows called 'podcasts' (using Apple's iPod as the inspiration for the term) that resemble radio and television programs. And 'wikis' (which is pronounced 'wee-key' and is Hawaiian for 'quickly') resemble dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other reference documents that anyone can update. All of these things are being used increasingly by organizations to communicate with internal and external audiences. At this point websites are a genre that could use improvement when

it comes to demonstrating innovation's full potential – finding the press room is often problematic, and most companies bury community relations and put consumer purposes at the forefront. Major corporate social responsibility efforts are often linked uniquely and easily. What's more, however, is the formatting for blogs, podcasts, and wikis are very similar to – if not a replica of – websites, using the same software technology and design and usability (ie discourse) conventions.

On the websites for the ten organizations we selected we see sophisticated use of the website genre. All of them use the conventions for effective website design in different and reasonable ways. We'll not critique their website designs, because doing so would take us away from the thesis of this paper. All ten focus on two primary audiences, as did their news releases: consumers and investors. Nevertheless, the top companies' use of websites enacts important messages about innovation that support their reputation, identities, value, and competitiveness. Indeed, if any of these organizations did not enact such messages, it would call into question why they overlooked such important points (at best) or what may be going on internally that might signal major change (at worst). All the websites use animation and interactive links to help visitors go deeper into the substance of the organization in multiple dimensions, but, among the top-ranked innovative companies, along with Fujitsu, Samsung, and Airbus, dynamic visual effects like animation and scroll-over highlighting of links with the cursor are hallmarks. The exceptions are Google, Indian Oil, and Kingfisher, which feature comparatively static webpages (Kingfisher's subsidiary companies, focused on do-it-yourself projects for the home, are much livelier for the consumer audience). All companies' websites exhibit reasonably simple page design and navigation. These findings are expected because of the current state of the art of

Web design and application of website usability research. The depth and breadth of information on the companies' websites is impressive, and the design and interactivity of them is stunning.

The bottom line, however, is how well the messages about innovation are enacted so that the companies' reputations are upheld. Websites function epideictically to provide an active and interactive site of performance, educating audiences by drawing them to Web content based on needs and values. Although Google's webpages appear to be even simpler in design than those of the other companies, the 'Corporate Info' link from the homepage provides links to discussions of its organizational culture, how it 'celebrates diversity', and to *Green News* on the company's official blog. Such pages among the top companies allow them to present different types of innovations, much more so than the remaining five's websites do.

DISCUSSION

The results across all three genres for the ten companies suggest common themes, stylistic choices, and discourse patterns that a *Global Pulse* company typically may use to frame expressions of its corporate identity, produce favorable images in the minds of stakeholders, and build and sustain corporate reputation as an innovator. Like the annual reports, a website's visual dynamism is not necessarily indicative of a company's innovativeness, but the symbolic value to merely using technology can be worth noting. The use of the term 'innovation' in organizational discourse is as interesting as it is in the annual reports – the term seems used to refer to at least the idea of being innovative or the presence of innovations created by employees. Our initial reading of these data suggest that those companies perceived as innovative use the message genres we have examined in ways that make them distinct from other organizations. Language intensity can direct audiences' attention to evidence of innovation,

with product innovation receiving the most attention in news releases. Other genres allow more extensive highlighting of innovation, particularly annual reports. Still, organizations must provide more evidence – both written and visual support – to document true innovation, the activity of innovating, or the characteristic of innovativeness. The top innovators do so. So linguistic and visual intensity go hand in hand, yet visual impact does not necessarily distinguish companies rated highly on innovation from others with strong reputations, as our examination of these companies' websites indicates.

Additionally, the innovations discussed by these several companies in the three genres fit within the types of innovation organizations can realize, as described by Keeley (2006, 2007) and shown in Figure 3, which is based on his typology. Within Keeley's framework, we find that all ten types of innovation are addressed substantively by the top five *Global Pulse* companies, particularly in annual reports. All of the companies in this study predominantly focused news releases and their websites on two audiences: investors and consumers, with particular concern for addressing their business models, product offerings, or brand. High reputation companies did so with news releases that included quotations from credible, third-party sources that could communicate and bolster a reputation for innovation. Links found on websites can direct audiences to innovations in corporate social responsibility, but they often are hidden by a vague link at the bottom of the homepage ('About Us' or other such phrasing). When you find the pages devoted to the environment, diversity issues, and the like, the innovative organizations use these more than others to mark themselves as innovative.

Some examples from our data illustrate how top innovative companies appeal to audiences with a variety of innovation types. Among news releases, Sony demonstrates

support for workers in Japan ('Enabling process' in Figure 3) and hopefully facilitates customer perceptions of value beyond its products ('Service') when it publicizes a charity event featuring cellist Yo-Yo Ma and the Sony Philharmonic Orchestra, comprised of Sony employees and family members, performing at Carnegie Hall. Sir Howard Stringer, Sony's chairman and CEO, is quoted to bring home the idea: 'Their passion for music mirrors their passion for engineering excellence. And their commitment to both reflects the talents and the energies of Sony employees around the world' (Sony Corporation, 2008: 2). On their websites, the five companies we studied provide well-developed pages devoted to all of Keeley's categories. For example, Novo Nordisk has links on its homepage to separate pages for health-care professionals, patients, investors, media, sustainability, and research and development. Regarding sustainability, the company has multiple pages to different facets of social responsibility, including one on bioethics, clearly linking core processes to customer-centric innovations. The R&D page includes four links to short movies regarding Novo Nordisk's (2009) enabling and core processes, how its researchers look at proteins 'along the entire value chain'. As noted earlier, annual reports allow companies to feature all of the innovation types. In the 'Founder's letter' in Google's annual report, co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin tie their innovations together this way: 'In all of these efforts, the trust of our users is paramount' (2007: 2).

Our focus on innovation types summarizes well our findings about organizations' communication about their innovations. The apparent split between internal and external concerns, as Figure 3 shows in the right column, suggests much about the broader rhetorical frames in which the companies think about themselves as innovators and express messages about their innovations that resonate with their audiences. Specifically,

Innovation Category	Innovation Type	Description	Innovation Message Focus
Finance	1. Business model	How you make money.	Internal, organizational “big picture” innovativeness and systems to bring innovations to market.
	2. Networks & alliances	How you join forces with other companies for mutual benefit.	
Process	3. Enabling process	How you support the company's core processes and workers.	
	4. Core process	How you create and add value to your offerings.	
Offerings	5. Product performance	How you design your core offerings	External, customer-centric value that can be added or portrayed to audiences.
	6. Product system	How you link and/or provide a platform for multiple products.	
	7. Service	How you provide value to customers and consumers beyond and around your products.	
Delivery	8. Channel	How you get your offerings to market.	
	9. Brand	How you communicate your offerings.	
	10. Customer experience	How your customers feel when they interact with your company and its offerings.	

Figure 3: Ten types of innovation

those companies that focus on the first four types of innovation tend to focus more on their internal, big-picture innovativeness and systems to nurture those capabilities to bring innovations to market. The companies that focus on the remaining six types tend to focus on external, customer-centric matters that bear on the value innovations add or represent to audiences. Top innovators do

both. By combining Figure 3 with Figure 1 and an understanding of the epideictic nature of corporate communications, we gain a more potent approach for organizations to both (1) understand themselves and the innovations they create and offer and, especially, (2) craft messages in particular communication genres that foster identification about their organizations and the

innovations or innovativeness for target audiences. This combination, which is worked out in our analysis and discussion of *Global Pulse* companies' communications, then, is at the heart of Figure 2 – the message design function of corporate reputation when addressing innovation.

IMPLICATIONS AND QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The communication model in Figure 2 that we presented and argued for gives us a way to analyze and critique the synergy between genres and key messages. Our analysis suggests that style is subservient to substance, and form definitely follows function. News releases, based on our analysis, appear to be discursive forms that innovative companies use to their advantage. The discourse conventions of annual reports and websites, however, appear not to be as distinctive when innovation is paired with reputation. However, our test of the model has revealed that corporate genre conventions may be epideictic in character. In the role of innovator, high-ranked companies in our study appear more likely to take risks in their messages and genre use than companies with strong but lower-ranked reputations, which tend to say and present messages conservatively. This observation is especially evident in our analysis of annual reports.

The news releases, annual reports, and websites we examined fulfill the traditional functions of the epideictic genre: Reputation management's effective use of message design may be facilitated through the invocation, celebration, teaching, and reiteration of core values to key audiences. Communication is an enactment of an organization's personae, as innovator, responsible fiscal agent, good corporate citizen, etc and corporate communication, in our opinion, works best when it employs information in the service of persuasion (cf. Bostdorff and Vibbert, 1994).

Our approach and model challenges the field to take more seriously the discursive

and rhetorical dimensions of reputation management and public relations. We created a model that is grounded in linguistic constructs about genre and discourse conventions plus rhetorical principles about genre and message design. Our model also addresses these things within the context of message-based decision-making, creative thinking, and discourse producing for any symbolic action on an organization's behalf. All these dimensions are vital so that the 'hard organizing' work is accounted for as part of the symbolicity that makes reputation management and public relations successful.

Our focus and findings suggest several lines of inquiry. First, we foresee further research regarding the epideictic character of organizational rhetoric. Would samples from other organizations support our contention of participation in the broader genre? Within particular discourse types, would different purposes suggest subgenres (eg news releases; cf. Lassen, 2006)? Would other forms of publicity (eg biographical statements, backrounders, feature stories) also display epideictic qualities? For these and other questions, it would not be sufficient to determine within which genre or subgenre certain messages belong (see Smudde and Courtright, 2010). Results would suggest message considerations to be applied in discourse development – and these would provide specific, strategic choices within reputation management.

The relationship between Agent, Act, and Purpose warrants further study for such applications. As Burke argues, a message emphasis on Purpose may be 'collective or nominalist' (1969: 288); in this case, an organization may use messages to facilitate two-way communication with publics or may talk 'at' them in one-way communication. How might messages directed at employees differ strategically, if at all, from those designed for external audiences – and how do the latter address the former? All message design, be it focused on innovation or not,

must consider the reflexive quality of all corporate communication. Whether intended or not, employees receive multiple messages, within and outside the company confines. Furthermore, how does proper use of genre considerations affect audiences, regardless of role? For example, Heath (1998) argues that corporate communication should use new technologies for generating dialogue, connecting people anywhere at any time.

Our model also uses the corporate identity and reputation literatures as a broader context for message design, raising additional research questions. With access to all innovation scores in a *Global Pulse* study, would samples of other organizations confirm or modify our claims about innovative organizations compared to others? Would differences in genre-based message strategies correspond with differences in scores on other factors that *Global Pulse* reports? In addition to reputation, what effect does corporate identity (persona) and values, as communicated through strategically designed messages, have on corporate culture and personality, organizational identity, and audience images that inform reputation?

Additional work should be done to understand the rhetorical moves that enable companies to cross Moore's chasm from the early adopters to the early majority of the mainstream market. This matter includes retrospective analysis of past cases but, most important, concerns prospective application of our approach to organizations' future communication. Organizations professing any degree of innovativeness and innovation must understand, plan for, and proficiently enact communication that reflects the values upheld by audiences, depending on where they fall in the adoption curve (ie early adopters, early majority, late majority, laggards, and skeptics; see Figure 1). Initial ideas about such research could include content analytical studies that trace patterns of message themes in corporate reputation discourse

and compare them to the combination of Moore's and Keeley's models as message-design taxonomies, reader-reception studies that measure the degree to which actual audience members apprehend the messages as intended based on Moore's and Keeley's ideas, ethnographic studies that examine organizations' message design and discourse-development processes for specific reputation management efforts to market segments, and case-study research or meta-research about strategic planning, chasm crossing, and reputation management.

Finally, how effective is the idea of innovation as an analog for the study of reputation management? We believe it is a great place to start because innovation involves the creation of something new to meet new needs. In this way our model enacts a view of reputation management and public relations as 'the measured and ethical use of language and symbols to inspire cooperation between an organization and its publics' (Courtright and Smudde, 2007: 4). The communication demands for innovation parallel those for reputation management, public relations, emergency communication, and so on. Message design, seen as central to reputation management (and based on our limited analysis), rhetorically uses information, rather than traditional argument, to invite audiences to identify with the values – and innovations – supplied by reputable organizations.

NOTES

- 1 An additional concept is rule breaking to achieve real strategic advantage along with customer enthusiasm (Markides, 1997).
- 2 Identification also has a role within organizations as 'a process closely tied to identity [ie what is commonly taken as representative of a person or group], both linguistically and conceptually', and linked to individual and group commitment (Cheney and Tompkins, 1987: 5; 6–7). Identity, identification, and commitment, then, are the result of socially constructed symbolic action when people organize through communication.

- 3 Our project is not to evaluate corporate reputations on a national or global basis. We are examining discourse genres used in managing corporate reputation across geo-political boundaries.
- 4 In the interest of (1) keeping almost 30 additional entries in the references list and (2) allowing for flexibility in accessing online documents after any website redesign, we only list the website addresses for the 10 Global Pulse companies' webpages from which the reader may then navigate to specific links such as online press rooms. The URLs are as follows: Toyota http://www.toyota.co.jp/en/index_company.html; Google <http://www.google.com/about.html>; Sony <http://www.sony.net>; Novo Nordisk <http://www.novonordisk.com/default.asp>; Disney <http://corporate.disney.go.com/index.html>; Fujitsu <http://www.fujitsu.com/global>; Kingfisher <http://www.kingfisher.com/index.asp>; Samsung <http://www.samsung.com/us/index.html>; Airbus <http://www.airbus.com/en>; and Indian Oil <http://www.iocl.com/home.aspx>. Please note that organizations sometimes change their URLs, so these addresses can change without notice.

REFERENCES

- Austin, J.L. (1974) *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd edn., Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Benoit, W.L. (1994) 'The genesis of rhetorical action', *Southern Communication Journal*, 59(4), 342–355.
- Benoit, W.L. (1995a) *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies*, SUNY Press, Albany.
- Benoit, W.L. (1995b) 'Sears' repair of its auto service image: Image restoration discourse in the corporate sector', *Communication Studies*, 46(1–2), 89–105.
- Benoit, W.L. and Brinson, S.L. (1994) 'AT&T: Apologies are not enough', *Communication Quarterly*, 42(1), 75–88.
- Benoit, W.L. and Czerwinski, A. (1997) 'A critical analysis of US air's image repair discourse', *Business Communication Quarterly*, 60(3), 38–57.
- Bitzer, L. (1968) 'The rhetorical situation', *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 1(1), 1–14.
- Blaney, J.R., Benoit, W.L. and Brazeal, L.M. (2002) 'Blowout!: Firestone's image restoration campaign', *Public Relations Review*, 28(4), 379–392.
- Borchers, T.A. (2005) *Persuasion in the Media Age*, 2nd edn., Kendall-Hunt, Dubuque, IA.
- Bostdorff, D.M. and Vibbert, S.L. (1994) 'Values advocacy: Enhancing organizational images, deflecting public criticism, and grounding future arguments', *Public Relations Review*, 20(2), 141–158.
- Brand, J.D. (2007) 'Restoring investor confidence via model and antimodel advocacy by Merrill Lynch', in J.L. Courtright and P. M. Smudde (eds.), *Power and Public Relations*, Hampton Press, Cresskill, NJ, pp. 107–123.
- Brinson, S.L. and Benoit, W.L. (1996) 'Dow corning's image repair strategies in the breast implant crisis', *Communication Quarterly*, 44(1), 29–41.
- Brinson, S.L. and Benoit, W.L. (1999) 'The tarnished star: Restoring Texaco's damaged public image', *Management Communication Quarterly*, 12(4), 483–510.
- Brønn, P.S. and Berg, R.W. (eds.), (2005) *Corporate Communication: A Strategic Approach to Building Reputation*, 2nd edn., Gyldendal, Oslo.
- Brummett, B. (1984) 'Premillennial apocalyptic as a rhetorical genre', *Central States Speech Journal*, 35(2), 84–93.
- Burke, K. (1966) *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Burke, K. (1968) *Counter-Statement*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Burke, K. (1969) *A Grammar of Motives*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Campbell, K.K. and Jamieson, K.H. (nd) 'Form and genre in rhetorical criticism: An introduction', in K.K. Campbell and K.H. Jamieson (eds.), *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action*, Speech Communication Association, Falls Church, VA, pp. 9–32.
- Campbell, K.K. and Jamieson, K.H. (1986) 'Introduction' (Special issue on genre criticism), *Southern Speech Communication Journal*, 51(4), 293–299.
- Campbell, K.K. and Jamieson, K.H. (2008) *Presidents Creating the Presidency: Deeds Done in Words*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Cheney, G. (1991) *Rhetoric in an Organizational Society: Managing Multiple Identities*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, SC.
- Cheney, G. (1992) 'The corporate person (re) presents itself', in E.L. Toth and R.L. Heath (eds.), *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations*, Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 165–183.
- Cheney, G. and Christensen, L.T. (2001) 'Organizational identity: Linkages between internal and external communication', in F. M. Jablin and L. L. Putnam (eds.), *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 231–269.
- Cheney, G. and Tompkins, P.K. (1987) 'Coming to terms with organizational identification and commitment', *Central States Speech Journal*, 38, 1–15.
- Cheney, G. and Vibbert, S.L. (1987) 'Corporate discourse: Public relations and issue management', in F.M. Jablin, L.L. Putnam, K.H. Roberts, and L.W. Porter (eds.), *Handbook of Organizational Communications: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage, pp. 165–194.

- Cheney, G., Christensen, L.T., Conrad, C. and Lair, D.J. (2004) 'Corporate rhetoric as organizational discourse', in D. Grant, C. Hardy, C. Oswick, and L. Putnam (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse*, Sage, Newbury Park, CA, pp. 79–104.
- Consigny, S. (1974) 'Rhetoric and its situations', *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 7(3), 175–186.
- Coombs, W.T. (2007) 'Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situation crisis communication theory', *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10(3), 163–176.
- Coombs, T. and Schmidt, L. (2000) 'An empirical analysis of image restoration: Texaco's racism crisis', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12(2), 163–178.
- Courtright, J.L. and Hearit, K.M. (2002) 'The good organization speaking well a paradigm case for institutional reputation management', *Public Relations Review*, 28(4), 347–360.
- Courtright, J.L. and Slaughter, G.Z. (2007) 'Remembering disaster: Since the media does, so must public relations', *Public Relations Review*, 33(3), 313–318.
- Courtright, J.L. and Smudde, P.M. (eds.), (2007) *Power and Public Relations*, Hampton Press, Cresskill, NJ.
- Daymon, C. and Holloway, I. (2002) *Qualitative Research Methods in Public Relations and Marketing Communications*, London: Routledge.
- De Meyer, A. (2007) 'Strategic epistemology: Innovation and organizational wisdom', in E.H. Kessler and J. Russell (eds.), *Handbook of Organizational and Managerial Wisdom*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 357–375.
- Dowling, G.R. (2006) 'Communicating corporate reputation through stories', *California Management Review*, 49(1), 82–100.
- Dowling, G. and Weeks, W. (2008) 'What the media is really telling you about your brand', *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 49(3), 27–34.
- Garcia, R. and Calantone, R. (2002) 'A critical look at technological innovation typology and innovative terminology: A literature review', *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 19(2), 110–132.
- Gioia, D.A., Schultz, M. and Corley, K.G. (2000) 'Organizational identity, image, and adaptive instability', *Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), 63–81.
- Godin, B. (2006) 'The linear model of innovation: The historical construction of an analytical framework', *Science, Technology & Human Values*, 31(6), 639–667.
- Goldzwig, S.R. and Sullivan, P.A. (1995) 'Post-assassination newspaper editorial eulogies: Analysis and assessment', *Western Journal of Communication*, 59(2), 126–150.
- Google Inc (2008) 'Google Annual Report 2007', [Internet]. Available from: investor.google.com/pdf/2007_google_annual_report.pdf, accessed 18 March 2008.
- Goswami, S. and Mathew, M. (2005) 'Definition of innovation revisited: An empirical study on Indian information technology industry', *International Journal of Information Management*, 9(3), 371–383.
- Grunig, J.E. (1993) 'Image and substance: From symbolic to behavioral relationships', *Public Relations Review*, 19(2), 121–139.
- Habermas, J. (1985a) *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, vol. 1 (T. McCarthy, trans.), Beacon Press, Boston.
- Habermas, J. (1985b) *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, vol. 2 (T. McCarthy, trans.), Beacon Press, Boston.
- Hagen, Ø. (2008) 'Seduced by their proactive image? On using auto communication to enhance CSR', *Corporate Reputation Review*, 11(2), 130–144.
- Hager, P.J. and Scheiber, H.J. (1990) 'Reading smoke and mirrors: The rhetoric of corporate annual reports', *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 20(2), 113–130.
- Hearit, K.M. (1995) 'From 'we didn't do it' to 'it is not our fault': The use of apologia in public relations crises', in W.N. Elwood (ed.), *Public Relations Inquiry as Rhetorical Criticism: Case Studies of Corporate Discourse and Social Influence*, Praeger, Westport, CT, pp. 117–131.
- Hearit, K.M. (1996) 'The use of counter-attack in apologetic public relations crises: The case of general motors vs. NBC', *Public Relations Review*, 22(3), 233–248.
- Hearit, K.M. (1997) 'On the use of transcendence as an apologia strategy: The case of Johnson controls and its fetal protection policy', *Public Relations Review*, 23(2), 217–231.
- Hearit, K.M. (1999) 'Newsgroups, activist publics, and corporate apologia: The case of Intel and its Pentium chip', *Public Relations Review*, 25(3), 291–308.
- Hearit, K.M. (2001) 'Corporate apologia: When an organization speaks in defense of itself', in R.L. Heath (ed.), *Handbook of Public Relations*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 595–605.
- Hearit, K.M. and Brown, J. (2004) 'Merrill Lynch: Corporate apologia and business fraud', *Public Relations Review*, 30(4), 459–466.
- Heath, R.L. (1998) 'New communication technologies: An issues management point of view', *Public Relations Review*, 24(3), 273–288.
- Heracleous, L.T. (2004) 'Interpretivist approaches to organizational discourse', in D. Grant, C. Hardy, C. Oswick, and L. Putnam (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse*, Sage, Newbury Park, CA, pp. 175–192.

- Heraud, J.-A. (2004) 'Science technology and innovation policy: New governance schemes in Europe, in France and at regional level', paper presented for the symposium 'Developments and Policies on Advanced Technologies', Centre of Advanced Policy Science (CAPS), Toyo University, 24 September, Tokyo. Available from: [http://cournot2.u-strasbg.fr/users/beta/divers/ArticlepourToyo\(def-8dec04\).pdf](http://cournot2.u-strasbg.fr/users/beta/divers/ArticlepourToyo(def-8dec04).pdf), accessed 22 September 2008.
- Ihlen, Ø (2004) 'Norwegian hydro electric power: Testing a heuristic for analyzing symbolic strategies and resources', *Public Relations Review*, 30(2), 217–223.
- Jamieson, K.H. and Campbell, K.K. (1982) 'Rhetorical hybrids: Fusions of generic elements', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 68(2), 146–157.
- Johannesen, R.L. (1985) 'The jeremiad and Jenkin Lloyd Jones', *Communication Monographs*, 52(2), 156–172.
- Keeley, L. (2006) 'The power of innovation, Irving, TX: VHA health foundation'. Available from: <http://www.doblin.com/IdeasIndexFlashFS.htm>, accessed 6 February 2009.
- Keeley, L. (2007) *The Ten Types of Innovation*, Doblin Inc, Chicago. Available from: <http://www.doblin.com/IdeasIndexFlashFS.htm>, accessed 6 February 2009.
- Killingsworth, M.J. and Gilbertson, M.K. (1992) *Signs, Genres, and Communities in Technical Communication*, Baywood, Amityville, NY.
- Lassen, I. (2006) 'Is the press release a genre? A study of form and content', *Discourse Studies*, 8(4), 503–530.
- Latimore, D., Baskin, O., Heiman, S.T. and Toth, E.L. (2009) *Public Relations: The Profession and the Practice*, 3rd edn., McGraw-Hill, Boston.
- Mahmood, I.P. and Rufin, C. (2006) 'Government's dilemma: The role of government in imitation and innovation', *Academy of Management Review*, 30(2), 338–360.
- Markides, C. (1997) 'Strategic innovation', *Sloan Management Review*, 38(3), 9–23.
- McClenehan, J.S. (2005) 'PR practitioners and 'issues' in the early millennium', *Public Relations Quarterly*, 50(2), 17–22.
- McDermott, C. and O'Connor, G.C. (2002) 'Managing radical innovation: An overview of emergent strategy issues', *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 19(6), 424–438.
- McMillan, J.J. (1987) 'In search of the organizational persona: A rationale for studying organizations rhetorically', in L. Thayer (ed.), *Organization Communication: Emerging Perspectives II*, Ablex, Norwood, NJ, pp. 21–45.
- Miller, C.R. (1984) 'Genre as social action', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70(2), 151–167.
- Moffitt, M.A. (1994) 'A cultural studies perspective toward understanding corporate image: A case study of state farm insurance', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 6(1), pp. 41–66.
- Moffitt, M.A. (1999) *Campaign Strategies and Message Design: A Practitioner's Guide from Start to Finish*, PraegerWestport, CT.
- Moore, G.A. (1999) *Crossing the Chasm: Marketing and Selling Disruptive Products to Mainstream Customers*, HarperBusiness, New York.
- Novo Nordisk A/S (2009) 'Research & Development', [Internet] Available from: <http://www.novonordisk.com/science/default.asp>, accessed 9 February 2009.
- Pelham, F. (2000) 'The triple crown of public relations: Pitch letter, news release, feature article', *Public Relations Quarterly*, 45(1), 38–43.
- Perelman, C. and Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. (1969) *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, (J. Wilkinson and P. Weaver, trans.), Notre Dame University Press, Notre Dame, IN.
- Reputation Institute (2008a) *The Most Respected U.S. Companies 2008: A Study of Corporate Reputations in the United States*, Available from: <http://www.reputationinstitute.com/knowledge-center/global-pulse>, accessed 2 October 2008.
- Reputation Institute (2008b) *The World's Most Respected Companies 2008: A Study of Corporate Reputations in 27 Countries*, Reputation Institute, New York. Available from: <http://www.reputationinstitute.com/knowledge-center/global-pulse>, accessed 2 October 2008.
- Rogers, E.M. (2003) *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th edn., Free Press, New York.
- Rowland, R.C. and Jerome, A.M. (2004) 'On organizational apologia: A reconceptualization', *Communication Theory*, 14(3), 191–211.
- Ryan, M. (1995) 'Models help writers produce publishable releases', *Public Relations Quarterly*, 40(2), 25–27.
- Schultz, M., Hatch, M.J. and Larsen, M.H. (eds.), (2000) *The Expressive Organization: Linking Identity, Reputation, and the Corporate Brand*, Oxford, London.
- Searle, J.R. (1969) *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Sellnow, T.L. and Brand, J.D. (2001) 'Establishing the structure of reality for an industry: Model and anti-model arguments as advocacy in Nike's crisis communication', *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 29(3), 278–295.
- Smudde, P.M. (2004) 'Implications on the practice and study of Kenneth Burke's idea of a public relations counsel with a heart', *Communication Quarterly*, 52(4), 420–432.
- Smudde, P.M. (2005) 'Blogging, ethics and public relations: A proactive and dialogic approach', *Public Relations Quarterly*, 50(3), 34–38.

- Smudde, P.M. (2009) *Public Relations as Dramatistic Organizing: A Case Study Bridging Theory and Practice*, Hampton Press, Cresskill, NJ, (in press).
- Smudde, P.M. and Courtright, J.L. (2008) 'Time to get a job: Helping image repair theory begin a career in industry', *Public Relations Journal*, [Internet], Winter 2(1), Available from: <http://www.prsa.org/prjournal/Vol2No1/SmuddeCourtright.pdf>, accessed 6 February 2008.
- Smudde, P.M. and Courtright, J.L. (2010) *Inspiring Cooperation and Celebrating the Organization: The Strategy behind Public Relations Genres*, Hampton Press, Cresskill, NJ, (in press).
- Sony Corporation (2008) *Cellist Yo-Yo Ma to Perform with Sony Philharmonic Orchestra at Carnegie Hall*, [Internet], 10 Apr [Press release]. Available from: <http://www.sony.net/SonyInfo/News/Press/200804/08-0410E/index.html>, accessed 29 January 2009.
- Stacks, D.W. (2002) *Primer of Public Relations Research*, Guilford, New York.
- Sullivan, D.L. (1993) 'The ethos of epideictic encounter', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 26(2), 113–133.
- Swales, J.M. (1990) *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*, Cambridge University Press, New York.
- van den Bosch, A.L.M., de Jong, M.D.T. and Elving, W.J.L. (2005) 'How corporate visual identity supports reputation', *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 10(2), 108–116.
- van Riel, C.B.M. and Balmer, J.M.T. (1997) 'Corporate identity: The concept, its management and management', *European Journal of Marketing*, 31(5/6), 340–355.
- Vendelø, M.T. (1998) 'Narrating corporate reputation: Becoming legitimate through storytelling', *International Studies of Management and Organizations*, 28(3), 120–137.
- Vatz, R.E. (1973) 'The myth of the rhetorical situation', *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 6(3), 154–161.
- Watson, T. and Noble, P. (2005) *Evaluating Public Relations: A Best Practice Guide to Public Relations Planning, Research and Evaluation*, Kogan Page, London.
- Williams, S.L. and Moffitt, M.A. (1997) 'Corporate image as an impression formation process: Prioritizing personal, organizational, and environmental audience factors', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 9(4), 237–258.
- Windt Jr., T.O. (1972) 'The diatribe: Last resort for protest', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 58(1), 1–14.